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INTERVIEW

PETER STIRLING BENSON

THE NEW CEO OF FITNESS FIRST AUSTRALIA ON
CREATING A RECESSION-PROOF BUSINESS

EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT...

STAFF FITNESS LEVELS

ARE WE SETTING A GOOD EXAMPLE FOR MEMBERS?

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Rosi Prescott talks
about the new Global
Agenda Council for the
Role of Sports in Society



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who's liable?

In this issue, we hear about a possible replacement for the PAR-Q – the standard induction questionnaire that has been used by the industry for years to screen new joiners (page 18).

The use of the PAR-Q is being reviewed because of three major concerns. Firstly operators have reported that some people find it intrusive and it can put them off joining.

Secondly, its use can expose operators to greater risk of legal liability. The implication is that once the operator has asked for information about potential health risks and this information has been given, the operator assumes a greater degree of responsibility for the wellbeing of the member in question. Where problems arise, in some cases, the PAR-Q has been used against operators to establish a case of negligence or lack of care.

The third concern is financial, in that a proportion of potential new members – believed to be around 8 per cent – who 'fail' the PAR-Q on health grounds and are referred to their doctor by the club for clearance to exercise, don't ever come back and join up. This is viewed as lost business by

some who argue that if the 'barrier' of the PAR-Q could be 'removed' and these people could take responsibility for themselves – effectively taking liability away from the club – then they could start exercising straight away, resulting in more members for the club and more health benefits for the member.

The reasons members don't return after a referral seem varied. It's believed some don't get around to following up, while others chose not to, as they find the prospect too daunting. Where follow-ups are attempted, in some cases, GPs refuse to get involved, saying they aren't qualified to prescribe

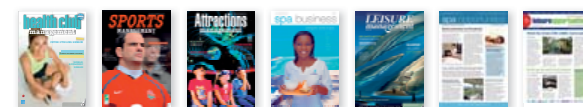
exercise. Some see these appointments as a nuisance, while others make a hefty charge to see patients who want clearance to join a club – fees as high as £80 have been found. This shows how much work is still needed to bond with GPs and educate them about the importance of exercise.

The replacement to the PAR-Q has been drafted by lawyers who specialise in helping organisations to minimise liability and is based in part on the philosophy that individuals should take personal responsibility for their own wellbeing, rather than simply handing this over to a third party. The 'new PAR-Q' is currently at the development stage and will come to the market later this year, with a small fee being charged for its use. The FIA is currently reviewing the draft proposal.

So where does this leave us? It seems less and less people are prepared to be liable for 'at risk' members at a time when we're telling the government we can help with the health agenda – work which will inevitably involve taking on more members of this type. There's a danger the two things will be in conflict and it's likely that if this new document comes into use, operators will fall into two camps – those who are prepared to take on 'at risk' members and those who aren't.

Prescribing exercise for people with health issues requires training to an appropriate level and this in turn requires that the person prescribing the exercise is paid a fair salary for this education level. When it comes to the crunch, this will be a major factor in deciding which way operators will fall.

Liz Terry, editor
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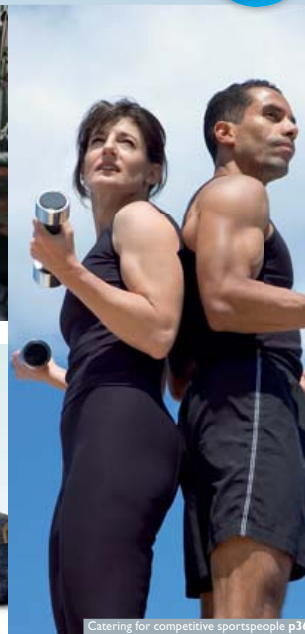
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buyers' guide:

For suppliers of products and services in the health club and spa markets, turn to p70



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



invest in our workforce to win the trust of the public

I read the article on exercise referral (Talkback, HCM Feb 08) with a mixture of excitement and frustration. The medical profession's varied perceptions of our industry are not surprising and, I believe, symptomatic of where we are in our evolution. We're a relatively young industry still developing into the health solution that we should be. You only have to look at the Register's numbers to see the problem: 27,000 members with only 6 per cent qualified in exercise referral.

I'd like to see a world where exercise professionals work alongside health professionals, with qualified exercise

referral professionals in every club. Some of the barriers to progressing on to this crucial qualification are being removed to make accessibility easier. But the barriers described by the public and physicians will take longer to break down. By simplifying our framework, we will improve their understanding of our workforce, which will increase respect and opportunities for our industry. The work being done by Georgina Jupp is pioneering, demonstrating that you have to get out there to build relationships and, ultimately, trust, which will only come if you employ enough qualified professionals to do the job.

If we're to be the solution to the UK's health issues, we must be more proactive in meeting the health profession's needs. This takes investment in our workforce to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to do the job – a difficult subject in these uncertain times, but I believe this investment will pay off as we gain the trust of the medical profession and, more importantly, the public. We must keep building bridges until everyone can get the help they need from our sector to make changes and improve their lives.

jean-ann marnoch
registrars, reps



To earn GPs' trust, we must employ enough qualified staff to do the job

the letter of the law

Taking early legal advice can often prevent a problem becoming a dispute. The team at Croner Consulting answers readers' questions

Q The Unfair Commercial Practices Regulations came into effect last year, protecting consumers against unscrupulous traders by preventing them from misleading consumers or subjecting them to aggressive commercial practices. If I have a complaint, what redress do I have?

A Unfortunately the Regulations give consumers no personal remedies whatsoever. You can report the trader to the Office of Fair Trading or your local Trading Standards Department, who can prosecute, but you cannot claim damages for a breach of the regulations. The European Parliament is presently urging Member States to give consumers a direct right of redress, but for the time being UK consumers will have to make do with existing legislation, eg the Sale of Goods Act and the Consumer Protection Act.

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Retain members with longer contracts

a warning: attrition increases without contracts

At a time when prospective members are reviewing the benefits and costs of health club membership, it would be tempting for operators to try to increase sales by taking away the 'hurdle' of a traditional membership contract. However, this approach could cost you income in both the short and long term.

In the original FIA research carried out by Dr Melvyn Hillsdon in 2001, members who signed contracts stayed longer than those who did not. This was also tested in a study of the New Zealand fitness industry and re-asserted by the FIA's 2008 retention study, which showed that those who sign a longer contract stay longer than those signing shorter contracts, even if the contract is not enforced.

Meanwhile, members who signed short-term contracts or no contract remained members for the shortest period – they were 2.5 times more likely to cancel than members who had signed a 12-month contract. The reason for this is unknown, but has been seen repeatedly with every comparison of contract length conducted in the past eight years.

Short-term or no contracts appeal from a sales perspective as they can make membership easier to sell, but they may not produce longer-term revenue streams and they place a heavy burden on resources that may not be recouped.

dr paul bedford
re-aim retention consultant,
the leisure database company

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in brief...

new centre for southwark

A £5.5m revamp at Dulwich Leisure Centre in south London has been approved by Southwark Council.

The refurbishment includes a new entrance, pool area, fitness suite and wet and dry changing areas, as well as improved disabled access.

The project is part of the council's Leisure Investment Programme; other facilities in the borough are also set to benefit.

barnstaple plans ditched

Plans to build a new £17m leisure centre as an extension to the Tarka Tennis Centre in Barnstaple have been abandoned.

North Devon Council took the decision to ditch the proposals – to demolish the North Devon Leisure Centre and transfer the facilities to the new site – after a report deemed the scheme too expensive. The centre could have included an outdoor pool, a climbing wall, gym facilities and an all-weather pitch.

colne valley centre re-opens

The Colne Valley Leisure Centre in Kirkstall, West Yorkshire, has reopened following a £1.8m revamp, including a new 50-station gym.

The council and the leisure trust jointly funded the project: Kirkstall Council invested £1.3m while Kirkstall Active Leisure, which manages the council's sports centres and pools, built and equipped the new £500,000 fitness suite.

women's boxing in sheffield

A new weekly women's-only boxing club has been launched at Sheffield's English Institute of Sport (EIS Sheffield) in response to increases in demand for female-only classes.

The club, set up by two female boxing tutors at EIS Sheffield – Kylie Hodgkinson and Allison Donohoe – has been designed for females over the age of 13 to focus on developing and improving aerobic fitness, agility and strength by doing skipping work, pad work, circuit training and using punch bags.

new £6.4m nottingham centre

Construction work is underway on a new £6.4m leisure centre at Forest Fields, Nottingham, as part of the city council's £18.5m Leisure Centre Transformation Programme to improve the city's sports facilities.

The centre, which has been designed by Archial Architects and which will be built by ISG Regions, is to be situated alongside the Djanogly City Academy and will replace the existing Noel Street Leisure Centre.

Nottingham City Council (NCC) will manage the facility, which will include a 25m swimming pool, a 50-station fitness suite, a multi-activity fitness studio, a sauna and a steamroom, as well as changing facilities.

Funding for the leisure centre, which is scheduled to open in March 2010, is being provided by NCC along with a £2.2m contribution from the Neighbourhood Development Company. The Noel Street Leisure Centre will remain open until the scheme is completed.

David Trimble, NCC's portfolio holder for communities, leisure and culture, says: "This is an exciting new development in the council's Leisure Transformation programme, which means that yet another community will be able to benefit from top class fitness facilities."

"The council's continued investment in its leisure facilities supports our aim to inspire more people to be more active more often. [We] have improved facilities so far at John Carroll, Portland and Ken Martin Leisure Centres, where we have seen an increase in attendances."

The programme is aimed at providing fewer but better leisure facilities across the city. It is being complemented by a new affordable, contract-free, fixed-price monthly membership – which can be used across all local facilities – in a bid to appeal to a wider audience.



New site: Part of the council's £18.5m Leisure Transformation scheme

building of darwen centre begins

Work has commenced on a new £12m leisure centre in Darwen, Lancashire, and is expected to open late 2009.

The centre will feature a 25m swimming pool with a moveable floor

and a separate learners' pool, spectator seating, an 80-station fitness and health suite, a sports hall, two activity rooms, a café and changing facilities.

The centre will be built on the site of the old Darwen Leisure Centre, which was demolished to make room for the new development.

Plans for the new leisure centre were approved last year by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council.

Sport England is contributing £400,000 to the project to fund the moveable floor, while the council make up the rest.



£12m Darwen Centre is expected to open late 2009



Jan Spaticchia, énergie CEO, with GSSG MD Mohammed Al Hamadi

énergie takes on fitness first sites

The énergie Group has brokered the acquisition of eight Fitness First clubs in the UK on behalf of Qatar-based investment group Ghanim Bin Saad Al Saad & Sons Holding Group (GSSG).

GSSG purchased the eight clubs as part of the investment group's plans to grow its portfolio of énergie clubs in both the UK and the Middle East simultaneously. The firm plans to invest in 30 clubs in the UK.

énergie's new Management Services division (see p22) will operate the clubs on behalf of GSSG. All eight sites will undergo a £1m rebranding over the next eight weeks and two of the clubs, in Northampton and Southampton,

will become women-only facilities. The other six clubs are located in Inverness and Dundee in Scotland, Rotherham, Milton Keynes, Swindon and Epsom.

As part of the deal, énergie has taken a 50 per cent stake in the Milton Keynes site with a view to using it as a national training centre for its franchisees.

GSSG, which has net assets of more than 1.8bn Qatari riyals (£338m) and interests across the Middle East and Europe, has also agreed a development pipeline with énergie in the Middle East (see HCM Feb 09, p14). This agreement will see the two groups open an additional 50 clubs across the Middle East over the first five years of the partnership.

country clubs to relaunch with fitness offering

Privately-owned golf club operator The Country Club Group (CCG) is redeveloping its golf-only offering to incorporate health and fitness.

CCG, which has invested £16m in acquiring five golf clubs in the UK over the past five years, joined forces with former CEO of The Club Company Charlie Parker following a strategic review of the business in 2007. By redeveloping each site to include premium health and fitness, CCG aims to broaden the appeal of its clubs.

The first two sites to have undergone the transformation are the Cranleigh Golf & Country Club in Surrey and the Slinfold Golf & Country Club in West Sussex, at a total cost of £7m. Facilities at both clubs, set to open by July, will include a Matrix-equipped health club and gym, group exercise studios, tennis courts, an indoor pool, health spa and restaurant.

A similar redevelopment at Mill Ride Golf Club in Ascot, Berkshire, has a provisional opening date of mid-2010.

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training news

new free instructor courses

FitPro has launched a scheme of free courses in an effort to train a new generation of instructors and to tackle the growing childhood obesity problem.

FitPro is offering fully-funded courses that lead to its CYQ Level 2 Certificate in Instructing Health-Related Fitness for Children. In doing so, the company aims to create more than 500 coaches devoted to improving children's health over the next three years.

The courses will cover anatomy, physiology, class control methods and the practical implications of training with children. The courses are available to existing fitness professionals looking to specialise in children's health and fitness, as well as adults who would like to start a new career.

new courses from optimal

Optimal Life Fitness has launched two new REPs-accredited courses, in boxing and weight lifting.

The one-day Performance Boxing Course is worth 10 CPD points and focuses on equipping instructors and personal trainers with the skills to hold both group and one-to-one boxing training sessions.

Meanwhile, the two-day Olympic weight lifting course is worth 16 CPD points and teaches instructors the 27 exercises that make up Olympic weight lifting.

la fitness extends contract

LA Fitness has signed a new annual contract with Momentum Business Development to deliver sales training to its membership advisors.

Duncan Green, director at Momentum, says: "Gym operators have to really understand what a customer is looking for and how to secure a membership sale if they are going to survive this current environment."

"Our training course enables them to spend three days focusing on the techniques needed in order to increase sales and deliver sustained results."



Fitness suite: Equipped by Technogym

new gym for crystal centre

Crystal Leisure Centre in Stourbridge has benefited from an £800,000 investment by Dudley Council.

A new gym at the facility offers 44 stations of Technogym equipment, a family interactive area featuring ZigZag equipment, a group cycling studio with 12 Trixter bikes, punch bags, a speedball and a plyometric area.

A new reception area, modifications to provide easier access for people with disabilities and maintenance work to the centre's poolside area complete the revamp programme.

Councillor Karen Shakespeare, cabinet member for environment and culture, says: "The facilities are absolutely fantastic and we're immensely proud of the range and quality of activities on offer here."

The work, delivered on time and on budget, was jointly funded through a partnership between the council and the private sector health and fitness company Alliance Leisure Services.

£2m revamp for dolphin centre

The £2m refurbishment of Dolphin Fitness Club in Pillico, London, has been completed.

The independently-operated 929sq m sport and fitness facility underwent a two-phase facelift. Phase one involved the creation of a new swimming pool, while phase two saw the 325sq m gym kitted out with 37 stations of Cybex CV and resistance equipment.

There are also three new exercise studios, a sauna, a steamroom and changing rooms as well as three squash courts – used by the England squash coach Peter Genever – tennis court and a croquet lawn.

The club's manager, Jonathan Acott, says: "The gym hadn't been refurbished for over 10 years, so was in need of a good overhaul."

Located in the residential development Dolphin Square, the centre also offers an independent health clinic providing holistic therapies and a restaurant. Memberships start at £70 a month.



A new pool was part of the refurb

reading: investing in fitness

An indoor cycling centre (ICC) has been opened at Palmer Park Sports Stadium in Reading as part of a £380,000 investment in health and fitness provisions by the borough council.

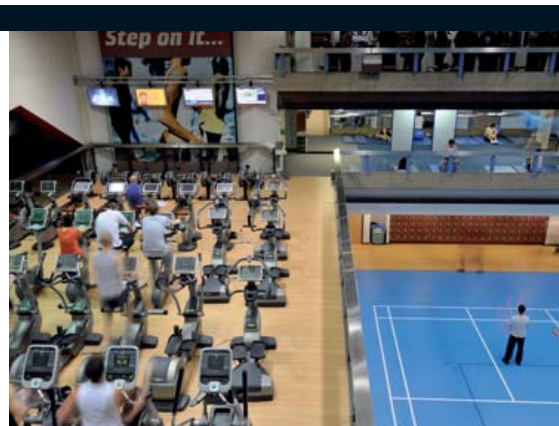
The MyRide Cycling Centre offers 20 Matrix Tomahawk S Series bikes worth £30,000 and 16 MyRide console screens. The new facility is complemented by the stadium's separate 37-station gym, 460m velodrome and floodlit football pitches.

Funding has also been put towards a revamp of Meadow Sports Centre's gym – a £200,000 investment – which now offers 35 stations of Matrix CV and strength kit. A £50,000 gym upgrade at

Arthur Hills Pool and Fitness Centre has also been equipped by Matrix.

Spencer Fanstone, operations manager for Reading Sport and Leisure, says: "We are very happy to have reached completion at the three centres. We currently have around 2,000 members across the facilities in Reading borough and it's important that we are able to service their needs and also attract new members."

"The ICC will provide an alternative way in which to keep fit and the MyRide consoles are a great motivational tool for those who are unable to attend group cycling classes."



Central YMCA now features an expanded CV zone following its refurb

£2.6m upgrade for central ymca

Central YMCA, in central London, has relaunched following a six-month, £2.6m redevelopment programme designed to increase the club's membership base.

The 10,776sq m club, which first opened on Tottenham Court Road in 1974, now features an expanded CV zone, a new free weights area and cycling studio, plus additional exercise studios, a GP referral zone and changing facilities.

There is also improved access to the 25m swimming pool for disabled users, thanks to the installation of a new hoist and accessible lift, as well as the introduction of three treatment rooms for holistic therapies.

The improvements have been designed by Cheshire-based Pozzoni architects, while the new fitness equipment has been supplied by Technogym, Precor and Keiser.

"The changes are dramatic and significant, both in scale and scope," says Barry Cronin, the club's executive director. "The outcomes will benefit every member, offering more to those who come here for their regular workouts, as well as enabling us to meet the high demand for places on our healthy lifestyle, medical referral, community and kids' activity programmes."

oxfordshire set to get active

The Get Oxfordshire Active (GO Active) project has been launched in an effort to increase participation in physical activity across the county.

The £1.4m, three-year project – part-funded by Sport England – aims to get individuals over the age of 16 to do moderate exercise for 30 minutes at least three times a week.

Events including the Malorie Calorie Burn Challenge, conducted on dedicated equipment at all three of the city council's Aspires Fitness Suites.

new health trainer scheme

An NHS-funded scheme to encourage gradual health and lifestyle improvements in Lincolnshire has been launched.

Twenty-six qualified health trainers will work with members of the public to boost their wellbeing.

Individuals will be given six sessions with their health trainer, ranging from face-to-face sessions to phone calls or accompanying them to a new appointment or activity.



At a time when it is supposed to be getting warmer you will notice that many people, particularly runners, will be heading outdoors to exercise. If you know running well, this is expected.

March puts many within touching distance of the Flora London Marathon and is synonymous with runners increasing the volume of training in preparation for the challenge ahead.

The challenge itself remains a serious one; analysis by the LSSA on last year's Flora London Marathon revealed that 23,000 of the 35,000 runners took longer than four hours to complete the 26.1 miles – by definition an ultraendurance event! On average runners were 17 minutes slower in the second half of the marathon compared to the first and 85% of runners opted to set off at a seemingly unsustainable pace.

The importance of fuel and hydration strategies during marathon training and competition can not be underestimated. Fuel meaning you ensure that your body, and more specifically muscles, have enough energy to get you across the line and hydration meaning that you maintain the right balance of fluids and electrolytes during and after exercise.

A 2009 entrant myself, I know I require all the help I can get and acknowledge the need for well formulated sports drinks both in training and on the big day. That way I hope to avoid being one of the 85%!

Nick Morgan

Head of Sport Science for Lucozade Sport

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update

gateshead centre gets go-ahead

Plans to develop a new leisure centre in Heworth, Newcastle Upon Tyne, have been approved by Gateshead Council.

The facility is the last of five new centres to be approved as part of the council's £29m Building an Active Future programme, designed to improve the community's health by ensuring access to quality facilities.

Plans for the Heworth centre have been referred to the Government Office North East for final approval; if completed, they could feature a 25m, four-lane swimming pool, a learner pool, a FlowRider surfing and body-boarding attraction, a fitness suite and a boxing gym. There will also be changing areas and a multi-purpose room.

If approved, construction work is expected to begin this summer with a view to completing it in winter 2010. The facility is being built on



If approved, the site will open in 2010

vacant land opposite Heworth Grange Comprehensive School and, once open, will replace the existing but ageing Felling Pool.

Other centres to benefit from the programme include the Gateshead Leisure Centre, a pre-training camp for London 2012 Olympics which has closed for a year-long revamp, as well as centres in Blaydon, Dunston and Birtley.

