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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2011

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INTERVIEW

LAURA KERBY

The MD of Nuffield Health
Fitness & Wellbeing reveals
brand new outcomes data

industry training

Operators step into the
role of training provider



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what's in a name?



So are we no longer the fitness industry? At a Vanguard Council meeting last month, the FIA announced a rebranding exercise, its allegiance to the word 'fitness' now under scrutiny.

It's an interesting move, and echoes a number of conversations I've had recently that have reminded me of the incredible power of words in selling a product – reminders that it's not only what you do but how you talk about it. The industry must harness the right basic terminology – the right labels – to ensure the broadest possible appeal of its products and services.

The sector has long been seeking the correct tag for itself: the ongoing debate of 'fitness' versus 'health and fitness' versus 'wellness', and how we even begin to define the latter. Then comes the question: do we offer 'exercise' or 'physical activity'? In his May 2011 interview with *HCM*, Active Nation MD John Oxley was clear in his views: "We make excuses for the word 'exercise' – we believe we have to use the word 'activity', otherwise we'll put people off. But I think it's better to take the bull by the horns." Should we in fact be building up a strong argument to showcase the benefits of 'exercise' – what can offer

that other forms of activity might lack? These are some of the many questions the FIA will need to address in its quest for a new name.

But it's not only our own label that we need to consider in order to extend our appeal. Perhaps even more important – and arguably an easier win – might be a re-assessment of the labels we use to define our members and prospects. Are we talking about, and to, them in a way that reflects how they see themselves? If we're not, they're unlikely to be listening.

While a new, unifying tag could well prove a good thing for the sector as a whole, the advice over categorising and labelling members might

Are we talking about, and to, members and prospects in a way that reflects how they see themselves? Because if we're not, they're unlikely to be listening. Do we need to change the labels we use?

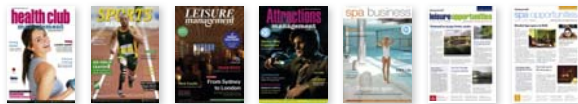
simply be to avoid it altogether – at least overtly. It can be particularly tempting with special population groups to create a distinct category for them. However, if we want to broaden our reach to embrace new audiences, we need to help everyone feel like a core part of our communities – not siphoned off into sub-sets with labels that set them apart in, albeit unintentionally, a conceivably finger-pointing way.

Back in April, CEO of the ICAA Colin Milner wrote an excellent feature on challenging perceptions of the grey market and totally rethinking the way we address and cater for them (see *HCM* April 11, p48). Meanwhile, at Leisure Industry Week in September, Denise Page of the YMCA was telling me about ex-soldiers entering YMCAfit's Instructability scheme – instructor training for disabled people. "They don't want to be categorised as 'disabled' but simply as 'service leavers'," she stressed.

And in her interview this month (p30), Nuffield's Laura Kerby says: "With our diabetes programmes, we found people didn't want to be labelled. Those with diabetes wanted a membership like everybody else, in which they were simply treated in a slightly different way. Similarly, it wouldn't be appropriate to launch cancer memberships – it's more about handling individuals respectfully and appropriately."

This might all seem obvious when written down in black and white, but in practice shades of grey can appear. We need to be very careful to treat each of our members as individuals, ensuring that the shorthand of customer segmentation labels doesn't spill over into external communications.

Kate Cracknell, editor
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welcome to HEALTH CLUB MANAGEMENT



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write to reply



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



Do PTs have sufficient nutritional knowledge to offer sound advice to clients?

sector must review standards in nutritional education

Having read the article on Level 4 qualifications (*HCM* Sept 11, p28), I found it interesting that there was no consideration of the standard of tutors delivering the training or the quality of the material being delivered.

From a nutritional perspective, delivering a Level 4 course requires a suitably qualified tutor. My experience of the leisure industry and nutrition teaching has not been a positive one thus far. In order to deliver sound, evidence-based nutrition programmes at Level 4, tutors should at least be registered nutritionists or registered dietitians. Without this level of qualification, it's unlikely that academia will recognise any course.

Furthermore, the course needs to be scientifically rigorous in terms of content. All content should be evidence-based and thoroughly and

accurately referenced, using up-to-date, peer-reviewed evidence.