£679,000 upgrade for dolphin leisure centre

A new gym at The Dolphin Leisure Centre in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, is set to open in April following a £679,000 revamp project.

The 240sq m gym will feature 52 pieces of Technogym's CV and resistance equipment as well as free weights. The centre also features a 25m swimming pool and sports hall.

The project was managed by design and build specialists Createability and the facility is operated by Bromsgrove District Council. A spokesperson says: "Not only will the new facilities improve the overall look of the centre but, by converting a previously unused space, we have created the potential for additional revenue."

new complex for fraserburgh

Plans for a new multi-million pound swimming pool and sports hall in Fraserburgh, north-east Scotland, have been given the green light by Aberdeenshire Council.

Work is due to begin later this year and will replace the town's four-lane, 25m pool with a six-lane 25m facility.

A small sports hall equipped for youth work and adult learning is also included in the plans, as well as a fitness suite, a soft play area and changing facilities.

The council has already allocated £8.2m from its capital plan to fund the scheme, which has been developed in partnership with Fraserburgh Initiative for Swimming, Sport and Health (FISSH), and a funding application will also be made to sportscotland.



New 25m pool will offer six lanes

Potential sites for the new pool will now be investigated, with North Links the preferred location. The council's decision also means that detailed plans for the complex will now be drawn up.



KINESIS MAKES MOVEMENT

EXTRAORDINARY

Adding Value Kinesis is intended to increase secondary spend and personal training uptake

When Technogym launched Kinesis™ in 2005 the industry was stuck in a rut of linear equipment that did little to challenge the body and retain users interest. Kinesis put movement back at the centre of the exercise experience.

Kinesis works efficiently by stabilising muscles during each exercise, but also allows free movement to help users develop balance, flexibility and strength. This provides a pleasurable and multi-dimensional fitness experience, with outstanding tangible results.

kinesis as a business solution
Retaining existing customers, attracting new and generating secondary spend are challenges facing many if not all operators. As a supplier, Technogym focuses product development on providing solutions that will help address the needs of the industry.

Technogym is working with some key industry partners including David Lloyd

Leisure, Liverpool City Council and Virgin Active to ensure that Kinesis adds value to their businesses. Results include:

- Increased secondary spend
- Increased uptake of personal training
- High occupancy and retention of customers on Kinesis programmes
- Development of fitness teams' skill and motivation
- Increased diversity of customer base

a complete pt solution

- A dedicated personal training space, that is unintimidating and requires minimal adjustment
- Personalised training sessions based on movement, skill and goals, with endless progression opportunities
- Shorter more intense workouts to maximise training volume and energy expenditure
- Greater customer penetration through time-efficient workouts and results-based training
- Structured four, eight or twelve-week programmes to educate and develop skills of personal trainers and customers

the kinesis range – select the best option for your business

kinesis circuit:

This consists of four independent modules: alpha, beta, gamma, Delta, configured into a beautifully designed wall. This can be ideally situated in a studio or in a semi-private area in the gym. The wall can be arranged to fit the space you have and is available with a number of wood finishes.

the evolution continues...

Alpha, Beta and Gamma have been configured into one unit to provide the following

kinesis class

a wall configuration which is ideal for small group training in multiples of two upwards

kinesis one

A free standing model, incorporating the 360° resistance of Kinesis in a stand-alone, gym floor product



Time Efficient Kinesis provides shorter and more intense workouts

Kevin Yates – national health & fitness manager, Harpers Health and Fitness

"We installed the Kinesis One only six weeks ago and within this period enjoyed personal training growth of over 65 per cent. Our personal trainers see this as a one-stop-shop to programming and effective training, offering our members the ultimate in cable motion training. Its ease of use and movement range makes this an outstanding member-facing machine. Due to Kinesis One's functionality, it really is the one for us".

in brief...

pulse equips dubai tower

Burj Dubai, set to be the world's tallest building, recently opened the first of eight gyms planned for the property.

Pulse Fitness secured the contract to supply all eight gyms in the early part of 2008. MD Chris Johnson says: "We're delighted to be associated with such a spectacular building. Dubai is pushing the boundaries of construction and we're pleased to be supplying our equipment to such a showcase contract."

Construction of the Burj Dubai started in 2004. The aim is for the completed building to stand over 810m (2600 ft), with 160 habitable floors, making it the world's tallest free-standing structure.

power plate oz distribution

Distribution of Power Plate in Australia is to be taken on by En Core Fitness Solutions, a new company officially launching at the Sydney Fitness Expo next month. It is led by directors Adam Smith, previously business director for Maximuscle in the UK, and qualified chartered accountant Greg Minefos.

nautilus in swiss resort

Nautilus has recently kicked out the health club in a new five-star resort in the Swiss Alps.

The Chalet Royalp Hotel and Spa, which opened at the end of 2008, is a new hotel and apartment resort in the French part of Switzerland. Its 110sq m fitness suite, which caters for hotel guests and owners of the apartments, has been equipped with €100,000-worth of Nautilus CV equipment and free weights, plus a full Nautilus ONE line.

new showroom for gym80

German manufacturer gym80 International opened its new 1,200sq m showroom at the company headquarters in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, at the end of January.

The showroom has been designed to display all the company's latest equipment, such as the SYGNUM fitness and medical ranges.

nordic wellness in gothenburg

Nordic Wellness, a new health club operation in Sweden, opened its first club on 7 January this year.

Located in Gothenburg, the 570sq m club – which cost US\$500,000 to build – targets a middle-aged audience



Nordic: A focus on wellness, not fitness

with a wellness, rather than a fitness, philosophy. As owner Henrik Ask explains: "The club has a friendly, cosy environment. It's hard to explain, but it feels more like a hotel than a gym."

The club has a Technogym-equipped fitness suite offering cardio and circuit training, Kinesis, core training and body balance, as well as mind-body classes such as yoga and pilates. Membership costs US\$60 a month.

There is also one spa treatment room, which is open to the public.

Ask plans to open one or two new sites a year, starting with more in Gothenburg – the second will open in September this year and the third in January 2010 – before moving on to Stockholm and Malmö, then abroad to cities such as Copenhagen in Denmark.

tera wellness expands in china

Tera Wellness Club, one of the largest fitness chains in China, opened its latest club at the end of last year.

Located in Pudong, close to the Lujiazui Financial area of Shanghai, investment in the new 2000sq m Lujiazui club totalled RMB10m (around £1m).

Targeting expats, white collar workers and business people living in the area, annual membership costs RMB 4,000–5,000 (£400–£500).

Facilities include a Technogym-equipped fitness suite with a free weights area, as well as group exercise and group cycling studios. The site also offers a range of leisure facilities such as table tennis and snooker.



Tera now operates 73 clubs in China

optisport: first club outside the netherlands

Dutch leisure management contractor Optisport has opened its first facility outside of the Netherlands.

The Optisport Health Club in Hanover, Germany, opened last month after an €11m renovation undertaken by Pelikaan Construction.

The two-storey, 4,000sq m club offers a Technogym-equipped fitness suite, a sauna with seven cabins, physiotherapy facilities, two indoor pools and two outdoor pools. The club also has a 2,000sq m outdoor area.

Targeting the mid-market, the €69 all-inclusive monthly membership fee covers the health club, sauna, swimming pool, childcare and soft drinks.

Three more sites are scheduled to open in Germany in 2009 and 2010, with another three opening in Holland in the same time frame. Optisport is also looking at Belgium and the UK as possible new markets, with take-overs an option according to director Theo Vermeeren. The company had a turnover of €60m in 2008.



Winning formula: Top of the range kit and 24/7 access for just US\$35 a month

1,000th club for anytime fitness

US franchise operator Anytime Fitness opened its 1,000th club on 30 January.

Located in Wake Village, Texas, the US\$240,000, 420sq m club offers Life Fitness and Precor cardio machines and Life Fitness strength equipment.

Founded in 2002, Anytime Fitness now has clubs in 46 states, plus Canada and Australia, and almost 600,000 members. Open 24 hours a day, the clubs charge an average monthly membership of US\$35 and offer top-quality exercise equipment – including a wide variety of cardio machines, strength training equipment and free weights – with personal trainers also available by appointment.

"In two or three years, we'll have at least 2,500 clubs open in the US and another 750 clubs open internationally," says CEO Jeff Klinger. He also predicts that, by the end of 2009, Anytime Fitness will have more than 30 clubs in Canada, plus its first clubs in Italy and India. Additional international expansion plans include other European countries, the Middle East and Asia. The company has sold the franchise territory rights for another 1,500 locations and expects to open its 2,000th club in 2010.

Anytime Fitness' revenue grew from \$2.9m in 2005 to more than \$20m in 2008, and Klinger expects the figure to surpass \$30m in 2009.

aspria: new and refurbished

Health club operator Aspria is due to open its newest club in Hanover, Germany, at the end of this month.

The €24m development is part of a renovation project at the Maschseebad Lido, a listed building, undertaken by Pelikaan Construction. The fitness and wellness area is located in a new 9,000sq m extension. Facilities include a fitness suite, three group exercise studios, group cycling, outdoor activities – such as beach volleyball, Nordic walking, running and water activities – and a kids' club. Training and learning

pools have been added to the Lido's large outdoor facilities, while a spa area offers spa pools, a range of saunas and steamrooms, a solarium, an ice room and treatment rooms.

Aspria's five existing clubs are located in Berlin and Hamburg, plus three in Brussels – one of which, the exclusive €200-a-month Aspria Avenue Louise, has recently undergone a €250,000 refurbishment. The refurb included new equipment from Star Trac: HumanSport cables, E-Series cardio equipment and the Inspiration strength range.

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Wattbike, the result of seven years work and a brief British Cycling said would be impossible, is already helping them take cycling to the next level.

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WHERE WILL WATTBIKE TAKE YOU?

from the board

mark moreso
ceo • leisure jobs group

There are more than 27 million adults in England who do not exercise. This is why the government launched the Physical Activity Alliance and why we, as an industry, hope to play our role in the government's public health strategy. This could help us break through the glass ceiling – the 12 per cent market penetration – that we keep bumping our head on.

However, this 12 per cent and the 30 million non-exercisers have little in common and we will need to serve both communities.

To succeed, the winds of change will need to blow into every corner of our sector. Trainers might have to learn how to communicate and motivate less physically-literate consumers than they are used to. And we may have to attract trainers from communities we traditionally do not reach – not just ethnic minorities, but poor urban communities that currently have no desire for our offering. Operators may also have to re-think their pricing and delivery models.

This is our collective challenge. This is also the great opportunity for the young entrepreneurs in our midst, as well as those who might not yet be working in our industry.

If we are to successfully target a potential audience that's four times bigger than our existing constituency, then we may well need to make some fundamental root and branch changes to how we do things – changes that go far beyond just building more facilities.

new national health strategy

The Department of Health (DH) has launched a new strategy to encourage people to become more physically active to improve health and wellbeing.

The scheme – called 'Be Active, Be Healthy' – aims to get people involved in activities through partnerships with private and voluntary organisations. The strategy also formally establishes a new Physical Activity Alliance, which will pool the resources of leisure centres and grassroots organisations.

According to government figures, more than 27 million adults in England are not getting enough exercise and 14 million don't complete 30 minutes five times a week. By putting physical activity at the heart of communities, the government hopes it will help tackle obesity.

Dawn Primarolo, Minister of State for Public Health, says: "Physical activity is the key to stopping this country becoming the obesity capital of the world – and it makes us feel better.

"We have to remove the 'no, you can't' messages across communities to create a 'yes, you can' culture – with more support, more encouragement and more opportunities to get active."

In addition, Primarolo has pledged that the government will actively encourage more GPs to prescribe physical activities just as readily as they do drugs.

On behalf of the FIA, CEO André Deane says: "The value of this initiative

for us as an industry is that it highlights the fact that, at last, physical activity is being bracketed with diet and food management by the government.

"Activity taking centre stage with the launch of 'Be Active, Be Healthy' is a huge green light to every FIA member. We now have the government's endorsement to build or consolidate more relationships with GPs and PCTs at a nationwide grassroots level.

"The challenge for us is to have a clear, compelling and sustained strategy and plan in place if we are to maximise on this great consumer catalyst."



DH will encourage GPs to prescribe exercise as readily as they do drugs

QHotels' gym portfolio joins the association

Leeds-based hotel group QHotels, with its 21-strong portfolio of hotel-based Technogym-equipped gyms, is the newest member of the FIA.

Kenneth Wattam, QHotels' leisure manager, says: "The FIA we're now dealing with is worlds apart from the one we originally spoke to a few years ago.

"The Code of Practice is really important to us because we've built our business by focusing on quality. In addition, the awareness campaigns and the school programmes will help us to get more involved in our community, which is important to us.

"We're also very excited by the Change4Life campaign and all the other things the FIA is doing with

the government. This connection is good for consumers and good for organisations like us."

QHotels was established in 2004 by managing director Michael Purtil, sales director David Taylor and financial director Ian Goulding.

A company spokesperson says: "Every hotel is individual, with its own idiosyncrasies, yet people know what to expect when they stay in one of our properties.

"Our brand ethos is maintained by a strong commitment to our customers to ensure that we provide consistently high levels of service, and a dedicated team of people working for us who are passionate about this industry."



Changes Health Club: Encouraging participation among teenage girls

changes put twist on go scheme

The women's-only Changes Health Club in Bexleyheath, London, has added a twist to the FIA's 10-week go programme, funded by the DCMS.

After a consultation with local headteacher Patricia Slonecki, the club's owner Julia Harris has combined the scheme with a health awareness programme to improve the lifestyle of a group of Year 11 (15-to 16-year-old) girls from St Catherine's Catholic School For Girls.

The augmented go programme will combine a schedule of activities with easily-accessible food advice and

information modules on healthy eating and regular exercise.

This integrated approach is designed to excite and motivate Changes' teenage participants – most of whom do not have any interest in traditional sports – through a combination of salsa, aerobics, body pump and boxercise classes.

Slonecki says that, very often, the girls make unhealthy choices which could lead to problems in later life. Having access to the gym at the club will, she hopes, encourage the girls to see exercise as an essential part of their developing lifestyle.

new peoples' choice award

The FIA FLAME Awards will feature a new category this year called the Future of FLAME Award.

This award will recognise an individual, irrespective of their role, who has shown remarkable dedication and commitment to the fitness industry. Peers can nominate people who have made a positive impact on their club by emailing the name of the club and nominee, and the reasons why they should receive the award, to: yourflame@fia.org.uk

Commenting on the launch of the new award David Stalker, operations director of the FIA, says: "This award is the people's choice. It's a great opportunity to recognise an unsung hero – the person who consistently delivers best practice on a day-to-day basis."

summit to be held this june

The FIA is combining and holding its annual FLAME Conference and the Summer Summit this June in Bolton.

Featuring healthcare experts as well as government officials and healthcare-related authorities, the summit – entitled 'Issuing the Dose' – will focus on how the industry can partner with healthcare professionals to enhance its 'wellbeing' proposition. The summit will address clinical and remedial issues.

The two-day conference will feature national and international experts from the health and fitness sector and will address the issues of management, sales, marketing, programming, service and retention.

To find out more about the events, contact: lauren@fia.org.uk



because
everybody
is not the
same

time to review the par-q?

David Stalker, the FIA's operations director, looks at the issues around the PAR-Q and asks whether it's time for a change



Should the industry continue to use the PAR-Q, or is it a barrier to engaging with the 27 million adults (in England alone) who are not exercising enough?

Research has shown that up to 8 per cent of potential new gym members are so put off by the process of securing medical consent from their GP that their initial enthusiasm to exercise evaporates.

The original rationale for the PAR-Q was that operators viewed it as a form of indemnity provided by General Practitioners (GPs). However, judging by correspondence received from some GPs, this group do not actually feel it's their responsibility to remove liability from health club and leisure centre operators.

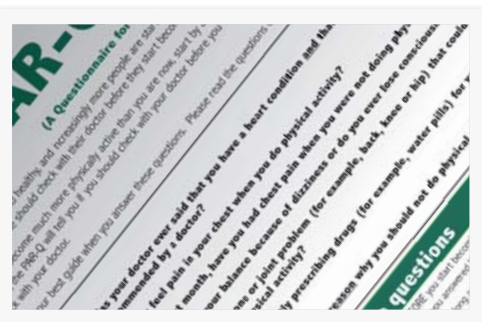
PAR-Qs have also been blamed for increasing NHS costs – both in terms of time and resources – and crushing the enthusiasm of inactive people who want to change their habits, but who know they need our specialist help to do so.

This is why the FIA Technical Health and Safety Forum, the wise owls of the industry who advise the FIA on issues such as these, have long suggested that the PAR-Q needed to be reviewed.

dawn of autonomy

The overall trend nowadays is to take a less paternalistic approach to delivering healthcare – individuals are today encouraged to take more control over their own health, choose their own healthcare providers, carry their own medical records and take responsibility for their own treatments.

A review of recent legislative trends also concluded that people should accept responsibility for the risks they choose to run, and has emphasised the importance of respect for individual autonomy.



The PAR-Q's detailed questions are known to be off-putting to potential members

This has been reinforced in recent decisions surrounding the standards of care required by those responsible for supervising what have been described as "worthwhile activities". To quote Lord Hoffmann: "If people want to climb mountains, go hang-gliding or swim or dive in ponds or lakes, that is their affair."

"Of course the landowner may, for his own reasons, wish to prohibit such activities. He may think they are a danger or inconvenience to himself or others. Or he may take a paternalist view and prefer people not to undertake risky activities on his land. He is entitled to impose such conditions.... But the law does not require him to do so."

The Compensation Act 2006 is a further indication of the law's attitude to what might be considered 'worthwhile activities'. The Act was passed because activities such as sports were apparently discouraged by organisers for fear of a flood of claims. Although it does little more than restate the previous law in relation to standards of care, it does clarify the position concerning activities such as those carried out in health clubs. The Act was supported by a 2004 report by the Better Regulation Task Force, entitled *Tackling the Compensation Culture*.

This seems to all be heading in one direction and the time might have come to change the way we operate.

a new direction

In line with this thinking, the FIA – working with Eido Healthcare, a provider of informed consent material – has reviewed the fitness industry's current procedures.

There has been a special focus on the medical and legal requirements that would influence any decision to move away from the PAR-Q. Any new system would also need to safeguard the rights and responsibilities of both the operator and the consumer.

The proposed new system has been designed to remove the legal uncertainty of the PAR-Q. It consists of a simple series of statements outlining the commitments of both the club and the member, thereby allowing operators to meet their legal responsibilities while helping inactive consumers to address their lifestyle-related issues.

The new system will adhere to current Office of Fair Trading guidelines, issued in 2002, specifically concerning health and fitness clubs. It will also ensure compliance with the 1999 Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations.

If approved by the FIA board, the new system will be available to FIA members at a significant discount. Licensed as a product from Eido, and available to download from the Eido website, it will be kept updated and in line with legal trends.

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in brief...

members have their say

All 27,000-plus REPs members have been invited to take part in a satisfaction survey which assesses all aspects of the Register. Topics include the registration process, services, the annual fee and how effectively the Register supports industry professionals.

Former members have also been invited to take part. Forms have been sent out to all members and can also be filled out online at www.exerciseregister.org

registrars to meet at ihrsa

IHRSA's 28th Annual International Convention & Trade Show takes place in San Francisco, US, later this month and brings together registrars from exercise registers around the world.

REPs registrar Jean-Ann Marnoch says: "It's always a good opportunity to discuss issues that are common to different registers. In particular, we will be working with our colleagues from Australia and New Zealand on taking our reciprocal working agreements further."

REPs, which launched in 2002, is also helping countries such as South Africa and Ireland to develop plans for their own registers.

new 2009 conventions

Two new conventions are being planned in Scotland and the north of England following the success of the Welsh Convention which was held at the end of January.

The Scottish Convention, due to be held this summer, will look at the work being done by the Scottish Executive to manage the fitness industry north of the border.

The North of England Convention, also planned for this summer, will be held in Leeds.

More details of both conventions – including dates, venues, details of keynote speakers and workshops, as well as booking information – will be available soon.



Young people should get a minimum of 60 minutes' vigorous activity a day

public health advice published

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), in consultation with SkillsActive, has published guidance on how to promote physical activity, active play and sport for young people under 18 years of age.

The recommendations are for people with a responsibility for promoting physical activity, such as policy managers, planners, teachers, parents and carers. The advice is also aimed at individuals in the health and fitness industry who are tasked with developing future policies,

schemes and training courses for children's physical activity.

The recommendations include delivery of a national campaign to promote physical activity to children and young people; ensuring a co-ordinated local strategy; and consulting with children. Raising awareness of the government's advice that children should get at least 60 minutes' moderate to vigorous activity a day is also covered. The advice is intended to shape activity strategies for children at a national and local level. For details: nice.org.uk/PH17

fia and reps reinforce relations



Deane welcomes the collaboration between the FIA and REPs

The FIA has been invited to present a series of keynote speeches and seminars at REPs' conventions in a move to give REPs members the chance to get involved in projects like the FIA's Sweat in the City, go, Active at School and Change4Life campaigns.

REPs registrar Jean-Ann Marnoch says: "The FIA and REPs have worked in tandem for a very long time on matters of policy and procedure, but this is the first time we've been able to let our members benefit as well."

Andrée Deane, the FIA's CEO, adds: "REPs members are in the frontline of fitness delivery and, therefore, key to delivering our 'more people, more active, more often' message. It's been great to get out and meet them."

visit the reps online: www.exerciseregister.org

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Ref: HCM0309



Williams joins Momentum

new manager for momentum

Melanie Williams, formerly part of Synergy Training, has joined Momentum Business Development as business development manager.

"Williams' responsibilities will focus on generating new business, delivering training programmes, and the strategic development of accounts."

Williams started as a fitness instructor before moving into membership sales, and will use this experience to train membership sales staff, fitness instructors, managers and club owners.

She says: "In these difficult financial times, it's even more important for a business to differentiate itself with a strong sales message and to convert the leads that are generated."

in brief...

france returns to barnsley

Barnsley Premier Leisure has appointed Mark France as facilities manager at Barnsley Metrodome.

He previously worked at the centre from 2001–2006, first as a fitness instructor and then worked his way up to supervisor level. He will now be responsible for the running of the Metrodome's dry side, including the fitness centre, squash courts, badminton and bowling facilities.

For the past two years he has worked for a consultancy, in partnership with Technogym, offering operational guidance to leisure facilities.

énergie undergoes a restructure

Fitness and wellness franchise firm The énergie Group has completed a restructuring of its senior management in light of the firm's recent expansion in the UK and the Middle East.

David Beattie, a founder of the group, has re-taken his place on the main board as énergie's brand and marketing director, alongside CEO Jan Spaticchia.

Giles Webber, who is also a board member, will head up a new Management Services division focused on clubs either owned by a subsidiary of the group or operated under a management contract for a franchisee company. Griff Shortt has been appointed operations director of the division and will oversee the rebranding and management of eight former Fitness First UK clubs, as well as four clubs in Qatar, on behalf of Ghanim Bin Saad Al Saad & Sons (see news p8 and HCM Feb 09 p14).



Beattie re-joins énergie's main board

The franchised division of the group will now be headed by Innes Kerr as head of direct franchising, who will take responsibility for all the énergie fitness clubs and SHOKK énergie direct franchising in England and Wales.

cybex promotes its sales staff

Cybex International UK has promoted four members of its sales team to better support its European distributors.

Ben Wilde, formerly Cybex's UK sales director, has been promoted to become the company's director of strategic accounts for Europe. The new role will consist of assisting Cybex's European distributors to develop their businesses, as well as continuing to offer strategic support to the UK.

Rob Thurston has also been promoted from senior regional manager to national

sales manager, and will support Wilde by managing the UK sales team. Thurston has been with Cybex since 2005, covering the East Midlands and East Anglia.

In addition, Jo Rich has been promoted from the UK's national account manager to European key account manager. Rich will now be responsible for managing account relationships across Europe as well as in the UK.

Ian Lewis is now regional sales manager in the North having worked as business development manager for over two years.

castle royle gets new manager

Ben Emerson has been promoted to manager of the health club at Castle Royle Golf & Country Club in Berkshire, part of a portfolio owned by The Club Company.

Emerson joined the company's Mapledurham club in 2007 as a golf professional, where he helped establish a golf academy for five- to 12-year-olds, before moving on to Castle Royle in March 2008 as duty manager.

Facilities at Castle Royle include a Technogym-equipped fitness suite, a 20m swimming pool, sauna, steamroom and three exercise studios.

PEOPLE PROFILE

richard noble



As founder of the pf2 health club, a new licensing scheme and plans for international expansion, it's clear that the recession isn't a deterrent for this enthusiastic entrepreneur

What inspired you to create pf2?

Having started in the leisure industry in 1988 at a local leisure centre, and spending the next 15 years progressing through the public and private sector at various facilities, I realised the only way I could fulfil my working philosophy was to create a brand that offers value for money, excellent customer service and quality equipment.

Where are your clubs?

I have two clubs in Worcester and Malvern, plus the Chessgrove Day Spa in Hanbury. The clubs, featuring around 21 stations of Life Fitness, Escape Fitness, Precor and gym80, also offer around 25 classes a week, plus a solarium and a coffee bar.

What makes pf2 different?

Looking at the economy now, the fundamental reason why companies are going under is because they're becoming increasingly blasé about what customers want. We can't afford to do this.

With so much doom and gloom, I believe it's important that clubs offer value for money and an environment that leaves people feeling good about themselves.

One of the dynamics of pf2 is that we don't have huge clubs – they're around 465sq m – so we can manage our membership base quite easily. We offer an intimate environment for clients with their own personal trainer, state of the art equipment and a professional team that understands what they require and that designs programmes around their lifestyle.

We don't do contracts at pf2. If our clubs don't perform, then customers are free to leave, which keeps staff constantly on their toes. Using this method, we've retained members who joined when we launched five and a half years ago. We also use our own direct debit system, instead of a third party, so if there are any problems we deal with it directly.

What's your vision for pf2?

We have a new licensing scheme which is very similar to franchising but which doesn't put as much financial strain on smaller, independent clubs. A lot of independent operators are going under at the moment; having a head office can put a bit of support and confidence back into the market.

We will be offering operators a range of packages to join the pf2 network, depending the level of support they need to turn a profit, in return for a £10,000 initial fee – it usually costs £30,000 for franchises – plus management fees of between 3 and 8 per cent of the monthly turnover, as opposed to the 10 per cent normally charged by franchisees.

We're also looking into opportunities to set up three clubs from scratch in the Caribbean and have also identified a new build UK unit, which I will be looking to put out to a licensee as part of our new scheme.



Noble: Looking to expand the pf2 health club network

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WAYS
TO
GROW

NEW
MEMBERS

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competitive edge

25 MAY 09

bupa london 10,000

The online entry system is now open for the Bupa London 10km road race. The race will start on Birdcage Walk near Buckingham Palace and take a route around central London, passing many of the capital's famous sights such as Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, Big Ben, St Paul's Cathedral and Nelson's Column. This event is now in its second year and is presented by London Marathon Ltd and Nova International, which also organises the Bupa Great North Run. Details: www.london10000.co.uk



The popularity of the London Marathon (above) has led the organisers to launch another event – the BUPA London 10,000

ACT: WORLDWIDE IMAGES

THROUGHOUT 09

raw races

Ambition Events has launched RAW – the 'Run Across the World' series of endurance marathons set to take place across the globe this year. RAW Africa has already taken place; next on the agenda is RAW Scandinavia, a 110-mile, 46-hour race on the Kungsleden Trail in Sweden, which takes place on 27–28 June. Other RAW challenges will be held in Britain in Dubai, Greenland in September and August in November. Details: www.runacrosstheworld.com



RAW Africa took place in Namibia

7–15 NOVEMBER 09

big heart bike ride: sinai desert

Four UK charities have joined forces to launch a new cycling challenge in the Sinai desert in Egypt, to raise funds and support their work fighting heart disease. The 420km route will take in the stunning scenery of the Sahara Belt, including granite mountains and colourful canyons. Highlights will include camping under the stars and finishing on the shores of the Red Sea. Registration costs £250 and sponsorship is set at £2,500; funds will go to The British Heart Foundation, Cardiac Risk in the Young, Echo UK and Heart UK. Details: www.actionforcharity.co.uk



The 420km route ends at the Red Sea

PICTURE: WWW.STOCK-COHERENT.COM

14 JUNE 09

uk ironman 70.3 triathlon

The UK IRONMAN 70.3 Triathlon will return to Wimbleball Lake in the heart of Exmoor National Park this year. Athletes have 10.5 hours to complete a 1.2-mile swim, a 56-mile bike ride and a 13.1-mile run. This course is hailed as one of the toughest in the Ironman circuit – it's defined by two monster hills and over 3,000m of ascent during the cycling and running phases. The top 50 finishers will qualify for the 70.3 World Championships in Florida. Entry costs £160. Details: www.half.ironmanuk.com



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diary

worldwide event listings for leisure professionals

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MARCH

16–19 | IHRSA 2009

Venue San Francisco, California, US
Summary
Representatives from all areas of the health, fitness and wellness sector can benefit from the diverse training sessions, trade show and networking opportunities at this annual event.
Tel +1 617 951 0055
Web www.ihrsa.org

27–29 | International Fitness Showcase

Venue Winter Gardens, Blackpool, UK
Summary
Showcases the latest exercise classes, along with workshops and lectures, for fitness instructors and enthusiasts.
Tel +44 (0)113 277 3885
Web www.chrysalispromotions.com



International Fitness Showcase offers classes for instructors and enthusiasts

APRIL

17–19 | FitPro Spring Convention

Venue Loughborough University
Summary
Convention for fitness professionals with more than 180 workshops, lectures and seminars on everything personal trainers and instructors need to know.
Tel +44 (0)20 8586 0101
Web www.fitpro.com/convention09

17–19 | Australian Fitness Expo

Venue Sydney, Australia
Summary
Exhibition, seminars and training for the Australasian fitness industry.
Tel +61 3 9261 4500
Web www.fitnessexpo.com.au

23 | Understanding and Pitching to the Public Sector

Venue De Vere Hotel Cheshunt, UK
Summary
This seminar, organised by Leisure-net Solutions, is aimed at suppliers who want to understand the various sectors and sub-groups of the leisure industry's public sector, to improve sale strategies.
Tel +44 (0)1603 814233
Email info@leisure-net.org

23–26 | FIBO 2009

Venue Essen, Germany
Summary
More than 480 companies from more than 35 countries exhibit products,

concepts and solutions for the fitness, wellness and leisure industries at this show in Essen, Germany. The show attracts more than 50,000 visitors.
Tel +49 (0)211 90 191
Web www.fibo.de

23–26 | IDEA Fitness Fusion Conference

Venue Rosemont, Illinois, US
Summary
Education for group fitness instructors and personal trainers.
Tel +1 858 535 8979, ext. 7
Web www.idealift.com

MAY

1–3 | AFEEX

Venue Beijing, China
Summary
Training techniques and management information are on offer at this event – the Asian Fitness Education Expo – targeting China's fitness professionals.
Tel +8610 6712 3689
Web www.afeex.org

20–21 | SIBEC UK

Venue The Belfry, Warwickshire, UK
Summary
This event brings together the industry's most influential suppliers and buyers in the local authority, trust and education markets for two days of networking, forums and face-to-face meetings.
Tel +44 (0)20 8547 9830
Web www.mcleaneventsinternational.com

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everyone's talking about . . .

staff fitness levels

Health and fitness is the focus of our industry, but are our staff really leading by example? And does it really matter anyway, as long as we're giving members the right advice?

Most Fridays, there's an aroma of greasy fish and chips in my local health club – an end of week treat for the slightly plump receptionist. Looking elsewhere, it's not unheard of to see delegates drinking and smoking heavily at fitness industry functions. The irony is not lost on me: if we're in the health and fitness business, shouldn't we be practising what we preach?

Of course, a thin person can be unfit, while being fat does not rule out being fit (see *HCM* April 08, p1). However, we all judge people by their appearance, and realistically do so more if they work in a club or leisure

centre – places where we should be setting an example of healthy living.

The advantages of having a healthy, fit workforce are many: increased productivity, happier employees and a reduction in absenteeism. But how many club operators offer free membership to employees?

Some owners have embraced staff fitness wholeheartedly. Fitness First, for example, launched its Operation Shape-Up initiative early last year. The initiative involves every employee, not just instructors, taking a fitness test and attending boot camps if need be, and it's now being rolled out across the whole global estate (see *HCM* Jan 09 p58).

But it isn't about employees meeting physical activity benchmarks, according to Fitness First's European head of fitness Steve Kouma: "It's about getting staff passionate about our product and helping them engage with members."

Others feel that super-fit employees could alienate new or deconditioned members, suggesting that it doesn't really matter how fit an employee is, as long as they're qualified and able to give the right advice to customers. There may also be other qualities that operators value more in their employees – motivational or people skills, for example. We ask our panellists where they stand on this debate.

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO PRACTISE WHAT WE PREACH? EMAIL US: HEALTHCLUB@LEISUREMEDIA.COM

richard apps

sheffield international venues • corporate health & fitness manager



"Staying physically and mentally fit is an advantage to any workforce. It's also very important to practise what you preach: if you take part in exercise, people will see you benefiting from it and they will probably buy into the concept more.

This January, we launched the 'What's Your Promise?' health and fitness

initiative. This is open to our employees and members, each of whom makes their promise – which can be any kind of personal goal – online. Each visit is registered and, if they stick to it and reach their stated goal, they get vouchers for various activities at our venues. In addition to this, all staff have free use of our gyms, group exercise classes and pools already.

The campaign has been a huge success so far: around 300 people have signed up online, including 50 employees, and another 50 staff have made a promise off-line. It's been embraced at every level, including directors. Some staff, including me, made promises on video camera which have been posted online, which is very motivational.

However, this is not a mandatory scheme as I think demanding this of staff could have an adverse effect."

martin noddings

core exercise clinic • commercial development manager

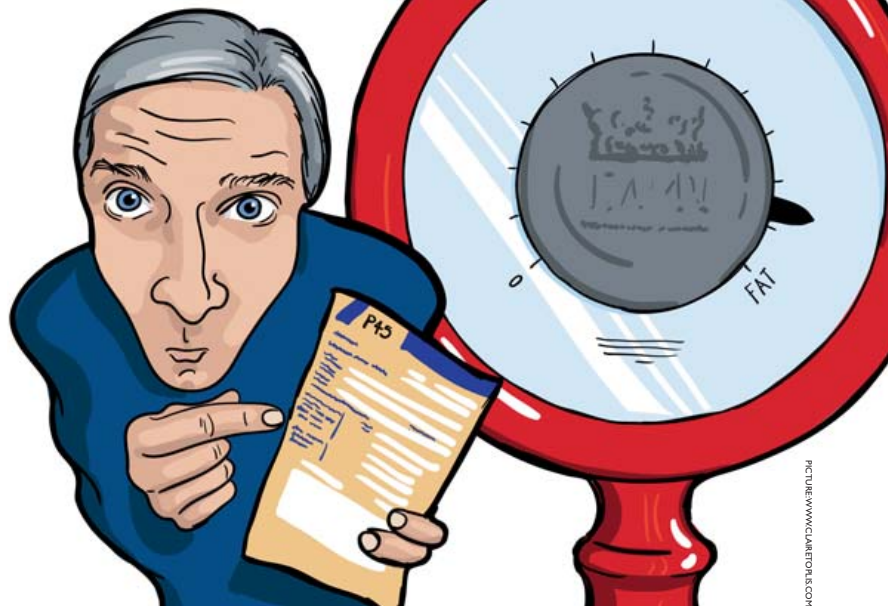


"Having a member of staff who is fit, or who looks fit, is not the most important thing for us because what we deliver is really very specialised.

We offer physiotherapy and clinical support such as cardiac rehab classes, so we only employ physiotherapists and exercise physiologists with degree standard qualifications or above.

First and foremost, however, we look for maturity in staff because a major part of what we deliver is behavioural change counselling. A lot of our members have failed at many exercise or eating programmes because they haven't had psychological support. We look for staff who are happy and mature enough to offer such support and to coach people through small, incremental lifestyle goals, rather than for a sportsman who can run that half a second quicker.

But inspiration does come into it and it wouldn't feel right to have an exceptionally overweight person working in a gym – a customer could say 'if they can't do it, then how am I supposed to?' But you don't want someone who's excessively slim either because that's not inspirational or achievable, or even particularly healthy in itself."



A weighty question: Should people have to achieve certain levels of fitness and BMI to be able to work in our industry?

jon johnston

matrix fitness • managing director



"I was at an industry convention recently with senior managers who were smoking heavily and clearly not in good physical condition. If they don't believe in their product or business, why should they expect their staff to?

I think Fitness First is doing the right thing as they need to present a certain image. For me, though, it's more

about being healthy than fit. For example, if you work at the frontline of our industry – whether in a gym or supplying equipment – you shouldn't smoke. I only employ a handful of smokers and they tend to be people working in the warehouses or building kit, rather than selling it.

I'm careful when selecting staff, but we're careful not to be prejudiced. I pick those with the right attitude, who are clearly fitness enthusiasts – most of our company directors are active people and tend to have healthy lifestyles. But the main thing is to be supportive and encouraging. Our workers can use our equipment and also buy it for a discount, plus we have corporate gym memberships for head office and field staff. We also support our staff who do sponsored charity challenges. It's important for us to have a culture of exercise in our firm."

kevin yates

leisure connection • national health and fitness manager



"We want to be the employer of choice in the industry and, in light of the recession, we've put together a programme to re-train and recruit people regardless of their background or connection to fitness.

We believe that you can train skills, but that it's difficult to train personality. What we're looking for is community

spirit: people with a passion to bring health to the community. We're also looking for those with phenomenal people skills – our best PTs aren't the ones with rippling muscles but the ones who can communicate with members. We want our fitness instructors to be everyday people who are just like our customers, and not just those with a beautiful body.

If an employee were unfit and unhealthy, however, we would advise and support them in living a healthier lifestyle. We offer free membership to all staff and encourage them to work out and experience our facilities. It's good for them, but also helps them to relate to members and do their jobs better.

What Fitness First is doing is very good. We're now thinking of offering the [complementary] five-point health check we give to members to employees too, with PT advice to follow."

peter stirring benson

The new CEO of Fitness First Australia talks to Jennifer Todd about his initial impressions of the industry, the secrets of the company's success in Australia, and a desire to broaden its reach still further

Born to a medical father, Peter Stirling Benson, CEO of Fitness First Australia since September 2008, has always been interested in exercise and is a keen sportsman. However, one gets the feeling that's not the reason the Fitness First board chose a non-fitness industry executive to take control of the most profitable division of its company.

A newcomer to the health and fitness industry, UK-born Stirling Benson originally moved to Australia in 1989 as business manager for British Airways. This was followed by a three-year stint as CEO of general entertainment channel TV1, coinciding with the launch of pay television in Australia. He then took up the position of general manager at Galileo, providing electronic distribution services to the travel industry's agency network, and most recently spent five years as CEO of the entertainment sector at ticketing giant Ticketek.

Stirling Benson obviously relishes the challenge of his new role at Fitness First. "I like to work in a competitive environment – one that requires a people focus," he says. "I like the positive pressure of market-driven businesses and I'm very motivated by results."

He takes over from Tony de Leede, who founded Fitness First Australia after he and UK-based Fitness First plc took over the bankrupt Heathland group's 11 Australian health clubs in 2000. After eight years as CEO, de Leede had expanded the chain to over 80 clubs nationally, with an annual turnover of approximately AUS\$350m.

member engagement

With a background in technology, Stirling Benson believes his strengths lie in bringing

A fresh approach Peter Stirling Benson (left), CEO of Fitness First Australia, believes his strengths lie in bringing new skills to the role

new skills to the role: "I have no desire to 'corporate' Fitness First. But I have a passion for the internet – what I believe to be the common language of our members. I see a great opportunity to develop a 24/7 relationship with our members to help get a clearer understanding of what makes them tick."

Stirling Benson believes that engaging people via the internet will bring a new level of excitement about fitness, making recruiting of new members easier, as well as keeping existing members up-to-date with opportunities in the club and helping them keep track of their progress.

His background in technology-based companies has set the priority for his focus and he's in the process of trialling a new induction programme using the internet, which will engage new members as soon as they join a Fitness First club.

"A key member principle that we work to at Fitness First is that it's motivation that gets our members started, but habit that keeps them training," he says. "The best way to kick-start that passion and drive for fitness is by making sure that we expose the member to everything that our clubs have to offer right from the start."

Stirling Benson says the induction initiatives will range from structured workout programmes to fitness assessments with personal trainers.

"The first few weeks are the most critical in the relationship between a new member and a club," he says. "We'll be first off the rank in terms of our competitors to roll-out a strategy using the internet like this."

Testing new waters Fitness First Australia is trialling a new induction programme, using the internet to engage directly with the member

So what does Stirling Benson think of service levels in the fitness industry? "Generally they're good, but consistency is the challenge," he says. "This industry can deliver a more personal level of service, because it's populated by a number of small groups of clubs – it hasn't yet adopted the large-scale corporate feel of the hotel industry, for instance – but that brings about challenges in consistency."