There is a real problem with PTs advising clients on nutrition and supplementation without having a sound knowledge of the consequences of their advice. At LIW this year, we held a competition in which you had to answer three basic nutrition questions. These were multiple choice, with a 25 per cent chance of guessing the correct answer. However, from over 100 entries, only two people answered all three questions correctly. Whether this is reflective of the general understanding of nutrition in the leisure industry cannot be gauged from such a small sample. I suspect, however, that it is not far off; the industry needs to look closely at just how well nutrition is being taught.

dr gary mendoza, PhD, BSc, RNutr
lecturer, bath spa university / uwic

vigorous intensity activity guidelines – a welcome step

It's encouraging that the new physical activity guidelines (*HCM* Oct 11, p30) are reflective of significant advances in exercise science since 2004. With physical inactivity the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality, I'm pleased to see the new guidelines have made considerations for the early years and the need to reduce sedentary (sitting) time.

The guidelines support our approach: engaging young people in vigorous intensity activities, including resistance exercise in particular to promote muscle strength, which has received negative and uneducated reactions in the past.

The message that one minute of vigorous intensity activity accrues similar health benefits to two minutes of moderate intensity activity provides an important public health message for those who state a lack of time as a barrier to physical activity. The challenge now for the industry is to effectively communicate and promote the guidelines and provide a fun, customer-driven activity offering.

dr lee graves

head of research & development, shokk



New guidelines take into account exercise needs for children



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new £75,000 gym for nuneaton academy

Nuneaton Academy, a dual-use centre, has benefitted from a new £75,000 gym.

New equipment at the gym, which is managed by Nuneaton and Bedworth Leisure Trust, was supplied by Precor and includes 13 cardio machines including treadmills, recumbent and upright bikes and cross-trainers, all featuring Precor's wireless cardio theatre units. The gym also features six pieces from Precor's S-line and two from the C-line strength ranges, along with three Icarian stations.



Scheving: LazyTown will be around for a long time

lazytown founder eyes further role for sportacus

Magnus Scheving, founder of the children's television programme LazyTown, has told *Leisure Opportunities* that he believes the concept has more to offer the UK market.

The brand has recently joined forces with both FitPro and the Change4Life initiative to increase the number of young children taking part in physical activity, but Scheving is not ruling out further collaborations.

He says: "The person I think could really help would be Sir Richard Branson. I think he would understand what needs to be done to get a country moving."

new gym opens at somerset leisure centre

Somerset Leisure Trust has announced the opening of a new 34-station fitness suite at West Somerset Sports and Leisure Centre, following the completion of a £100,000 refurbishment of the venue.

Life Fitness has supplied equipment as part of the renovation, which has included an upgrade of the CV machines and the acquisition of additional Hammer Strength weight training stations.

TRX suspension training equipment has also been installed as part of the revamp, as well as the addition of specialist flooring designed to withstand impact.

esporta claims vat victory

Health club operator Esporta has won its legal case to make payment arrears recovered from members to be free of VAT.

In a hearing put before the First Tier Tax Tribunal, the operator successfully argued that the sums recovered by the debt collection solicitors did not represent payment for any service supplied by the club.

The decision could potentially result in windfalls for clubs around the country, as the tribunal's findings mean that health clubs are now - in principle - able to reclaim the amounts paid as output VAT on late payments.

Esporta has already indicated that it will be reclaiming the VAT paid on all late payments. Commenting the ruling, David Stalker, chief executive of the Fitness Industry Association (FIA), said: "This landmark ruling is great news



The ruling exempts clubs from VAT when collecting arrears payments

for any business, not just health and fitness operators, which opts for a membership and/or subscriptions-based revenue model.

"Irrespective of the economic climate, any breach of contract should not be subject to VAT. Given the huge financial pressures on businesses at present, this ruling will help alleviate some of the tax burden."

fit4less opens new location in stockport

Fit4less, the low-cost gym concept from The energie Group, has opened its 14th UK club in Stockport, with more locations to follow "shortly".

The launch of the 465sq m (5,000sq ft) facility in Stockport comes after the opening of Fit4less Hartsfield and ahead of the "imminent" opening of a site in Port Talbot.

Facilities at the Stockport club include a cardio theatre and a free weights area equipped by Precor. Personal training and group classes are also available.

David Beattie, brand and marketing director at energie, says: "The Fit4less brand is increasingly popular among investors looking to capitalise on the surge in demand for affordable, quality gyms."



The Stockport club is the latest addition to the Fit4less portfolio

"The support network, from marketing to training, is giving our franchisees all the tools needed to get memberships coming in, even before the doors open, as well as driving sales to meet and exceed targets."

sport makers launched - targets 40,000 volunteers

Sport England has launched its Sport Makers campaign, a scheme aiming to mobilise volunteers to create opportunities for physical activities in their communities.