As for his initial impressions of the Australian fitness industry, Stirling Benson believes the passion of the people who work in it and its members' desire to continually improve creates an exciting opportunity. "It's a young industry which I see is committed, keen to learn and embrace new ideas," he observes. "Something I've learned about Australians is that they expect world standards in their health clubs. They're keen travellers who go overseas, come back and want world-best standards in their lives – and that includes health clubs."

Fitness First Australia's members are typically aged 18–39, with a 50:50 male to female ratio. One of Stirling Benson's goals is to widen this demographic, particularly at times of the day when the clubs are quiet. "I'm well-versed in capacity management in the airline industry," he says. "I see an opportunity to apply that to the health and fitness industry, to do something about the

PERSONAL TOUCH

- **Favourite book:** *Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela
- **Favourite film:** *Some Like it Hot*
- **Favourite music:** Jazz – Miles Davies
- **Favourite place:** New York
- **Favourite food:** Lamb with lashings of gravy!
- **Favourite workout:** Spin class
- **The best piece of advice you've ever been given:** "Live every day as if it were your last, because one day you will be right!"

Broad reach The club in Market Street, Sydney (right) is one of Fitness First Australia's 78 clubs; there are plans to open a further seven in 2009

times of day when our clubs are relatively empty. We're looking at ways to appeal to both school-goers and the older generation, but it's fair to say there are not many clubs doing that particularly well at the moment, so it is a challenge."

Other challenges, like retaining staff and members, are issues Stirling Benson also wants to tackle. He says he thinks of his staff as he does his members: "They need training, an attainable goal to work towards and managers who spend quality time with them." When hiring staff, he says he looks for "passionate people who like to keep on learning, who are big on the principles of great service and who want a fulfilling career."

Stirling Benson says one of the key roles of a club is to educate members in the benefits of health and fitness – something ▶



PICTURE: WWW.STOCK.COM



► he believes helps to attract new members and retain existing ones: "Educated members are more likely to instill the importance of health and fitness in their children, colleagues and friends, so we achieve another of our goals: to help the community become healthier."

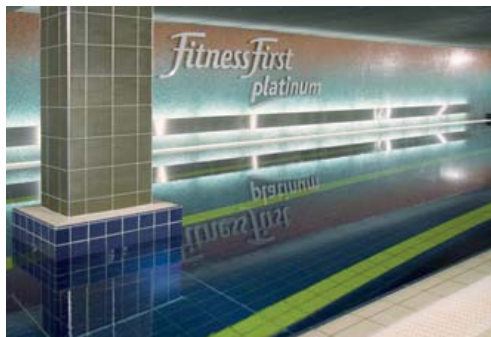
global structure

Fitness First Australia operates as a separate business from the group's parent company in Poole, UK. It has its own targets, bears its own costs, keeps its own revenue and is the most profitable of all the businesses within the global Fitness First network. Ask Stirling Benson why this is and he is unequivocal: "Australia is the most sport, health and fitness-orientated society I've ever lived in. Australians value fitness and are willing to pay for it as long as it's professional, high quality and convenient."

To meet the demands of such a discerning nation, Stirling Benson says his team puts a great deal of emphasis on choosing the right location for each new club. "Since 2000, we've been unrelenting in our search for site locations which fit our three criteria: size, convenience (including parking) and foot traffic," he explains.

He also attributes the Australian company's success to its contracting of more than 2,000 highly qualified personal trainers across its 89 clubs – more than any other part of the Fitness First business – as well as employing 1,500 group fitness instructors. "PTs are pivotal in demonstrating to members how to get the best out of their club. They unlock the opportunities each club has to offer and are an important glue in keeping members at a club," he explains.

As well as running the Australian operation, Stirling Benson is also part of the group executive team at Fitness First



Top-end The George Street Platinum club in Sydney offers a 20m, three-lane pool

worldwide, tasked with making Fitness First an international business in the true sense of the word. All major decisions are taken as a group by this team, which includes the MDs responsible for the UK, Germany, Rest of Europe, Asia and Australia, as well as the company's four functional heads from global sales, marketing, member experience and IT.

As in Australia, each of the Fitness First divisions represented in this global team operates as a separate business, with 100 per cent ownership and control held by Fitness First in the UK. Profit from each of the divisions is re-invested locally in capital expenditure for new and existing clubs, and any surplus cash after paying tax and interest is remitted back to the UK holding company.

Stirling Benson says there is no huge difference between the way the operations are run in each country but, where differences do exist, they share their experience so as not to reinvent the wheel. "We learn from each other," he adds. "The areas we spend most time exploring are what makes a club successful in terms of location, investment, equipment, quality of staff, communication between members – and how we can improve those things."

recession proof

Currently, a pressing issue for the executive team is managing the recession. "The challenge for Fitness First, and the industry, is to position ourselves as a necessity, not a luxury," says Stirling Benson, who has ridden out recessions before in his career. "We continue to roll out a list of member benefits to reinforce our value to them. Thankfully there is strong evidence to show that, for a large number of our members, fitness becomes more important during a recession, because it's a release from what else is happening to them."

Stirling Benson believes the fitness industry is relatively recession-proof compared with other sectors, providing operators are willing to be flexible and remain focused on offering members value for money. "We offer flexibility in that we give members the chance to freeze their membership for a period of time. Whether we should be more flexible will depend on how the market evolves and what our members want from us."

In Australia itself, Stirling Benson is facing a different issue: the country now ranks as one of the fattest nations in the world. Naturally, Stirling Benson sees this as an opportunity for his company. "This country is facing major health issues, so one of my longer-term goals is unashamedly to promote fitness for life to a nationwide audience," he says. "This industry needs to work with a broader church – including health insurance companies, government, educators and members – to show communities how much fitter and healthier their life can be with us in it."

 **Jennifer Todd**
healthclub@leisuremedia.com



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FITNESS FIRST BY NUMBERS

Fitness First has clubs in the UK, Belgium, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Italy, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Philippines, Singapore, Spain, Thailand and the UAE. In total it has more than 550 clubs worldwide, catering for in excess of 1.5 million members.

Fitness First Australia has 89 clubs across six states and will open a further three this year – two in New South Wales and one in Victoria. Its current membership is 360,000.



◀ On your feet
Technogym's Kinesis (left)
can be used to perform
pilates-influenced moves
in both the standing
and prone positions



Variable incline The angle of the
glideboard can be adjusted on
the GRAVITY Training System
to change resistance levels

beyond the studio

Neena Dhillon looks at the opportunity to complement a pilates offering with pilates-influenced programming on alternative gym equipment

Health club operators seeking to stimulate interest in pilates among their membership base have a few options available to them, from offering mat-based classes as a component of their group exercise timetable to establishing a specialist studio. But can equipment that's not pilates-specific, and that health clubs may already have on their gym floor, also play a role in turning people on to this exercise method?

"Pilates equipment is defined and designed to meet specific method principles," points out Balanced Body CEO and president Ken Endelman. "There may be modern innovations made on different pieces of kit, but it's still pilates equipment."

"That being said, one of the best ways to get members to try pilates in a gym setting is to combine it with equipment they're familiar with, and then offer a free demo so they can really feel the benefits of the class before signing up."

"We believe there's a great synergy between the heart-healthy advantages

of cardiovascular exercise and a pilates regimen. Not only can this energise clients and diversify programming, but it can become a service differentiator that can help to attract new people and boost the bottom line."

For example, one of Balanced Body's personal trainer clients in Florida fused sessions of pilates with both treadmill and group cycling elements. She was able to pay off her initial investment in pilates equipment in just three months because her customers got hooked on pilates through its fitness element.

But while specialists such as Balanced Body recommend a pairing of cardio and pilates to pull in customers with a gym mindset, other pilates-influenced programmes developed in conjunction with different exercise systems are emerging in the UK. Provided members work with an instructor who has an equipment-based pilates qualification, these multi-purpose systems can be used to deliver pilates-influenced workouts, as well as being suitable for more general use both on the gym floor and in group exercise studios.

the pull of gravity

The GTS (GRAVITY Training System) – a piece of strength training equipment that involves the use of cables, a moving glideboard and the exerciser's bodyweight against a variable incline resistance – is one such example, offering pilates-influenced programming among a range of different applications and uses. It can be adapted with special accessories for these pilates-influenced workouts.

GRAVITY UK MD Greg Sellar explains: "Our GRAVITYPilates programme comprises a series of combined Reformer and matwork (Reformat) pilates-based exercises adapted specifically for use on the GTS. The movements are not compromised, with some traditional pilates instructors commenting that they are in fact aided by being able to adjust the incline of movements for newer participants, or those who feel less comfortable in the earlier stages of pilates equipment-based work."

The GTS is positioned as a good investment for clubs looking to develop an equipment-based offering, as it can be used for a wide range of applications,

not just pilates-influenced programming. "The GTS can be used [to deliver pilates-influenced sessions] by qualified pilates instructors who have undergone our one-day GRAVITYPilates training," explains Sellar. "But it can also be used by personal trainers, gym instructors and physiotherapists across three other GRAVITY strength training programmes."

While the versatility of the GTS is a clear benefit, Sellar is quick to emphasise that it is not a Reformer and that only those with a REPS Level 3 pilates qualification from a recognised provider can be trained to use the machine to deliver pilates-influenced programming. "We're not here to compete with pilates people; we simply want to allow health clubs to get the most out of their existing equipment," he adds.

GRAVITYPilates training is REPS-certified in the UK, with the GTS itself endorsed by the American Physical Therapy Association. A club that has noted an increase in pilates interest since investing in five GTS machines is Nuffield Health Fitness & Wellbeing in central London. Group activity manager

Sarah Barnett explains: "The varying levels of the GTS unit enable beginners to adopt the correct postures at a suitable level, while advanced pilates-goers can increase the intensity of their mat-based exercises. We use the units mainly for group classes and small group personal training sessions, as well as providing individuals with corrective therapy for injuries."

moving to vertical

Technogym's Kinesis cable equipment is another system that has caught the attention of pilates practitioners. "Kinesis is not intended to replace traditional pilates benches and accessories," says Technogym UK managing director Tony Majakas. "Instead, it can become an extension of training, which allows the method to be introduced away from a traditional studio – on a gym floor, for example."

Pilates, as originally created by Joseph Pilates, met an initial need for fitness and rehabilitation, meaning that the traditional Reformer bench was used mainly in the lying/prone position.

Kinesis has allowed trainers to progress these movements from a lying to a natural standing position; they can also create pilates-influenced movements on the floor, adding attachments to the legs and arms to generate more resistance.

Majakas acknowledges that traditional pilates instructors will tend to stick to familiar kit such as Reformers, but adds: "It's at the forefront, where trainers are mixing styles, that pilates and Kinesis can work together. Additional training is minimal, because a pilates trainer who has completed a five-year course will be able to translate movements from a lying to a standing position by following our DVDs."

At Stephen Price's exclusive studio in London, pilates trainers are now incorporating Kinesis into their personal training programmes, says Majakas.

amplified effect

Pineapple vibration platforms employ bio-oscillation technology to activate and amplify every muscle in the body during a workout (see *HCM* Feb 09, p36). The practicality of the full-length platform, in combination with a comfortable

► frequency and movement in the vertical plane, means the machine is positioned as being suited to all forms of exercise.

"We work with the philosophies that Joseph Pilates introduced when he took a series of physical exercises and techniques and systemised them," says Pineapple director David Seymour. "What we're doing is applying additional stimulus to optimise muscle action when doing these exercises."

Seymour goes on to explain that pilates exercises carried out on the Pineapple are more efficient and, importantly, improve postural muscles more than a standard mat class. The Pineapple can also be used as a warm-up tool, a post-workout treatment, or a special 'conditioning' tool for transition between a Reformer workout and a trapeze table.

"Pineapple is certainly not just a pilates platform, but the experience has been that pilates instructors are using their techniques on the machine and gaining accelerated results, as are sports-specific trainers and general conditioning trainers," Seymour continues.

PineappleLATES classes – pilates classes of less than 30 minutes, carried out on a Pineapple – is a new offering for health clubs that's been introduced in Los Angeles.

A comprehensive PineappleLATES certification is currently being developed, which will



Power Plate pilates Many moves can be translated without much adaptation



Fast-forward Accelerated results can be achieved by doing pilates on a Pineapple

allow pilates instructors to undertake a series of online training workshops.

"An instructor applies the pilates principles of a mat class, but instructs less repetition of each movement and more focus on breath control. The practice is harmonised with bio-oscillation in the Pineapple platform to relax the body and allow it to go deeper into the muscles located next to the spine," Seymour explains. "Since deep core muscles can be a challenge to engage if clients aren't fully relaxed, PineappleLATES is helping to open up new customer channels, particularly among men."

Clint Bigham of 2020 Fitness in Los Angeles specialises in personal training. He has been employing the Pineapple to warm up and cool down clients, and during pilates classes for mat-based work in between traditional pilates machines.

"We make more income because clients pay extra to use the Pineapple, with sessions lasting 30 to 40 minutes rather than one hour," Bigham says. "This means more clients coming in daily." He emphasises that it is specifically this reduction in required workout time that has allowed him to see more clients and increase his revenue.

Another practitioner who has harnessed vibration training as part of his pilates offering is Chris Stjohn-Smith, of Pilates Revolution in London, who sometimes integrates Power Plate® into his practice. "In principle it's a floating, vibrating mat, so many pilates moves can be translated onto the machine without the need for much adaptation," he comments. "With the use of the machine's arm straps and some pilates boxes or a stability ball, the working area of the machine can be easily extended to suit parts of the pilates repertoire."

Having the Power Plate at his disposal for one-to-one sessions allows Stjohn-Smith to work into areas that can be difficult to access. He cites an example: "I have a client recovering from a near

fatal skiing accident. Using the massage techniques of the machine early in the session allows me to accelerate the work I'm doing with my pilates repertoire. Clients who often suffer from involuntary tension during training appear to achieve better results when incorporating the Power Plate."

experts only

While Stjohn-Smith is happy to recommend the machine for certain applications, he also argues that only fully-qualified instructors should deliver this type of training, because the key to uncompromised pilates on the Power Plate lies in understanding the ethos and principles of pilates, not the machine itself. He is currently helping to develop a training module that will introduce Power Plate machine pilates to the UK.

For other pilates specialists, such as Balanced Body, the concern remains that anyone involved in pilates programming must be certified, or at least underway in their certification, to avoid diminished results and possible injury to clients.

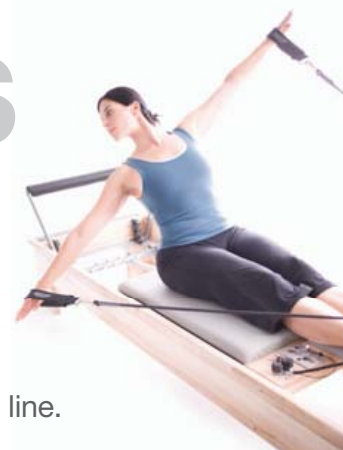
Balanced Body's Endelman offers an additional observation on the use of machines that aren't pilates-specific to deliver pilates-influenced workouts: "Sessions on such equipment are usually fee-based, which may not make them a good 'feeder' into another fee-based programme [ie pilates]. In terms of pilates feeder programmes, it may prove more effective for gyms to offer free mat classes to encourage members to gravitate towards fee-based equipment sessions."

Despite these reservations, some pilates instructors are indeed benefiting from incorporating 'complementary' equipment into their offering. Only time will tell, however, whether these technologies enjoy acceptance among the wider pilates community.

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COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Caroline Wilkinson
looks at what it takes to
cater for competitive
sports people, and provides
some insight into how
existing clubs attract and
retain these members



Complementary offering Most competitive sportspeople will already have a training routine, but some use health club facilities as well

With four years to go until the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the foundations being laid for a lasting legacy, it won't be long until the country gets the Olympic itch.

Should this motivate the general public to get off their sofas and become more active, more often, it should also spur amateur sports people to be more competitive and performance-driven.

With this in mind, offering the right services and sports-specific equipment could help mainstream clubs attract high-performance members.

One thing is clear: whether catering for an athlete who wants to improve their game or train for a marathon, triathlon or the Tour de France, a strength and conditioning area is essential. In fact, according to Phil Leary, a strength and sports coach at independent club The Third Space: "The amount of equipment required by an athlete is far less than you would ever need for a member of the public, as everything has a means to an

end. You could probably get away with barbells, a set of kettlebells and dumbbells. Athletes aren't looking for enjoyment from their workout. They're looking to be faster and more powerful."

However, this doesn't mean equipment can't be more engaging. Ex-professional footballer Paul Shinner, commercial director for Pulse Fitness, says most of an athlete's training is repetitive and boring, but that interactive products such as Pulse's Lightspace Play Wall can allow them to have fun and hone sports-specific skills such as co-ordination, bilateral movement and reaction time (see p45).

equipment requirements

Olympic triple jumper Larry Achike uses a UKA High Performance Centre for its free weights area, but complements his programme by going to his local Esporta club to use the Concept2 rower and CV equipment; if Esporta were to invest in an Olympic lifting platform, he says, there's no reason why he wouldn't conduct his full training session there. "There are so



INDEPENDENT OPERATOR FOCUS

Keep it simple You don't need much kit to cater for competitive sportspeople: barbells, kettlebells and dumbbells will often suffice

many exercises you can do with a free bar, which machines can't mimic," he explains.

According to Teleri Wilson, strength and conditioning coach at Leeds Metropolitan University – named SkillsActive's coaching environment of the year 2008 – any individual looking to progress with their sport will need to join a club, team or squad to get access to coaching and sport-specific equipment.

If health clubs don't want to offer these services but want to hook these members, their main focus may need to be on the strength and conditioning side. To cater for this group effectively, Wilson advises clubs to include a functional training area, a separate area for speed and agility, Olympic free weights, a lifting platform, bumper plates, chinning and dipping stations, plyometric boxes and medicine balls.

specialist staff training

The level of expertise needed to train these members is one reason most clubs shy away from them. "Many clubs don't employ suitably qualified PTs, and the salaries are often too low to reflect the experience and expertise athletes need from their coach or personal trainer," says Michelle Meade, founder of strength and conditioning club Ripped Gym.

However, most competitive sports people already have coaches; opening up health clubs to athletes with their own personal trainers could be a means of bypassing this skills gap.

But for those looking for personal trainers to help them meet their sports-specific goals, having access to adequately trained staff is essential. Most operators we spoke to considered a REPs Level 3 personal training certificate sufficient to coach this group, as long as it's backed up with relevant sports-specific experience.

Some clubs, however, such as The Hogarth Health Club, insist on a degree-qualified instructor with a background in exercise physiology. The Third Space's Leary agrees: "A degree is critical for training at this performance level, as it requires an understanding of



biomechanics, anatomy, physiology and how fuel systems work." He adds, as an example, that too many personal trainers are unaware that runners shouldn't train on exercise bikes, as cycling speed doesn't translate into running speed.

Meade, on the other hand, uses self-employed trainers who have trained competitively themselves, ensuring they understand the needs of the group.

the lure of the elite

Dolphin Fitness Club in Pimlico, London, allows England squash coach Peter Genover, and members of the British squash team, to use the facility for free in exchange for PR benefits. "The squash league was dying out but now it's burgeoning, with 240 members on a waiting list," says manager Jonathan Acott.

The club's three squash courts are unpainted and plastered, providing a truer bounce and making it a reliable court for athletes to train on. In addition, the club's

personal trainers, osteopath and neuro-linguistic programmer liaise with the team, designing programmes in the club's 70-station gym that often include use of the Cybex FT360, an advanced strength machine for functional training.

Club nights also form part of the arrangement, with professional squash players, such as former world number one Peter Nichol, playing exhibition matches. "The draw of high profile sports people training at a club can raise the profile of a facility as a serious training centre, and attract members of the general public to join the gym, which covers any overheads incurred," adds Meade.

Acott agrees. It's hard to get pro-athletes to actually join "normal" clubs as most already have trainers and a fixed routine, he says – it would involve them switching allegiance – but any use of the facility by this group "brings members which, at the end of the day, is what we need to do."

CASE STUDIES



Fit for purpose Hogarth Health Club (left) and The Third Space (right) both cater for competitive sportspeople at their clubs

hogarth health club

Hogarth Health Club is popular with cyclists and rowers, partly due to its location by the river Thames. Although the club didn't set out to attract performance-driven clientele, a demand for sports-specific equipment led it to install Concept2 rowers and Wattbikes.

"When catering for this market, 'equipment must be sports-specific' according to Terry Rodhamel, the Hogarth's group fitness manager. But, he adds, any equipment that relates to activity in the real world and accurately measures performance would be fit for a performance-minded person. The Wattbike, for example, mimics the resistance of an on-road cycling session and is more interactive than a standard gym bike. It also measures individuals' watt power outputs, which is more reliable than heart rate monitoring. The club also offers Kinesis for sports rehab. 'It can be used for specific exercises, set by physios, based on what's needed for different sports,' says Rodhamel.

Hogarth also offers personal training towards specific events or performance goals, and is considering hosting in-house triathlons and duathlons using the Wattbikes to extend its links with local cycling and running clubs.



ripped gym

Ripped Gym, a new 1,532sq m (16,500sq ft) strength training facility in Wych Elm Harlow, Essex, offers training in competitive power lifting, mixed martial arts, bodybuilding and boxing. The club offers 73 stations of Hammer Strength equipment, supplied by Life Fitness, as well as Cybex's VR3 Heavy Weight range, Jordan free weights and custom-made cable crossovers from Leisure Lines, which hold 130kg weights.

Michelle Meade, the club's founder, says she chose the Hammer Strength plate-loaded equipment as it offers "converging and diverging arcs of motion that mimic the way a human body moves, and allows for a complete range of movement". Similarly, its Iso-Lateral range allows both limbs to move independently with different weights, ensuring one limb is not weaker than the other.

The 26 pieces of CV equipment on offer include Life Fitness cross-trainers, Cybex Arc trainers and treadmills, and Concept2 rowers. The club also offers a boxing and martial arts facility, called Ripped Fight Club, with a cage and 14ft boxing ring. Catering services focused on sports nutrition, a juice bar, a diet supplement shop and a sports rehabilitation facility are also available.

"We believe that only people who have trained competitively in their respective sports can properly train those wishing to pursue this route," says Meade. This is why all three of the club's personal trainers have themselves held titles as competitive sports people.

Ripped Gym offers a flat membership rate of £35 a month. However, depending on the athletes' competitive level, Meade also looks at sponsorship.

A new contender Ripped Gym's free weights-focused offering is complemented by boxing and martial arts, sports nutrition and sports rehab

the third space

The Third Space, in London, is particularly attractive to competitive athletes thanks to its advanced training area, including a hypoxic chamber; used in sites run by the British Institute of Sport, these chambers are still unusual in health clubs.

In addition, the club offers two treadmills, two exercise bikes and a rowing machine. There are also turbo bikes for triathletes and cyclists, a boxing ring, a climbing wall, gymnastic rings, a martial arts area, a dojo and an extensive range of equipment, including a free weights area with nine plate-loaded machines, three squat racks and seven free weight benches.

The facility has a strong emphasis on recovery as well as training, offering a medical centre with a physiotherapist, a chiropractor, a masseur and a GP for pre-event medical checks. They can monitor an athlete's blood and stress hormone levels and the club also works closely with the Ki Performance centre (www.kiperformance.com), which offers advanced forms of fitness assessment. Finally, if The Third Space isn't able to offer what an athlete needs, it promises to source it externally.

Around 70 per cent of the facility's members are recreational exercisers with goals around fat loss and body shape; 30 per cent are sports-specific, with 10 per cent competing at a high level.

"There isn't a massive difference between athletes and those wanting to get fit," says Phil Leary, the club's strength and sports coach. It's about how someone works mechanically, Leary explains: "We're not necessarily trying to make them stronger or faster but more economical and to ascertain weak points, which is very similar to a member of the public with knee or back problems."

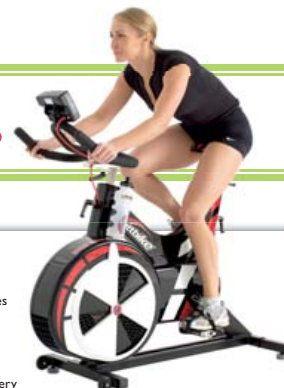
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PRODUCT ROUND-UP

measure your power

Designed in partnership with British Cycling, the Wattbike mimics the resistance and inclines of on-road cycling. The bike collects performance data – measuring speed, distance and power in watts – to which users can refer back at a later date. Every bike is identical, so it's possible to conduct in-house races and triathlons.

fitness-kit keyword: wattbike



Real feel
The Wattbike mimics the experience of on-road cycling

*improve your reflexes

Supplied by Pulse, the Lightspace Play Wall has been used by Manchester City Football Club to improve the reaction times of its goalkeepers. Featuring over 50 games and measuring 8ft by 4ft, the product focuses on specific interactive exercises that improve reflexes and develop stamina and bilateral movement.

fitness-kit keyword: pulse



consistent resistance

Keiser's Air Series of resistance equipment is based on pneumatic technology, which uses air pressure to provide consistent, controllable resistance. It isolates muscle groups and prevents shock loading to connective tissues and joints. The range includes Air350, which changes the axis of rotation to improve range of motion; Air300, which provides unilateral movement and an increased resistance range; and Air250, which allows for bilateral movements.

fitness-kit keyword: keiser

Elite use Hur's Air series is currently used by football clubs in Scandinavia

explosive movements

Designed to allow for fast, explosive movements during strength training for elite athletes, Hur's Air resistance system provides a consistent, smooth movement regardless of speed. This helps develop endurance as well as strength, and also reduces the risk of injury. Hur equipment is currently used in China for Olympic level training, as well as by football clubs in Sweden and Finland.

fitness-kit keyword: hur



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ASIA PACIFIC OVERVIEW

Kate Cracknell provides a summary of the third annual IHRSA Asia Pacific Market Report

The Asia Pacific fitness market is in a state of flux, observes the 2008 IHRSA Asia Pacific Market Report, with high inflation and the impact of the global slowdown affecting levels of disposable income.

China and India remain buoyant, with growth rates still relatively strong and room for expansion, while elsewhere leading gyms have sought to expand their position in their respective markets both through acquisition and by attracting investment.

However, there have been some high profile failures: in Taiwan, the Alexander Fitness chain collapsed in December 2007, while California Wow and Bally Total Fitness suffered the same fate in South Korea. In all cases, members who had

paid lost their money; consumer confidence in fitness has been shaken as a result, although in Taiwan the government has intervened to standardise processes and protect customers.

One of the key issues in the region is high member attrition. There's also little to differentiate clubs; many focus solely on price as a point of difference, although those offering personal services and group social activities have better retention rates. Travel time is also key: in mainland China and Hong Kong, in a 2008 Deloitte in-house survey, an average of 68.9 per cent of respondents travelled 15 minutes or less to their gym, compared with 42 per cent in a 2006 survey, which also suggests that supply is starting to meet demand.

australia

Of the estimated 2,800 gyms, 1,500 are larger than 1,000sq m. A further 700 – generally smaller and with fewer members – cater exclusively for women. Franchise operator Curves has the most sites (398 at the time of the research), while Contours Express has 231.

Among clubs over 1,000sq m, four of the top five players, based on number of sites, are local chains: Fernwood Health Clubs (78 clubs), Beach House Fitness (49), Genesis Fitness Clubs (26) and Zest Health Clubs (18). Fitness First completes the line-up, with 78 clubs at the time of the report, around 3,000 members per site and 10 new clubs each year.

mainland china

In China, the report covered clubs over 1,000sq m in the top 10 cities: a total of 1,500, of which 1,292 are commercial, 70 public gyms and 138 hotel gyms. The Chinese government is said to be focusing on the provision of public facilities, with this sector therefore expected to expand.

In this year's 10 cities, selected to give a good geographic mix, gym membership was 2.9 million people; a like-for-like comparison with the cities measured in the 2007 report showed a rise in membership of 13 per cent, to 2.6 million people.

Although international operators are still expanding in mainland China,

particularly in Beijing and Shanghai, the top players, by site and member numbers, are domestic: Hokay (75 clubs), Tera Wellness (73), Impulse (66) and Bally (33). International franchise Powerhouse Gym is fifth with 31 sites.

hong kong

Two of the top five operators are international players: California Fitness (10 sites) and Fitness First (six sites). The other three – Physical (eight sites), Pure Fitness (three) and Phillip Wain (three) – are local operators.

Hong Kong has 180 clubs: 74 commercial, 66 public and 40 hotel gyms. It's a mature market with a number of

differentiated segments, such as studios devoted to yoga, pilates, boxing, personal training and martial arts. There are also several women-only fitness centres.

In order to attend one of the 66 government-run facilities, customers must attend either a five-hour briefing or a programme of 24 sessions that cover the use and benefits of each machine. These centres also offer sports facilities.

taiwan

The fitness industry is concentrated in Taipei, although the market is expanding to other areas, particularly Kaohsiung – where a new chain, Fitness Factory, launched in 2007 – and Taichung.

Another new player, Action Life, entered the market by taking over six of the former Alexander Fitness clubs in 2008.

Many commercial gyms are, however, feeling threatened by the development of large community fitness centres that cost as little as US\$1.60 per session. There are seven such gyms already, with another five under construction and plans to build more throughout Taiwan.

india

The mass market fitness industry is still young in India. Gyms are generally small, with a focus on equipment rather than classes, and membership is seen as a luxury rather than part of a normal healthy lifestyle – even though the average

membership for a commercial club is the lowest in the region (US\$24/month).

There are 720 commercial clubs but no public facilities, and the market is fragmented with a lot of independent sites. The market leader is Talwalkers, with 53 sites, followed by international operator Gold's Gym (26 sites), Fitness One (17), Abs Fitness (eight) and Addiction (six). Other international operators are present – Powerhouse Gym (four sites), World's Gym (three) and Fitness First (two) – with more, such as True and Celebrity, planning to enter the market in 2009.

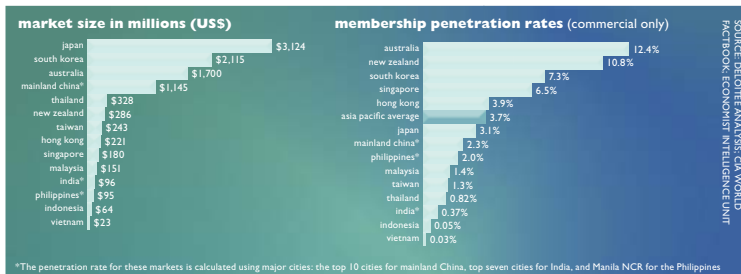
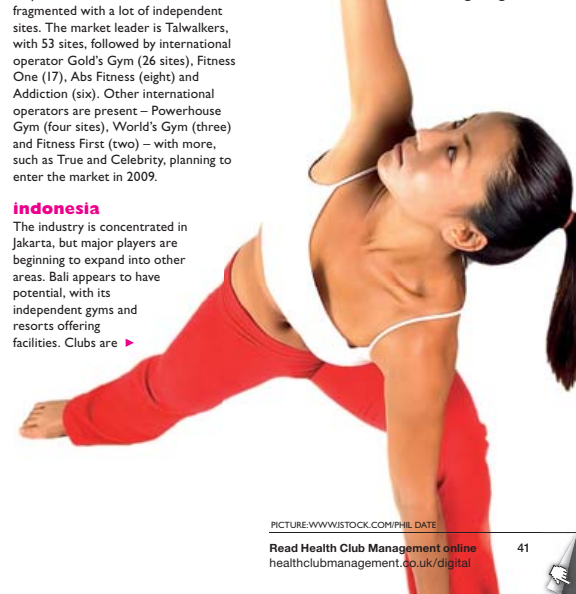
indonesia

The industry is concentrated in Jakarta, but major players are beginning to expand into other areas. Bali appears to have potential, with its independent gyms and resorts offering facilities. Clubs are ▶



Eighty-six per cent of China's clubs are commercially run by companies such as California Fitness (this image)

Women-only fitness centres are popular in Hong Kong





Les Mills owns 10 health clubs in New Zealand, as well as distributing the Les Mills workout products worldwide

► also diversifying: personal training, yoga and pilates are popular, while some clubs have trainers specialising in the over-40s. A new 30 per cent tariff on imports of fitness equipment may, however, have a negative impact on the market.

Celebrity Fitness is market leader with 14 sites; it received funding in 2007 and has begun expanding into other markets. Gold's Gym, in fifth place, is the largest international operator (eight sites). However, if ranked by membership numbers, Fitness First would be the second largest and Gold's the third.

Shopping centres and offices are the preferred locations for gyms.

japan

Curves is the largest operator, with 710 sites; local operators make up the remainder of the top five – Konami Sports (225 sites), Central Sports (160), Renaissance (103) and Tiptness (46). There are 5,083 gyms in total, around 60 per cent of which are commercial, but only a 3.13 per cent penetration rate.

The slow growth of the economy has had an impact – only Curves increased both its number of clubs and number of members year-on-year. Some operators are focusing on niche markets to maintain membership fees and numbers – special programmes for elderly citizens, training programmes for sports such as golf and tennis, etc – as well as developing secondary revenue streams.

malaysia

Malaysia has 50 clubs over 1,000sq m – 330 including small gyms – about 40–50 per cent of which are located in Kuala Lumpur or Penang. International

operators dominate: Clark Hatch has 14 sites and Fitness First 12, while California Fitness and Celebrity Fitness have four each. Gold's Gym has one club. Local operator True Fitness has six clubs, two of which are exclusively for yoga.

new zealand

The market is well developed, with high levels of health awareness among the population. Around half of the country's 400 gyms are over 1,000sq m; YMCA is the largest operator in this category (20 clubs), followed by Club Physical (14 sites), Les Mills (10) and City Fitness (nine). There's also a raft of smaller, women-only clubs such as Curves (49 sites) and Contours Women (19).

philippines

Fitness First is market leader, with 18 sites, followed by local operation Slimmer's World with 13. Gold's Gym has six clubs. The market is, however, dominated by smaller gyms, with most located in the National Capital Region of Metropolitan Manila.

singapore

Higher earners typically choose international chains such as Fitness First, which has nine gyms. However, the government has created 30 public gyms, accounting for 25 per cent of the market and charging US\$20–30/month; ClubFITT, the largest of these, is market leader with 20 sites. One of the largest local operators, Planet Fitness, was taken over by the True Group; True now plans to open 100 sites in five years, in new territories, following investment from Dubai Investment Capital in 2008.

south korea

The market leader is Curves, with 26 sites. Another international franchise, World Gym, comes next with six clubs. However, of the 6,396 clubs, around 86 per cent are local single-site operations offering free weights and CV with limited classes – an extremely fragmented market.

thailand

The industry remains fragmented and independent operators are struggling in the face of a growing number of residential, hotel and community facilities. Fitness First (16 sites) and Clark Hatch (14 sites) lead the market. Local operator California Wow Xperience has lowered prices to capture the mass market; it has 11 sites, but is market leader in terms of numbers. True Fitness (three sites) has created a lifestyle experience via brand extension – True Fitness, True Yoga, True Spa, True'Est (beauty) and True Café.

vietnam

The industry is small. With the highest average monthly membership in the region (US\$79), only the top 10–15 per cent can afford to join commercial clubs. The average age of members is therefore 35–40. Hotel and residential gyms dominate, and most urban areas have at least one government-run club, but there are only 13 standalone commercial clubs. California Wow Xperience and Curves entered the market in December 2007 and have two clubs each.



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10 YEARS YOUNGER

If you buy remanufactured or refurbished equipment, how much money will you save, and will your members be able to tell the difference? Kate Cracknell puts these questions to the suppliers

The recession may be making an impact, but there's a fine balance to be struck between cutting costs and preserving the quality of the member experience. So could using remanufactured or refurbished equipment in your gym help, and are there any drawbacks? We ask suppliers the questions you want answered about buying this type of kit.

Q How much am I likely to save by buying remanufactured equipment for my club?

A As financial pressures increase, we're seeing a shift in the ratio of new to remanufactured sales – 50 per cent of our business used to be from sales of brand new kit, but now 80 per cent comes from remanufactured.

We remanufacture leading-brand cardio and strength equipment that's between three and five years old, and an average saving would be around 65 per cent off the original list price for a totally remanufactured product.

We're also able to remanufacture a client's own equipment, overhauling the machines they already have in their gym. We go to the site and discuss options – the cardio equipment tends to need replacing, but often the strength equipment is just a bit tired and in need of a facelift.

If we remanufacture the club's existing strength kit, and supply them with newer remanufactured CV equipment – complete with a 12-month warranty – the savings are closer to 75 per cent for the full package.
Ian Thorpe, MD, Fitness Systems

Q What's the average lifespan of a piece of remanufactured fitness equipment?

A The average lifespan of a typical remanufactured unit is really based on who performs the process and whether it's cardio or strength. We completely rebuild all our equipment from the ground up, replacing every single part, nut, screw and manufacturer's label. There's literally nothing we don't test or replace.

If remanufactured properly in this way, cardio equipment can have an average lifespan of four to six years, and strength

equipment five to seven years – provided it's all properly maintained in a normal commercial application.

However, most successful managers and owners know it's best not to run your equipment into the ground before replacing it, as it only becomes a liability and not profitable due to higher maintenance and replacement parts. In this way, maintaining fitness equipment is no different from maintaining a car.

Nick Pugh, president, US-based Fit4Sale.com

Q Can I get a service agreement on remanufactured equipment?

A We offer warranties on all our remanufactured equipment, although these are shorter than for new kit – our average warranty is three months.

We then offer service contracts for those who want them, although a lot of our clients are hands-on independent operators who know how to do their own repairs and maintenance.

Our service contracts are for 12 months and we offer four different levels – one, two, three or four service visits a year. Provided sites look after their kit properly, cleaning it regularly and keeping it rust-free, your average normal-use gym won't need more than two services in a year.

We sell all makes and ages of machine, and we try to stock parts so we can keep even very old kit going – we can even manufacture parts. However, there will come a time when it's more cost-efficient to buy a new piece of kit than to keep an old one going, and we're honest with our clients about this.

We can also cover all equipment in a gym through our service contracts – it doesn't have to be equipment they've bought from us.
Jackie Walker, project manager, Staffs Fitness



Physique supplied remanufactured Life Fitness kit to Sedbury Leisure Centre in the Forest of Dean

Q Will members realise they're exercising on old kit?

A Our products are refurbished to the highest standards using tried and tested methods; even an expert would have trouble distinguishing our product from new, especially on the strength machines. This is mainly attributable to our four-stage paint process, which we feel is unique in our market, and to the professionalism of our staff.

We also recently launched bespoke refurbishment: we can supply any piece of equipment in more than 9,000 colours to meet individual requirements and to fit in with other kit in a club.
Chris Griffin, sales executive, Amazon Fitness

Q Can I have a combination of new and refurbished equipment?

A Yes, you can. We believe the key to ensuring the best possible service for our customers is to be as flexible as possible. In some cases, this means supplying them with a mix of new and refurbished equipment.

Because all our refurbished equipment is maintained to a very high standard, the user won't notice any significant difference between the new and the refurbished kit. In fact, some of our current refurbished stock is only three years old; when you consider that the equipment is expected to last at least 10 years, this equipment is virtually new.

Another benefit is that refurbished equipment can be re-upholstered to

SO WHO'S BUYING IT?

ministry of justice gym

14 CPO Life Fitness CV stations, plus 10 Hoist Roc-It resistance – all remanufactured

Supplier: Physique
Cost: £100,000
Install date: Nov 08

sport fitness health club, Kiev, Ukraine

Remanufactured – 24 Life Fitness CV, six Stairmaster steppers, 15 group cycling

bikes, 26 Precor resistance machines, plus plate-load machines/benches/dumbbells, flooring, warranty and spare parts

Supplier: Fit4Sale
Cost: US\$190,000 (£135,000)
Install date: Nov 07; two further sites in 09

fitness zone, Wakefield

14 Precor CV stations, two Concept2, one VibroGym,

two Force Machines – all remanufactured
Supplier: Fitness Systems
Cost: £28,000
Install date: Dec 08

stockport college

Refurbished – 12 resistance machines, six CV (rowers, treadmills, bikes), benches and weights
Supplier: Pulse
Cost: £22,000
Install date: Q4 08

match the overall design of the gym, meaning it will blend in with the new kit.
Claire Johnson, second-hand equipment sales co-ordinator, Pulse Fitness

Q What's the difference between refurbished and remanufactured fitness equipment?

A Remanufactured kit goes through a far more stringent process. All Physique's remanufactured equipment is Life Fitness Certified Pre Owned (CPO), guaranteeing its quality and that it has gone through a checklist of replaced parts.

A typical treadmill will have around £700-worth of new parts to pass the CPO process. It will be stripped to the bare frame before being shot-blast and

powder-coated. A new belt is fitted, along with a new deck and front and rear rollers. The motor is reworked and the console overlaid with new pads. All the nuts, bolts and plastic mouldings are replaced. Strength kit is also stripped and the frame shot-blast and powder-coated before adding new cables and upholstery.

When kit is refurbished, the frame is not shot-blast or powder-coated. They also only replace parts that are broken, damaged or worn out. With remanufactured, there's a long, set list of things that you have to replace, even if they don't actually need replacing.
Graham Bertrand, MD, Physique

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Fitness Systems Strength equipment before and after the remanufacturing process

SHARED VISION

Vicky Kiernander visits the Berkeley Centre in Bristol – a holistic, integrated wellness offering where services are brought together both in location and in mutual understanding



From left to right: Brad van Hooijdonk, Peter Culliford and Kate Johnstone

Many facilities boast a holistic offering but, in truth, few live up to their promises. The Berkeley Centre appears to buck this trend.

Set in a peaceful square in the fashionable district of Clifton, just a short stroll from central Bristol, the centre claims to offer a complete approach to a healthy lifestyle. Its mission is to bring together all the specialists, therapists and instructors required for individuals to manage their own health, fitness and wellbeing. The array of services it offers to meet this ambitious goal is diverse, ranging from acupuncture, massage and personal training to counselling, physiotherapy and

orthopaedic surgery. And it's growing, with 30 practitioners already on board and 60 expected to be operating out of the centre by the end of this year.

The idea for the Berkeley Centre was born out of the frustrations of one man and the ambitions of another. Peter Culliford, an experienced physiotherapist, was treating management consultant Brad van Hooijdonk for an injury he had sustained during his triathlon training. A simple steroid injection was deemed the best course of action for the condition, but obtaining it proved far from easy and van Hooijdonk soon found himself in an exasperating game of ping-pong between GP and consultant in an attempt to get

the treatment he needed. Meanwhile Culliford, who had based his practice out of the local Cannons Health Club for a number of years, was looking for his own site. He had long felt the need for a more integrated approach to health and happened to mention the idea to van Hooijdonk, who immediately saw the potential of the concept after his own trying experience.

Things moved quickly after that. The pair found a suitable site, a five-storey Georgian townhouse in the elegant Berkeley Square, and two other partners – actor and photographer Johnnie Cross and financial director Martin Mulligan – joined the team. With a passion for period properties, Cross managed the complete refurbishment of the building – the former head office of health and fitness training provider LifeTime.

"The look and feel of the building is key to our success as a business. We wanted to combine the original Georgian style and features with state of the art facilities to create a welcoming

and approachable atmosphere," says Culliford. The £1m redevelopment took four months and the centre opened in November 2008.

berkeley centre community

The lower ground floor of the centre is home to the gym. Designed and equipped by Escape Fitness, it's very much a functional training space with free weights, wobble boards and Swiss balls in addition to cardiovascular and resistance equipment. The area caters for just six personal trainers and their

clients at any one time, keeping the focus on quality not quantity.

"We feel that personal training is the best way to offer the high level of individual service a client deserves," says centre manager Kate Johnstone.

As well as personal training, which starts at £38 an hour, the gym is also used by local sports clubs for sports-specific training. But it has no members, as Johnstone explains: "We don't offer any form of membership. Instead, we help clients to build bespoke packages that meet their individual health and fitness needs. This can range from a £5 dance class to a £55 nutritional consultation or life coaching session."

Despite this, clients still feel they belong to the centre, she says: "We have 'members' in the sense that many people visit us daily or weekly. The only difference is that we don't charge them for the privilege of belonging to the Berkeley Centre community – only for the services they use. In the current economic climate, that's really important."

Two studios host a range of classes, as well as courses for activities such as pole dancing

Two studios host a range of classes including yoga, pilates and kettlebells, as well as courses for pole fitness, burlesque and Bachata (a style of dance similar to merengue). An outdoor running club and boot camp class are also available. Clients can book online and class sizes are limited to 12 people.

"I worked for large gym chains for years, where class sizes are so big you can't possibly get to know all the members. Here, I know their names and can chat to them about their work and families. It's also easier for the clients to make friends – the social networks that have built around the classes we offer are amazing," says Johnstone.

Culliford adds: "The trouble with the national chains is that they're so focused on making money that they lose sight of the member. As a small business, we don't face the same restrictions, which means we can be more flexible and offer a better quality of service."

an integrated approach

Fitness is only part of the Berkeley Centre offering, but is as valued as the other services because of the centre's integrated approach. And it's cleverly

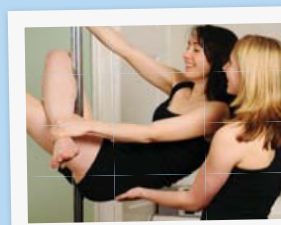
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A range of complementary services is available; massage is particularly popular at evenings and weekends



A three-room gym caters for just six personal trainers and their clients at any one time



The centre is the 'shell' from which rent-paying health practitioners, PTs and instructors operate

done because, in essence, the centre is merely the shell from which the rent-paying health practitioners, personal trainers and instructors operate. Rates vary according to which of the seven treatment rooms practitioners choose to work from; all are modern, welcoming and equipped to the highest specification.

Open seven days a week from 6am to 10pm Monday to Friday, and 8am to 8pm at the weekends, the centre has the capacity for a huge range of services – particularly given that consultants must commit to just four hours a week. Personal training and consultancy are most popular during the working week, while there is more demand for massage services at evenings and weekends.

Despite the multitude of independent services on offer, the Berkeley Centre is packaged as one entity, with business cards and personalised flyers for each consultant sporting the same look and design. To ensure it operates as a truly integrated business and not just as a series of independent businesses sharing the same building, all practitioners must also understand how other services in the building complement their own.

Regular meetings allow them to come together, share their knowledge and develop their understanding of other



practice areas. "We want to create a culture of open learning, which helps us to guide clients to the right solution for their needs, so each is treated as an individual and given a bespoke package or specific advice," says Culliford.

But not all practitioners have been keen to adhere to this culture and a few have been turned away as a result. "It's a very difficult thing to do when you're just starting a company, but we only want to work with people who share our vision," Culliford explains.

The centre has strict recruitment criteria, thoroughly researching each appointment and ensuring all practitioners commit to updating their skills on an ongoing basis. Customers are also phoned each month to check they're happy with the services they've received. "We want to attract the best in class and become a centre of excellence," says Culliford.

In return, the centre runs frequent marketing campaigns to the benefit of all practitioners, and assists individuals in growing their business. A receptionist, chosen for her admin and social skills, supports all practitioners with bookings and payments, welcomes customers and also cross-sells the services available.

"We take care of pretty much everything. All the practitioners have to do is turn up and do what they do best," says Culliford.

In keeping with its integrated approach, the centre packages its services as solutions, so that customers can access them via an umbrella category such as 'injury rehabilitation' or 'weight loss'. Someone interested in 'sports performance', for example, would be directed to personal training, strength and fitness classes, sports massage, physiotherapy, nutritional therapy and orthotics. Meanwhile, the services that

fall into the 'mother and baby' category include Alexander Technique, massage, acupuncture, reflexology, women's health and pregnancy classes.

Cross-promotion plays an important role in building the business and comes in the form of newsletters, internal referrals – say from a physiotherapist to a personal trainer to a podiatrist – and the reception team, who may for example suggest a reflexology session to a customer attending a pregnancy yoga class. "What we're offering is a joined-up approach – the ability to access a range of specialists under one roof and the knowledge to offer the right class, session or treatment for the client's needs," says Johnstone.

model for the future

There's nothing quite like the Berkeley Centre in Bristol, says Culliford. "Nuffield Health is an extremely large company with memberships, while The Medical and The Relaxation Centre are at the other end of the scale, offering treatments but not health and fitness. There's not really anywhere with a comparative package."

The team is considering replicating the concept in other cities in the future. In the meantime, the focus is on developing the business and adding new services to the offer, says Culliford: "Our challenge going forwards is to not lose the intimacy that we've developed with customers and practitioners as we grow into a bigger business. This isn't just about making money. This is about delivering a great service and developing a team of professionals that works well together, so that customers can manage all their healthcare needs under one roof."

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ECO-FRIENDLY

US company TriActive Fitness offers what it calls 'eco-friendly' outdoor fitness kit.

One of the firm's key beliefs is that environmentally-friendly exercise products should be the rule, not the exception, and its manufacturing process has been refined to reduce the amount of resources and energy used.

The equipment range – which includes more than 50 items – is also finished with recyclable powder coatings rather than paint, as the latter could potentially damage the ozone layer.

fitness-kit keyword: **triactive**

ENJOYING THE GREAT OUTDOORS

The Great Outdoor Gym Company has completed the installation of a range of gym equipment at four sites in the south-east of England.

Situated in Rickmansworth and Abbots Langley in Hertfordshire, as well as in South Harrow and Edgware, all of the equipment has been designed and tested to comply with the children's playground safety standard EN1176, and with the indoor training standard EN957, meaning that the equipment is safe for the entire family to use.

The company provides two ranges of outdoor kit: Street Gym, designed with youths and teenagers in mind; and The Green Legacy Gym, which can be used by people of all ages.

The equipment includes chest presses, cross-trainers, treadmills, bikes, leg presses and facilities for dips, pull-ups and sit-ups.



The company is also working towards gaining IFI accreditation and has already incorporated key inclusive elements into their existing ranges, with modifications such as easy-to-read signage.

fitness-kit keywords: **the great outdoor gym company**

JOINING FORCES IN THE FRESH AIR

Suitable for all ages and skill levels, from teenagers through to seniors and from beginners to advanced athletes, Fresh-Air Fitness offers a variety of permanent outdoor exercise equipment.

The company comments that some installations have been dubbed 'playgrounds for adults', with men and women using them as a first step towards undertaking regular exercise. Consisting of strength, CV, flexibility and co-ordination ranges, the products can be used individually, in pairs or in groups – for group classes and exercise programmes, for example.

fitness-kit keywords: **fresh-air fitness**



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STARTING YOUNG

STRENGTH AND VITALITY

Proludic has over 20 years' experience in designing products that focus on maximising the play experience, creating inclusive, accessible play areas that challenge and stimulate children from all backgrounds to promote a sense of adventure and achievement.

Its Vitality range of kit can be organised into courses or trails and is designed to fit into natural and urban areas.

Sunningdale Parish Council has overseen the installation of a Vitality Stamina unit at Sunningdale Park – including a rowing machine, a bike and bars – to encourage active involvement among young adults. The equipment is complemented by signage indicating the levels of difficulty and CV workout and has, according to the council, particularly appealed to teenage girls.

fitness-kit keyword: proludic



WALKING NORDIC STYLE

Nordic Walking UK has launched a complete solution for health clubs looking to set up exciting and lucrative outdoor programmes.

Nordic Walking is claimed to be a great way to motivate existing members, as well as to help attract new audiences who tend not to respond to traditional fitness marketing.

The activity is described as a precise technique that uses specially-designed poles which can engage 90 per cent of the skeletal muscles. It's said to be extremely versatile; although great for older adults and rehab, it's by no means limited to these groups. It's marketed as ideal for cross-training and weight loss, providing a time-efficient whole body workout.

The package offered by Nordic Walking UK comprises training for both instructors and walk leaders, a marketing pack containing posters and banners, and sufficient walking poles to run a Nordic Walking class.

fitness-kit keywords: nordic walking

An assortment of outdoor fitness equipment has been fitted by Caloo at Hackney's Harrington Hill Primary School in an effort to encourage children and staff to develop and maintain active lifestyles.

Selected items from the Caloo Workout range have been chosen to create a full-body workout for the youngsters and staff at the school.

Equipment includes the cross rider, air walker and body twist, which are said to have been enjoyed by children and staff alike.

Caloo's products are designed to work by converting the user's weight into resistance, meaning that people of all shapes and sizes can use the same machines.

The company offers items that can be used to improve fitness and to aid rehabilitation or recovery.

fitness-kit keyword: caloo

SHEPPERTON GOES FOR OUTDOOR RECORD

A new fitness area installed by North Yorkshire-based Record RSS has recently opened at The Greeno Day Centre in Shepperton, Surrey.

The equipment from the Record RSS Outdoor Fitness Range was chosen by the older ladies and gentleman who attend the centre, with the aim of improving their health and maintaining suppleness.

The range is also used by children who take advantage of the equipment on their way to and from school.

Record RSS' range consists of nine individual stations, including the Handle Boat (pictured) and Mini Ski, all designed to target specific muscle groups.

fitness-kit keywords: record rss



GOING LIVE



Live DJs are encouraging health club members to ditch their iPods and engage with others to enjoy the upbeat vibe of a night out. Tina Milton reports on the challenges and rewards of going live

Building a sense of place and community is an essential part of keeping members happy; encouraging them to chat fosters camaraderie and leads to loyalty, more regular visits and extra spend. Interaction with staff also has benefits: research shows members are 80 per cent more likely to return to a club if fitness staff have talked to them four or more times during the previous month.

But what if your members are simply tuning out? Until recently, members plugged into a club's own AV system for entertainment while they exercised – to watch television or to listen to music or the radio. While they weren't talking to staff, at least they were effectively on club-controlled territory, being steered by in-house adverts and announcements. Nowadays, however, members are increasingly listening to their own MP3

The Third Space hosts a DJ each day, with decks located on a glass floor in the middle of the gym

players while they work out, lost in their own world and cut off from the group vibe it's so essential to keep alive.

creating a buzz

To stop members from zoning out on their iPods, a number of clubs are using live DJs to attract attention back to the gym floor. The Third Space, in London's Soho, has used DJs to create an upbeat environment at its club for the last six



Soho Gyms MD Mike Crockett says DJs attract high-energy dance people to their clubs

► years. DJs play every day on decks situated on a glass floor in the middle of the gym, and music is pumped to all areas of the club through hidden speakers.

It's a real visual feature, too. The DJ can be seen from the front desk and the decks are positioned on a raised platform, which creates a lot of interest and what spokeswoman Amanda Ellison describes as a "buzzing atmosphere".

"The members love it," she enthuses. "The DJ adds a lot of colour himself because he'll come and chat to members and they can request tracks. People are much more energetic in the gym when they work out when the DJ's playing, as it creates the feeling you get when everyone's on a night out. They're just really excited and happy."

While The Third Space uses a DJ every day, Soho Gyms takes a more selective approach to where and when it uses live entertainment. It runs DJ nights at its Borough, Waterloo, Clapham Common and Camden Town clubs once a week at each venue, and also on Saturday afternoons at Camden.

Soho Gyms managing director Mike Crockett says: "The DJs create an extra buzz and attract high-energy dance people to the clubs. It keeps us up to date with the latest tracks; our members are quite into their music, so if we get it wrong we know about it! It also generates conversation, so it's a good thing for the club."

But Crockett warns that the sessions aren't always to everyone's taste. At Soho Gyms, DJs perform on different nights across the club portfolio so they don't clash with one another, and the operator gives advanced notice of the sessions to minimise disruption for those members who wish to avoid them.

"DJS ARE PART OF THAT SIZZLE FACTOR THAT YOU HAVE TO OFFER IN THE BATTLE FOR MEMBER RETENTION"

Clubs should, however, be aware of the health and safety implications of putting music decks near gym equipment and should choose locations carefully, especially if space is limited. "One thing to bear in mind is that you can't put the DJ too close to the treadmills, because there are a lot of vibrations," says Crockett.

Preparation is the key to avoiding health and safety blunders, according to Reebok Sports Club managing director Ian Mahoney. The club, which is located in Canary Wharf in London, ran DJ nights once a quarter last year.

"You have to prep up, that's for sure," he insists. "You have to meet the people, have trial runs, check that the music from the decks flows through separate speakers or through your system, and make sure you have all the health and safety issues covered. You don't want to turn a positive experience into a negative one by, for example, making the mistake of running wires along the floor, as they could act as trip hazards."

Although the club had 20 positive written feedback slips after it held the last DJ night, Mahoney says it's too intangible to say if it increased numbers in the gym. He is, however, likely to operate more DJ sessions this year: "It's part of that sizzle factor that you have to offer in the battle of [member] retention. It's not as important as doing everything as well as you can every day, but it does just that little bit extra."

Operators are poised to be increasingly creative with their future plans for live entertainment – The Third Space, for example, is considering the introduction of live bands and jazz musicians to the gym floor.

An open-minded approach to live entertainment can free members from their iPod voids and steer them back to the club community, where they can interact with staff and fellow members. Particularly in the current climate, it's an extra weapon in the battle for member retention that's worth considering.

PRODUCT ROUND-UP

AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTS AND INNOVATIONS



Filmbank's Single Title Screening Licence enables clubs to screen a range of films to members only 10 to 12 weeks after they're shown at cinemas. The company specialises in legally licensing clubs to screen the latest Hollywood films, either at the gym when members are exercising, or as a membership incentive with film nights offered as social events.
fitness-kit keyword: filmbank

Filmbank licenses clubs to screen films just 10 to 12 weeks after they've been in cinemas

MYE Entertainment has signed an agreement to manufacture and distribute MYE wireless entertainment products under the Fitness Audio brand. Fitness Audio is a manufacturer and distributor of audio products, including aerobic microphones and wireless systems, audio mixers and accessories.
fitness-kit keywords: mye entertainment

The latest version of customised music television service ClubCom includes the facility to incorporate images, PowerPoint slides and Flash animations into the programming, as well as real-time news and weather information.
fitness-kit keyword: clubcom

Mood Media's latest offer, TeamCo, is a web-based application that allows any type of visual content to be displayed anywhere, at any time. The scheduling software is also designed to help operators manage their own content. Also in the news, Mood Media recently completed the acquisition of Music Marketing Services' installation business.
fitness-kit keywords: mood media

Leisure Sounds Solutions recently introduced Aermusic, which it claims is the first 100 per cent legal digital download music player for group exercise classes. The software allows fitness instructors to create play lists, but the music will only download onto a player in the club. There's no download limit and the operator is charged £1 for every hour the player is used in a class.
fitness-kit keywords: leisure sound solutions

Gym Screen Media's second generation channels provide a dedicated club-branded music TV channel; a club-branded digital marketing channel with an integrated music video channel; and high energy, low energy, spa and children's audio stations. The design, layout and communication options are flexible. Support services include auditable reporting of channel content and content uploads via a web portal.
fitness-kit keywords: gym screen media

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Rosi Prescott (left) is part of the new Global Agenda Council that met at the recent World Economic Forum Summit (main photo)

A GLOBAL AGENDA



Rosi Prescott, chief executive of Central YMCA, talks to Kate Cracknell about the new Global Agenda Council for the Role of Sports in Society

What is the Global Agenda Council for the Role of Sports in Society?

It's one of some 68 Agenda Councils created and funded by the World Economic Forum (WEF) – an independent, not-for-profit global organisation that's "committed to improving the state of the world". The councils all exist under the umbrella of the WEF and bring together the world's most relevant thought leaders to look at key global issues and to work on projects that improve people's lives.

The councils are clustered under eight headings: business and finance, development and growth, geopolitics and global governance, sustainability and environment, health, technology and innovation, regions, and society and values. The goal of each is to use innovation and collaboration to provide a transformational approach to global

decision-making and governance. The Agenda Council for the Role of Sports in Society aims specifically to work alongside other sectors to help communities across the globe to reap the social, political and economic benefits of sport.

The Agenda Councils' first meeting was in Dubai in November. Discussions centred on the economic crisis, and considerable progress was made on developing a greater understanding of the underlying malaise in the world at present. It was also invaluable to begin to see common threads emerging, such as the question of regulation versus free market, which applies across most sectors.

So what are the social, political and economic benefits of sport?

Sport and physical activity have an immense effect on our wellbeing and can be an amazing personal and social

development tool. They can make the world a better place, particularly in building social cohesion, improving health and reducing the need for, and cost of, healthcare.

Sport is a powerful draw for all people, especially the young; alongside less traditional physical activity initiatives, it can be a significant tool in the armory for dealing with issues such as anti-social behaviour, obesity, leadership and so on. Politically, sport has the capacity to bring people of vastly different cultures together and also provides a focus for the development of more local cohesion.

The economic benefits of sport have still to be fully realised and exploited. As a sector, we must collect and disseminate more detailed, robust data to substantiate the role that sport and physical activity plays in economic health. The question of data availability was, however, a universal concern and one shared by all eight council clusters, so a common call to arms was issued to address this.

Who's on the council?

The 16 Sports Council members include FIFA president Joseph Blatter, chair and CEO of Fox Sports Television David Hill, commissioner of the US National Basketball Association David Stern and Olympics Minister Tessa Jowell. Each member is invited to join for one year and will then assess whether the work of the council is still in line with their own area of contribution.

Each member was carefully chosen for their unique and varied contributions

to the world of sport and physical activity, as well as for their ability to communicate with global leaders from the other sectors. I bring to the table the knowledge and experience I've gleaned as CEO of Central YMCA; in particular, I was invited to share the YMCA's holistic approach regarding the effects of sport and physical activity on health and social cohesion.

Why did you want to be involved?

Central YMCA wants to see a world in which all individuals have the opportunity to live healthy lives in mind, body and spirit. As the leading activity for health charity, it's important that we take this message to the table, sharing knowledge with other key players in the global sports arena with a view to making a long-term difference. We're also one of the very few organisations to be involved on the ground in a huge variety of ways, delivering programmes and interventions across 140 countries and to more than 40 million people.

How will the council's recommendations be implemented?

Across the WEF, there are 96 countries represented by heads of state, ministers, senior officials and chief executives of both public and private companies, as well as leaders in the worlds of academia, religion and media. This provides a platform to comprehensively and collectively shape the global agenda: those

in attendance agree to collectively action the recommendations made by the Forum.

The council will meet twice in the year and will attend four video conferences. Between meetings, there are also numerous formal and informal communications to enable members to develop their thinking and contribute to the collective view of the council. In addition, each member has to contribute a 'breakthrough idea' every year, which may contribute to press releases and other communications.

What sort of initiatives do you expect to come about as a result of the council's efforts?

We're at a very early stage, so this is difficult to predict; it's going to be more of a marathon than a sprint. However, there's a strong call for collaboration across sectors and between nations, and some serious commitment to social enterprise and philanthropic investment.

I hope we'll achieve far greater co-operation between organisations and sectors, and that the council will become the catalyst that prompts the sports and physical activity sector to raise its game and become an acknowledged, global economic powerhouse.

What do you see as the main challenges facing the council?

The challenge now is for countries around the world to unite behind the common goal: ensuring that all communities can reap the benefits of sport. We're at a very early stage in the development of sport as a part of the WEF, but the meeting in Dubai was a very important first step towards achieving this. If we want to survive these testing times, though, we must work together – not pull apart. This will take a high degree of strategic commitment from our industry.

How can the health and fitness industry, both in the UK and abroad, be involved?

The single most important step for the health club industry is to get ourselves organised. We need strong data to support our belief that our products and services are truly effective. We're still seen as an immature industry, without significant benefit, and that has to change before we will be taken seriously as world economic players.



Data needed: We must prove the contribution of physical activity in reducing the cost of healthcare

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SHAPING UP



When PruHealth was formed in 2004, some dismissed its incentive and rewards approach as a gimmick. Now the company is among the leading healthcare firms and says it has proof to show its model works. Nick Ryan reports

Hardly a day passes without a major health story hitting the media – never has so much advice been available on leading a healthy and active lifestyle. But is this actually helping us to change our health behaviours for the better, with easy-to-implement recommendations, or is it simply overloading us with information to the point that we don't know where to start?

This topic was addressed by PruHealth's chief executive, Shaun Matisonn, in his presentation at the FIA Industry Summit last November. Matisonn had been invited to speak about the success of PruHealth's Vitality programme – a scheme, launched in the UK in 2004, that offers incentives and rewards to PruHealth policyholders who take steps to lead a healthier lifestyle (see information box, p57). As part of this, he unveiled a fascinating series of facts about the nation's health and the role Vitality has played in reducing policyholders' health-related problems and the costs associated with these.

The PruHealth Vitality Index: Examining the Nation's Health and Wellbeing was a report, launched in November 2008, that

Healthy lifestyles Only one in 10 adults finds ways to keep fit for free, while 60 per cent use cost as an excuse

provided a snapshot of the nation's health. Based on more than 3,000 interviews conducted last summer by Ipsos MORI, it looked at six different areas: exercise, diet, smoking, stress, check-ups/screenings and health knowledge.

The results of the index dubbed us 'a nation in denial' after we scored poorly on exercise (51 per cent), stress (57 per cent) and health check-ups (44 per cent). We scored 66 per cent for our diet, while smoking and general health knowledge received slightly better scores, of 71 and 76 per cent respectively. The overall 'health of the nation' score was, however, just 61 per cent.

Matisonn concludes: "Our health is good in parts. Smoking cessation has been fairly successful and education levels are quite high. The challenge is not that people don't know what to do; people know the lifestyle choices now. The weaknesses are in the levels of exercise, diet and diet choices. Stress and mental health levels are also not where they should be."

changing behaviour

After lack of motivation, cost and time were identified as the main barriers to living a healthy lifestyle. In the research, 60 per cent said they could not afford the perceived added expense involved in health and fitness, such as the cost of health foods and gym membership, while only one in 10 adults had found free ways of keeping fit and healthy.

Meanwhile, half of Britons feel their busy day-to-day lives can get in the way of taking care of their health. Only 14 per cent of adults visit their GP for periodic check-ups, leaving many unaware of potential health problems. More reassuringly, 57 per cent of the adult population are interested in new ways to improve their health and wellbeing, with most interest among women.

"The real question remains how to change behaviour," says Matisonn. He refers to the Wanless Review of 2004, which said the NHS could save up to £30bn if everyone were to make significant lifestyle changes. "There's a whole slew of literature about why people don't change. We're consistently over-optimistic about our health. We value our time and money now more



Support network Friends and communities can have a positive impact on driving and supporting behavioural change

than our health in the future. That's the challenge for our healthcare."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Matisonn argues that the Vitality programme is the "key to change". The programme, he says, makes it easier for people to engage directly in activities by subsidising gym memberships, setting goals, helping people measure their activity and their results through a new online interactive member zone – and, crucially, providing rewards.

statistical evidence

But can the company back up its claims? In South Africa, Vitality is involved in 1.3 million lives and has been running for more than 10 years. It's the largest wellness programme in the country and one of the largest linked to a health insurer worldwide.

"While it seems intuitive that wellness programmes work, nobody [had] been able to show definitively that they reduce healthcare costs," says Dr Craig Nossel, head of Vitality Wellness in South Africa. "There [had] not been studies linking behaviour change to healthcare costs on a large scale."

To address this need for robust data, researchers at the Harvard Medical

School in Boston, US, and the University of Cape Town Sports Science Institute, – in conjunction with statisticians from the University of Witwatersrand, also in South Africa – undertook three studies into nearly one million Vitality members during 2006. These looked at hospital admissions and treatments for cardiovascular and metabolic diseases, cancers and chronic diseases such

as blood pressure and diabetes. The third study looked at the effects of fitness activities alone on lowering the healthcare costs of Vitality members.

Nossel continues: "Our studies show that highly active Vitality members – those who attended the gym at least once a week – spent about 15 per cent less in hospital costs, relative to inactive members who were also hospitalised."

PruHealth

Since its launch in 2004, private medical insurer PruHealth has become an unqualified success, according to chief executive Shaun Matisonn, with 190,000 customers and approaching £100m in revenue. "Our competitors dismissed our business model as a bit of a gimmick, but today they are all talking about health and wellness," he says.

The company was founded as a joint venture between Discovery, one of South Africa's leading health insurers, and Prudential in the UK. Its Vitality model (see HCM Feb 08, p46) was

adopted from South Africa, where it has been running since 1998.

Vitality offers incentives and rewards for customers who take steps to lead a healthier lifestyle – going to the gym, attending health screenings or joining smoking cessation programmes, for example. Incentives include reduced prices on gym memberships (at Virgin Active, Nuffield Health and LA Fitness), discounted holidays and travel and cheap cinema tickets, as well as reduced premiums when they renew their health insurance policies.

Winds of change 57 per cent of UK adults, and particularly women, are interested in finding new ways to improve their health and wellbeing

► These members also experienced lower costs per patient, shorter stays in hospital and fewer admissions compared to all other groups."

More specifically, the highly active Vitality members had a cost per member that was 7.2 per cent lower for cardiovascular disease, 15.1 per cent lower for cancers and 21.4 per cent lower for endocrine and metabolic diseases. For most chronic conditions, except for chronic lung disease, there were also significantly lower admission rates and a shorter length of stay in hospital for this same Vitality member group.

lifestyle change

While the studies showed a clear association between increasing engagement with Vitality and significantly lowering healthcare costs, the challenge was still to get more members to participate fully in the scheme.

Nossel says the first step to achieving such behaviour change is to personalise the programme, customising the offerings based on the individual's health risks: "Furthermore, we need to make sure that people living with chronic diseases or other ailments have the same incentives and opportunities to engage in the programme as those who are healthy."

Second is better communication. Here in the UK, Vitality has launched an interactive website that allows members to better understand their health risks and how those can be minimised, and then monitor how well they are doing while at the same time being rewarded.

The third important step is to influence the member's environment, says Nossel: "We've seen the positive impact that friends and communities have on driving and supporting behavioural change. If we can harness this within the [Vitality] community, we will go a long way in further improving people's health."

While acknowledging that the South African climate and topography make outdoors exercise more widespread than in the UK, Matisonn says the lessons are



PICTURE: WWW.STOCK.COM

applicable in the UK too. "We've been astounded by the power of financial incentives in changing behaviour," he says. "I see a certain translation from one population to another. It gives us very real confidence when we think about how to manage the problems of a £90bn [national] health service."

Of interest to health clubs was an offer that Vitality trialled last year: free gym memberships at participating health club chains, provided the customer attended the gym at least twice a week. "No more than three to five per cent of gym users make it to a gym more than twice a week," says Matisonn. "By the end of the year's experiment, we had that up to 45 per cent [among Vitality participants]. It was an extraordinary change and far more than we expected."

"What was extremely interesting was how the customers viewed this as

a penalty, seeing the potential loss of free membership as a cost, and how that shaped their behaviour," he adds.

"I think many of the ideas we've introduced are applicable to the wider health club sector," Matisonn concludes. "People are starting to think along these lines: the government has introduced its Change4Life scheme, which may push greater numbers towards the gym. The healthy towns initiative in Manchester, Points4Life, and the Fit for the Future initiative [a gym attendance-based incentive scheme] are another two. However, implementation will be critical to get them to succeed."

Despite the impending obesity situation and the current recession, Matisonn remains optimistic over the nation's health. "Yes, we can make change, provided we can penetrate to a reasonable level of the population. If we can build what I call an epidemic of positive lifestyle change, that would be great and I hope we'll be part of that."

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research round-up

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live to the max

Physical activity, along with other healthy behaviours, can add 14 years to your life, while aerobic fitness can delay ageing by up to 12 years. We find out more

If looking slim and toned aren't a strong enough motivation to pull in new members, what about using this gem: physical activity – especially aerobic exercise – can not only delay biological ageing by up to 12 years, but can also add up to 14 years to your life expectancy. These are the findings of two studies released last year.

the slow-down

Running, jogging and other types of aerobic exercise can all help to speed up metabolic rate and improve the body's ability to utilise oxygen. Yet, as we reach middle age, a steady decline begins in our maximal aerobic power – the maximum amount of oxygen that our body can consume. The decrease is about 5ml/(kg.min) every 10 years.

This steady deterioration usually begins at the age of 20 for men and 35 for women, with both genders dropping to a maximal aerobic power of 25ml around the age of 60. When maximal aerobic power falls below around 18ml in men and 15ml in women, it becomes difficult to exercise without experiencing severe fatigue.

However, a review of Maximal Oxygen Intake and Independence in Old Age, published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, shows that a long period (24–52 weeks) of fairly high intensity aerobic activity could increase maximal aerobic power by up to 25 per cent (around 6ml), which is the equivalent of between 10 and 12 biological years.

Other findings suggest that progressive aerobic training can boost the aerobic power of the elderly by at least 10ml, potentially delaying the loss of independence in older adults by as much as 20 years.

Review author Dr Roy Shepherd, of the University of Toronto, says: "In principle, it would seem possible



PICTURE: WWW.STOCK.COM/CHRISTINE TILLET

Aerobic training can delay the loss of independence by up to 20 years

to prevent and/or reverse the age-related decrease in aerobic power by an appropriate programme of aerobic training... There seems good evidence that the conservation of maximal oxygen intake [also] increases the likelihood that the healthy elderly person will retain functional independence."

the add-on

The second piece of research suggests that small lifestyle changes, including increasing physical activity, can boost longevity. These were the findings of just one study which forms part of the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition (EPIC).

Research, carried out at the University of Cambridge and the Medical Research Council in the UK, looked at 20,000 men and women aged 45–79 and living in the UK. The participants, none of whom had known cancer or

heart disease, filled out a questionnaire focusing on four health behaviours: not smoking; physical activity (physical inactivity was defined as having a sedentary job and doing no recreational exercise); moderate alcohol intake (defined as one to 14 units a week); and the consumption of five pieces of fruit and vegetables a day.

Participants received one point for every healthy lifestyle behaviour that they demonstrated during the research. The questionnaires were filled out between 1993 and 1997 and participants were tracked by researchers until 2006. The researchers found that those with zero points were four times more likely to have died over an average period of 11 years than those with four points. Put another way, those with a score of zero had the same risk of dying as someone who was 14 years older than them and who had a score of four.

By the end of the year's experiment, the level of Vitality members using the gym twice a week reached 45 per cent

magical MYSTERY TOUR

Mike Hill, MD of Leisure-net Solutions, mystery shops the best and worst performing sites from the recent call-Focus survey to see how they compare in person to on the phone

In the last issue of *HCM*, we reported on the results of this year's call-Focus survey, which revealed a decline in satisfactory call handling across the industry.

So how do we fare when prospects walk through our doors? Leisure-net Solutions paid mystery shopper visits to the highest- and lowest-scoring private and public sites from the call-Focus survey, to see how this in-person experience compared with the phone results. Under analysis were the original phone call to book an appointment, the facility itself, the tour and interaction, and the close and follow-up.

The mystery shops aimed to test whether the call-Focus results were a good indication of the service delivered face-to-face, and generally speaking they were – the health club or leisure centre that received the highest score in the call-Focus survey generally scored highest in the visit too. This was particularly evident with the private sector clubs; public sector sites often score relatively lower in telephone surveys than they do for visits, as their telephone and reception operations tend not to be as focused or specialised as their private sector competitors.

CALL-FOCUS HIGHEST SCORING LOCAL AUTHORITY MONTLEM LEISURE CENTRE, SLOUGH

phone call: The call was answered promptly and positively, but a membership adviser was not available. No general membership details were given and the receptionist offered the price too easily. I wasn't asked for contact details or to book an appointment; when I asked if I could visit, I was simply told I could come along at any time. **70 per cent.**

facility: The facility was clean and tidy, albeit a little tired. **90 per cent.**

tour and interaction: The welcome was not particularly professional, but the receptionist failing to acknowledge me for quite some time. I was seen by a membership adviser even though I didn't have an appointment, but the tour was almost predictable and automated. It went straight into an explanation of the membership structure and pricing, followed by a whistle-stop tour of the main gym, the ladies-only gym, all the

studios, the swimming pool and the spa. Although the adviser asked the right questions for a needs analysis, none of the questions seemed to be asked with any genuine interest in me – it was almost an automated process and the adviser didn't make a note of my answers or appear to tailor the tour to my needs. **50 per cent.**
close and follow-up: Although I left with information, I had to do all the asking and they had no way of following up as they took no details from me. After the tour I was not asked for my thoughts, whether I had any questions or if I wanted to join – it was simply as if they assumed I would. There was no discussion and, as a result, no attempt to overcome any objections I might have to joining. I'm being generous by scoring it **40 per cent**

overall call-focus score 65 per cent
overall 'in person' score 63 per cent
verdict: With prices starting at £39 a month, plus a £50 joining fee, I would be tempted to join because the facility offers value for money. However, if this centre had been the first I had visited, I would seek out alternatives, as the atmosphere was not particularly accommodating.



The tour at Montlem Leisure Centre took in all the facilities, including the spa (above), but was a bit whistle-stop and not really tailored to individual needs

Hucknall Leisure Centre (below) gives the overall impression of a busy community used by many local clubs



CALL-FOCUS LOWEST SCORING LOCAL AUTHORITY HUCKNALL LEISURE CENTRE, HUCKNALL, NOTTINGHAM

phone call: The customer adviser didn't return my call as promised by the receptionist and I had to call again. However, when I did get through, she was friendly and enthusiastic, though perhaps gave me the price a bit too easily and didn't press me for a date or time to come in. **60 per cent.**

facility: While very busy, the centre was reasonably clean and tidy, with plenty of spaces in a well-lit car park. Information on the slightly cluttered notice boards gave the overall impression of a busy community used by many clubs and local organisations. **75 per cent.**

tour and interaction: The tour was very equipment- and facility-orientated, but the adviser's knowledge of the kit could have been better; I asked several questions she couldn't answer. She didn't ask what I was interested in or why I wanted to join either. It was very much a 'museum tour', completed with efficiency and friendliness, but without much proactive interaction. She did, however, take me to the pool when I said I might swim. **60 per cent.**

PICTURE: WWW.ISTOCK.COM/PICTURE

The adviser was friendly and cheerful and asked several questions to establish rapport

close and follow-up: There wasn't much of an effort to close the sale and the price options could have been presented more professionally; I had to scribble them on the back of an envelope. I was allowed to go for a complementary swim – a nice touch – but there has been no follow-up to date. **50 per cent.**

overall call-focus score 18 per cent
overall 'in person' score 62 per cent
verdict: At £29.50 a month, plus a joining fee of £30, I probably would join. The staff and members weren't overly friendly, but the facility is good value for money in terms of what it offers, with a 25m pool and good sized gym.

**CALL-FOCUS HIGHEST SCORING
PRIVATE HEALTH CLUB**
**NORFOLK HEALTH AND RACQUETS
(ESPORTA), NORWICH**

phone call: The receptionist and sales adviser handled everything perfectly and with complete professionalism, finding out what I was looking for and when I might use the facility, deflecting my enquiries about price well and getting me in for a tour that afternoon. **100 per cent.**

facility: A very high quality environment spoilt only by unclean tables in the bar area – I had arrived a bit early, so the receptionist offered me a complimentary drink in the bar while I waited and gave me a questionnaire to fill in. All toilet and shower areas were immaculate. **75 per cent.**

tour and interaction: The adviser was friendly and cheerful and asked several questions to establish rapport. I was shown straight to the areas I had expressed specific interest in and she had a good knowledge of the equipment, classes and programming. The tour was carried out with enthusiasm but I felt it relied too heavily on the impressive facility and equipment, rather than focusing on the outcomes I was hoping to achieve. However, the adviser did talk about how the opening times and programmes would fit into my work/life schedules. **80 per cent.**



Esporta's Norwich club strikes a good balance between quality and friendliness

close and follow-up: The price presentation was fine, but offered no real options. The lack of an annual membership was surprising and I was given a 'this is how it is, take it or leave it' impression. The adviser tried to close using a good approach – asking which option I would go for and how I felt about it – but when I said I was considering another gym and wanted to go away and think about it, she didn't try to overcome this. However, she did ask if it was OK to ring in a few days' time, and followed up the next day with a friendly phone call. **80 per cent.**

overall call-focus score 95 per cent
overall 'in person' score 84 per cent
verdict: If cost wasn't an issue and I wasn't put off by the inflexibility of the pricing options, I would join for the great range of facilities and the all-inclusiveness of the package – there were no extra charges on top of the membership, which starts at £67 a month, plus an £80 joining fee. I was given the impression of a club offering a good mixture of quality with informality and friendliness, which is not always achieved in the high-end market.

RIGHT OF REPLY

montem leisure centre

"The experience our customers receive is of great importance to us, so we were disappointed to read some of the comments. It reminds us that we need to be on the ball 100 per cent of the time. Rewarding excellent customer service and developing our skills in this area are critical to us. We have mystery shoppers that assess us on a six-monthly basis and have seen ongoing improvements in the scores that we receive." *Rob Whitehouse, MD, Slough Community Leisure*

hucknall leisure centre

"The membership advisor at Hucknall had only been with the company for four weeks and we're delighted that she delivered an enthusiastic and friendly tour; much of the criticism levelled at her will improve over time. In January, we also introduced 'activity profiling' – a document completed

with the customer to improve the tour experience, pinpointing their needs, presenting pricing options and incorporating a seven-day activity planner. Everyone takes this away after the tour, as well as a free Everyone Active card – all they do is fill out a form – which gives them access on a pay-as-you-go basis should they decide to start using the facility." *Neil King, commercial director, SLM*

norfolk health and racquets

"We are delighted with the results achieved by the Norfolk Health and Racquets club. We are proud of the facilities and services at this prestigious club and the excellent job our employees are doing in helping members improve the way they look and feel." *Glenn Timms, CEO, Esporta*

bexley heath marriott declined to respond



Positive response: Clubs should ensure their staff are fully trained to deal with queries from both members and prospects

CALL-FOCUS LOWEST SCORING PRIVATE HEALTH CLUB
BEXLEY HEATH MARRIOTT

phone call: Answered quickly and politely, but the receptionist was untrained and nervous of giving information. The price was handled poorly – he told me he couldn't give me pricing information over the phone, even before I'd asked for it – and I had the impression he wanted to give me guest passes and get me off the phone. He did try to take contact details, but there was no attempt to book a specific time for a tour. **60 per cent.**

facility: Marked down due to some cleaning issues at the poolside. The gym was very small and cramped, with limited kit. Access is only signposted from inside the hotel; an external sign for club members would be useful. **70 per cent.**

tour and interaction: The receptionist was not particularly welcoming and made no reference to our phone call the day before. The tour was rushed and not particularly professional. I was not asked what interested me and it was delivered in a standardised manner, spending longer in areas I was not so interested in. Even when prompted, he never picked up on any information volunteered to assist in a needs analysis – despite my interest in group exercise, for example, I was not shown a class programme until I had prompted on at least three occasions.

He tried hard to be friendly, but was completely untrained and regularly gave me reasons not to join, telling me the gym was very small, that it could get

busy at times and that, although classes were available, this was unfortunately not in the club but upstairs in the main hotel. **60 per cent.**

close and follow-up: There was no attempt at closing the sale. In fact, although it was December when I visited, when I asked about the January offers/pricing, they still did not know what these would be. In addition, despite informing them that I was part of a couple, joint membership was not mentioned. A week later there had still been no attempt to follow up. **0 per cent.**

overall call-focus score 52 per cent
overall 'in person' score 47.5 per cent
verdict: I wouldn't join this facility. At £50 a month, plus a £30 joining fee, it did not represent value for money, particularly with the limited access to exercise equipment and the fact that classes incur an additional cost on top of the membership fees.

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**I was informed that they
couldn't give prices out over the
phone before I'd even asked!**

MEMBER PROFILE

Jenny Stanley outlines the key findings of the third annual National Audit of Fitness Consumers, and provides some thoughts on how other segments of the population might be drawn in to fitness

The third National Audit of Fitness Consumers uses Mosaic – a demographic system that segments consumers into 11 Groups and 61 richly defined Types – to profile members from 856 UK gyms and paint a national picture of who is and, by implication, who isn't yet participating in fitness.

The findings reveal that operators are starting to attract members from a range of social backgrounds. Unsurprisingly, however, there are significant differences between the profile of members at private gyms compared to those using public sector facilities, with the latter attracting more of their membership from a broader social range.

PRIVATE MEMBER PROFILE

'City Adventurers' is the most prominent Mosaic Type in private clubs, accounting for 5 per cent of members in spite of making up only 1.4 per cent of the UK population. They tend to be young high flyers – typically aged 25–34, unmarried, with degree level qualifications and in good health – living in city centre locations and earning high salaries. Public fitness facilities attract only 2 per cent of their members from this Type.

Next on the list are 'Original Suburbs', which accounts for 4.5 per cent of

private health club members. They are generally 35–44 years old, with children of school age, living in suburban semi-detached properties with high household incomes. Making up just 2.6 per cent of the UK population, this Type is over-represented in both the public and the private sectors; it's the second most prevalent Type among private health club members and fourth in the public sector, accounting for 3.6 per cent of public gym members.

Accounting for just 1.3 per cent of the UK population, the 'Counter Cultural Mix' Type is also a good source of business, although more inclined to join private health clubs (3.9 per cent of members) than public gyms (2.4 per cent of members). Typically aged 25–34, single and in good health, they tend to live in run-down urban areas. They have degree level qualifications and work in a mix of jobs, generally in the service economy or professional employment.

A second segmentation system, Financial Strategy Segments (FSS), was used alongside Mosaic in this year's Audit as a way of providing further insight. Classifying every person and household into one of 13 Groups and 45 Types, FSS describes financial behaviour as well as summarising key socio-economic and demographic characteristics.

The FSS 'Up & Coming Elite' Type accounts for just 2.02 per cent of the UK population, but 9.4 per cent of private health club members. Young, single and wealthy, renting high value flats in fashionable areas of cities such as London and Edinburgh, this Type spends a lot of time at work and socialising with friends. Many have recently graduated, some with masters degrees or doctorates, and have well-paid professional jobs. Many are still paying off student debts, but have a high disposable income and enjoy an expensive lifestyle, which they are prepared to go overdrawn to maintain.

Meanwhile, 8.3 per cent of private health club members and 6.7 per cent of public gym members are classified by FSS as 'Looking to the Future' Types – young people living in rented accommodation, perhaps council-assisted, sometimes with young children. They tend to be self-employed or in professional occupations, although unemployment can be an issue and money problems can occur. However, they have an optimistic outlook and are comfortable using credit cards to finance holidays or to lead a full, active social life.

PUBLIC MEMBER PROFILE

In many cases, people who use public fitness facilities are vastly different from the members of private clubs: the most

common Types among users of public fitness facilities are 'Industrial Grit', 'Low Horizons' and 'Sprawling Subtopia'.

Four per cent of public fitness members are classified in the 'Industrial Grit' Type – self-sufficient families traditionally reliant on industrial employment, living in older terraced and semi-detached housing. People from this Type tend to be full-nested families with a strong family focus and modest incomes. They are regular TV watchers and football supporters.

The 'Low Horizon' Type accounts for 3.7 per cent of public fitness membership, but just 2.6 per cent of the UK population. These people generally rely on councils for housing and transport and few have bought their own homes. They tend to be families with school age children on low incomes.

'Sprawling Subtopia', again accounting for 3.7 per cent of public gym members (and 3.1 per cent of the UK population), are typically middle-aged (45–59 years old), middle income owner-occupiers living in semi-detached housing. They tend to have dependent children and are themselves in good health.

The Audit also highlights that public facilities attract a higher percentage of their membership from a closer proximity to their centre than private clubs: 69 per

cent of public members live within two miles of their facility, compared with 54 per cent of private members.

WIDENING OUR REACH

Clubs are very good at targeting the affluent, the professionals, the young, the well-off and the economically successful families, but there are other consumer segments to consider. Although there is no one solution to converting non-participants, using the Audit's findings can reveal other elements of the UK population that could be ripe for fitness.

However, to make fitness attractive to a broader market, fresh approaches are needed within the marketing mix: new delivery mechanisms, different pricing, varying services and the appropriate communication depending on the market segment being targeted.

Looking at other industries, we can see how invention has extended either the product lifecycle or market reach. Insurance companies, for example, have followed Direct Line's lead away from traditional delivery into direct and internet channels as a means of meeting customer needs for lower costs. Have clubs fully explored online memberships?

Meanwhile, retail giants like Tesco have dominated by extending their products into convenience services

Recognising our customers: We must identify the population groups who are already members and look beyond to identify new opportunities

such as home delivery. How can clubs offer more convenience to attract new members or retain existing members?

Some would-be fitness consumers are put off by price. However, the budget clubs are demonstrating that less frills and different delivery mechanisms can lead to more affordable rates. Could more clubs follow this lead, or even offer fitness advice and opportunities outside the club in locations where groups are naturally congregating?

The boutique hotel sector is also an interesting model: clear positioning in a heavily-branded marketplace, targeting the individual and offering outstanding service have led to better profit margins.

Meanwhile, Marks and Spencer's business-wide plan for social and environmental responsibility and sustainability, dubbed 'No Plan B', will be one to watch as it sets itself tough targets to adapt to a changing world. This consumer issue has not yet hit our sector fully and is an opportunity to be grasped.

 **Jenny Stanley**
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CHRIS ONSLOW

Kath Hudson finds out about the recent division of Proactive Health into three separate businesses, and about the opportunities presented by a recession



Q How and when was Proactive Health established?

In 1989, while I was a PE teacher and badminton player/coach, I wrote and produced a video-based dictionary of weight training exercises, which was sold for 15 years by Coachwise Ltd, the commercial wing of Sports Coach UK.

Around the same time, my final year MBA led to the production of a commercial series of A3 circuit training cards, endorsed by the Sports Council and the NCF.

The combined success of the video and circuit cards led to discussions with Central YMCA to make more circuit cards and a fitness range for the YMCA, including the Y Step and a range of Y-branded accessories for aerobics teachers. This led to the decision to turn Proactive Health into a limited company, which happened in 1992 after a couple of years' trading.

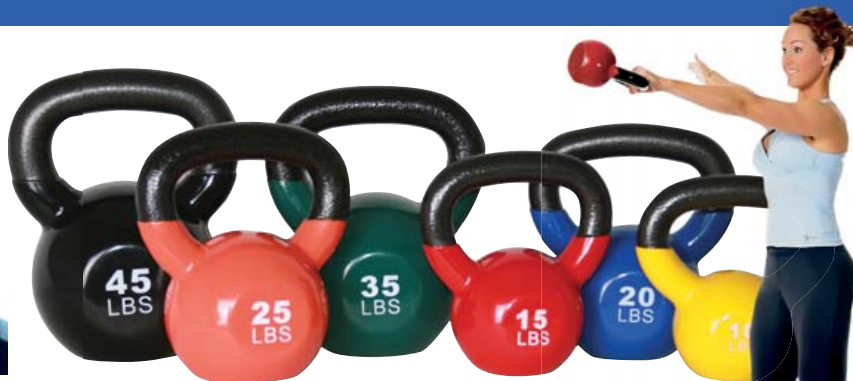
Q What's your USP?

Our unique range of specialist products, together with the fact that we've continued to own and run our own clubs and studios. This allows us to develop and recommend products with an experience second to no other accessory company.

Q The company split into three last August – why?

Once we identified that our company structure had as much to do with evolution and opportunism as it did

Growing the business Onslow has high expectations of growth from STOTT PILATES equipment sales



with strategic planning, we recognised the value of splitting it. This allows each part of the company to have a unique business plan, management team and strategy, servicing distinctly different markets and marketplaces, while still sharing common resources such as warehousing, marketing and business systems.

Q Can you describe the three parts of the business?

They are Proactive Health, Pilates Solutions and PowerBlock Fitness.

Proactive Health is focused on its traditional core market: personal trainers, fitness instructors and other one-to-one fitness instructors such as pilates and yoga teachers.

The new Proactive Health catalogue is packed with innovative products previously only available by international mail order, including eco-friendly products from French company Svetluts, and wellness and children's fitness products from Ledraplastic Spa in Italy.

Pilates Solutions is based around the STOTT PILATES brand. It's the exclusive supplier of their machines, accessories and commercial DVDs, as well as being the licenced training school for STOTT PILATES instructor education in the UK (excluding Ireland).

Worldwide, STOTT PILATES is recognised for its full solutions package: training, commercial pilates equipment, business support and product installation, plus retail lines of DVDs and accessory packs to support secondary income lines.

PowerBlock Fitness is a wholesale-only company – its customers are fitness product retailers and on-sellers. It has a pan-European focus and sells both

ProActive Health the company's new catalogue is packed with products previously only available by international mail order

the PowerBlock domestic dumbbell ranges and the new commercial Flex ranges. A further 100 lines of GoFit® branded professional-standard retail accessories will be launched at FIBO in Germany (see p68), based around training programmes designed by world-leading fitness and performance coaches such as Mark Verstagen.

Q What are your most successful products?

STOTT PILATES is by far the biggest sector and our growth expectations over the next five years are high.

More than half the turnover of Proactive Health comes from our own or exclusive supplier brands. Key areas are mats, studio weight accessories and core stability products, such as balls, wobble boards and foam rollers.

Within PowerBlock, the new commercial Flex Series has hit the ground running. Through Technogym, we've supplied all units of the UK Royal Marines, as well as a selection of Royal Navy ships. In Europe, we're tendering to equip other uniformed services – the latest is 100 sets for the Danish military, and now the Dutch military is interested.

Q How would you describe the market at the moment?

The sales end of the market is definitely challenging – credit lines are being withdrawn from projects that seemed secure and it's harder to offer lease agreements.

WHO'S WHO?

MD Proactive Health:

Nick Cunningham

MD STOTT PILATES:

Chris Onslow

MD PowerBlock Fitness:

Chris Onslow

Strategic/operations management:

Chris Onslow, Louise Duncan,

Trevor Gibbins

Sales managers:

Jan Smulders, Peter Crowdy

Training:

Emma Phillips, Caroline Murray

Despite this, Pilates Solutions had a 25 per cent like-for-like, year-on-year sales growth in January 2009, with elite sports teams and medical centres making up any shortfall from the fitness sector. We've sold STOTT PILATES into a number of premiership football clubs, including Manchester City and Newcastle United, and have had similar success with rugby clubs.

PowerBlock sales in January doubled those of the previous year, although retailers and distributors

FAVOURITES

Book: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*
Film: *Porky's*
Music: Jazz vocal
Place: Vancouver
Food: Indian, Japanese, Korean, Chinese
Season: Summer and winter
Leisure activity: Outside recreation – walking, downhill mountain biking and skiing



PowerBlock The commercial Flex Series has been supplied to both the Royal Marines and Royal Navy, with orders also coming from the Danish military

► were reducing their normal order sizes and taking hits on margin in order to preserve their cashflow.

We've seen a greater focus from our suppliers on putting credit limits in place and, from our foreign suppliers, on securing container orders with bank guarantees or letters of credit.

Are you making any changes as a result?

Like most companies in difficult economic times, we're reviewing our cost structures to ensure each pound spent maximises customer value. Customers will find a variety of new promotions and marketing tools to ensure we maximise stock turnover in our warehouses, and there will be great bargains on product lines we're dropping.

In our training company, we're developing more economic products that focus on small groups, rather than on one-to-one, to support our students and instructors.

Our product offering will move away from brands sold elsewhere towards exclusive brands offering added value. We're predicting more interest from clubs and personal trainers in products that support their clients with added value and generate secondary income. Similarly, we believe our clients will focus on accessories that differentiate them from their competition. This will often mean providing educational support with products, such as DVDs or online programming.

What trends do you predict for 2009?

We expect a growth in services and products that focus on wellness, and that target special populations and injuries, rather than pure fitness. People will focus on needs more than wants:

available money for personal spend will be channelled towards health issues – stress relief, backcare and weight loss, for example. The last place money will be cut will be on health-related spending for children. Where price is appropriate, customers will also take more interest in eco-friendly products.

What are your plans for the next 12 months?

While inducing fear, recession also brings opportunities: it's cheaper to lease or build new facilities and easier to find good staff at the right price, while the inevitable housekeeping leads to a stronger, more focused company.

Our plans are to underpin and develop our companies in a strategic way. Our pilates centres will expand their services, offering other wellness products targeted at GP referrals. These will be science- and research-based and may include backcare clinics, post-cancer treatment and specialist exercise classes, as well as men's fitness and obesity programmes. With this in mind, we're opening a specialist centre near Oxford which will be three times the size of our usual studios.

We'll seek new and modern methods to get our products in front of clients and will offer greater added value in terms of programming and online forums via e-zines and workshops.

By the end of the year, we expect GoFit to be a recognised brand in the industry, synonymous with quality and results-driven programming, and hope to see STOTT PILATES equipment programming adopted by at least one major chain.

Where would you like the companies to be in five years' time?

I'd like Proactive Health to be the first choice catalogue and website

COMPANY BY NUMBERS

Head office: Proactive Health – Long Hanborough, Oxfordshire, UK
Pilates Solutions – Oxford Airport PowerBlock Fitness – near Witney
Annual group turnover: £3m projected for 2009
Year-on-year growth: Proactive Health – 7 per cent like-for-like increase
 Pilates Solutions – 28 per cent like-for-like increase
PowerBlock Fitness – European sales turnover up 140 per cent
Number of offices: Four administration offices (three in the UK, one in the Netherlands) and two further training studios in London and Southampton
Number of employees: 22 including part-time and long-term contract staff

for one-to-one instructors and group exercise teachers.

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kath hudson
 healthclub@leisuremedia.com

EVENTS

show preview

IHRSA 2009

Offering a top class exhibition alongside conference sessions and networking opportunities, the 28th annual IHRSA convention takes place in San Francisco this month

The annual IHRSA International Convention and Trade Show this year takes place in San Francisco, California, between 16 and 19 March.

"The trade show continues to be a global powerhouse where industry manufacturers and suppliers from all corners of the world will gather", says IHRSA CEO Joe Moore in the introduction to the show brochure.

The exhibition will showcase the latest products and services – including numerous product launches – with special deals available to show attendees. The event also offers a wide range of training sessions and exercise classes, as well as networking opportunities with operators and suppliers from across the globe.

In 2008, the trade show encompassed more than 400 exhibitors spanning over 37,160sq m (400,000sq ft) of space. This year's event looks set to exceed that figure, making it the premier educational and product purchasing opportunity for anyone involved in the health, fitness, wellness and health promotion industries. An impressive 12,000-plus trade delegates from more than 75 countries are expected to attend this year's event.

the key to success

Keynote speakers at this year's event include Seth Godin, an author and blogger who has written a variety of books providing smart and actionable information on the topics of management and marketing. Godin's presentation – entitled "Invisible or Remarkable?" – reveals the benefits of using creative, remarkable thinking to transform business ideas and practices.

The second main keynote speaker is Marcus Buckingham, an author and



More than 12,000 visitors are expected to attend this year's IHRSA convention

business consultant. His presentation, "Go Put Your Strengths to Work", will help companies discover that developing great employees and teams leads to the creation of a great business.

This year's line-up of speakers will also feature presentations from Dara Torres, Olympic swimming gold, silver and bronze medalist and Joe Montana, four-time Super Bowl winning quarterback.

top of the class

As is now customary, education will be a vital part of the IHRSA convention mix. This year's schedule covers more than 100 topics, all carefully selected for their timeliness and relevance to today's issues and trends in the health club industry. This then allows delegates to immediately apply learnings to their business.

Additionally, IHRSA will be giving attendees the opportunity to speak to industry experts on a one-to-one basis through what is termed 'The Consultants' Connection'. The 2009 convention also sees the introduction of 'Town Meetings' after each educational session, comprising

an extended question and answer period in order to maximise learning potential.

Elsewhere, the following organisations will offer workshops and certification exams at IHRSA 2009: Aerobics & Fitness Association of America (AFAA); American Council on Exercise (ACE); The Cooper Institute; International Fitness Professionals Association (IFPA); National Federation of Professional Trainers (NFPT); and the National Strength & Conditioning Association (NSCA).

networking opportunities

Last but not least, the convention offers many opportunities to network with delegates from around the world, with a number of receptions and a gala dinner.

DETAILS

Venue San Francisco Moscone Center, San Francisco, California, US
Date 16–19 March 2009
Contact www.ihrsa.org

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GOOD SPRINTING, IT'S ALL IN THE HANDS...

Forget muscle size or leg length; apparently it's the hands that are the sign of a good runner. First-class sprinters and long-distance runners are more likely to have ring fingers longer than their other fingers, according to recent research focusing on the speed and times clocked up by young male runners.

The ratio between the ring and index finger is an indication of exposure to testosterone in the womb: the longer the ring finger, the greater the exposure during the first three months of pregnancy. It's believed that the hormone may impact on body and brain development, in this case influencing the growth of vascular and respiratory systems, improving aerobic capacity of the body and also increasing strength.

Other traits associated with long ring fingers include being good at football, rugby, basketball, fencing, skiing and dancing.

PICTURE: WWW.WISTOCK.COM



BOOT CAMP TARGETS BRIDES TO BE

The Gaylords Palm Resort in Kissimmee, Florida, US, has put a practical spin on a the traditional hen party by replacing the usual night of gluttonous chaos with a customised getaway for the bride and friends, designed to help them look and feel their best on the big day.

Boot Camp for Brides offers the ladies a weekend of healthy and heart-pumping experiences including: Fit for a Bride, a 90-minute consultation to develop a fat-burning and strength training regime; a 60-minute meditation class with take home techniques; and a 60-minute nutrition consultation.

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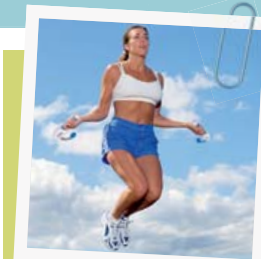
The Versaclimber, a stepping and climbing exercise machine, has gained a new fan at the White House: America's new First Lady, Michelle Obama.

Both Michelle and Barack Obama follow health and fitness regimes; indeed, the new US President has appeared twice in *Men's Health* magazine's 25 Fittest Men in America list.

Now it's claimed that Michelle Obama has started working out on the

Versaclimber, integrating it into her gym sessions alongside the treadmill, weights and group cycling classes. It's been widely reported that her toned physique is a result of a fitness programme that starts at 4.30am each day.

"This demonstrates that sticking to a programme can be achieved no matter how busy you feel or how busy your life may actually be," says Neil Kelford, managing director of Versaclimber UK.



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