The Lottery-funded initiative will offer 40,000 people over the age of 16 years the

opportunity to become Sport Makers. They will be invited to a workshop delivered locally through a Community Sports Partnership. Volunteers will be tasked with being responsible for organising and supporting hundreds of thousands of new hours of activities.

research institute for leeds met

A centre promoting and researching health and wellbeing will be launched at Leeds Metropolitan University in November. The Institute for Health & Wellbeing will undertake research into the health status of individuals and communities and will investigate issues including men's health, healthy communities, health promotion and childhood obesity.

The Institute has six distinct research themes: healthy communities; health promotion; men's health; men, gender and wellbeing; nutrition and childhood obesity; and pain science and management.

The different faculties will be housed in a single unit as part of promoting innovation and collaboration. The institute's director, professor Richard Hogston, says: "One of our key strengths is that our research is rooted in



The Institute for Health and Wellbeing will undertake a range of research

finding solutions that will have real impact on communities and businesses.

"Creating the Institute will bring together a range of related disciplines and make it easier for us all to work together, generate and apply our research to even higher levels of excellence."

fitness instructors offered 'tax amnesty'

A new 'tax amnesty' has been launched by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) in a bid to encourage private fitness and dance instructors to come forward with any undeclared liabilities. The Tax Catch Up Plan targets those who profit from private tuition and instruction, either as a main or secondary income, on which correct tax has not been paid.

The crackdown will see private tutors and coaches given until 31 March 2012 to declare any outstanding tax liabilities for the years from 5 April 2010 and to pay what they owe.

HMRC said those who come forward ahead of the deadline would receive the "best possible terms", which is "unlikely" to amount to more than a fifth of any outstanding tax debts.



Personal trainers are encouraged to declare liabilities

However, HMRC warned that anyone who does not come forward by 31 March 2012 will incur "much higher penalties", while criminal proceedings could also be pursued.

bc partners to sell fitness first australasia?

London-based private equity company BC Partners, which owns health club operator Fitness First, is rumoured to be considering selling the fitness chain's Australian and Asian arms.

In the past year, Fitness First has already sold all its clubs in the Benelux countries as well as in France, Spain and Italy. However, in an interview with *Health Club Management* (see October issue, p38), Fitness First CEO Colin Waggett said that Asia was a region that the company would look to expand in.

A spokesperson for BC Partners declined to comment.



The centre was designed by Holder Mathias

afan lido demolition work now underway

Plans for the multi-million pound redevelopment of the Afan Lido complex in Port Talbot have moved forward after contractors started demolition at the site.

A £13.6m Holder Mathias Architects-designed facility is mooted for the site, after the existing building was destroyed by a large fire in December 2009.

It is currently proposed that the replacement facility will be completed in 2013, with the initial plans featuring the provision of a six-lane, 25m swimming pool, a four-court sports hall and a learner pool.

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new leisure centre and gym opens in kent village

A new Hartwell Architects-designed leisure facility has opened its doors to the public on the Spinnery Lane sports ground site in Aylesham, near Canterbury, Kent.

Freedom Leisure will operate the new Aylesham Welfare Leisure Centre in partnership with the Aylesham and Snowdon Social Welfare Scheme.

Facilities at the WW Martin-built venue include a 26-station Life Fitness suite incorporating cardiovascular, resistance and free weights equipment, along with 10 outdoor grass sports pitches.



Personal training revenue grew by 300 per cent

gll extends personal training contract

Leisure trust GLL has extended its personal training contract with Your Personal Training after more than 2,000 of its members used the service.

During the period, the number of personal trainers working at GLL sites increased from 10 to 80, and personal training revenue grew by 300 per cent.

Joe Oliver, managing director of Your Personal Training, says: "We've seen a vast increase in members taking up personal training services, which has led to a dramatic increase in revenue for the operator."

fusion lifestyle takes over charnwood leisure venues

Charnwood Borough Council has said that Fusion Lifestyle has taken over management of Soar Valley Leisure Centre, Mountsorrel; South Charnwood Leisure Centre in Syston; and Loughborough Leisure Centre.

Fusion will invest more than £1.9m in enhancing the facilities at all three centres as part of the deal, while more than £2.4m will be invested in new equipment.

The 10.5-year contract will also see Fusion spend £3.9m on repairs and maintenance. CBC is expecting to save around £4.6m over the lifetime of the deal.

nantwich college gets new gym

The "Olympic Boulevard", a £1.2m extension to Malbank School and Sixth Form College in Nantwich, Cheshire, has been opened for use by students and the local community.

With 1,300 students, the institution has strong links in promoting sport and the values of the Olympic Games, which has seen it receive both national and international recognition.

The school's sporting links inspired the design of the Olympic Boulevard extension, which offers a 100sq m (1,076sq ft) gym fitted with Precor cardiovascular and strength equipment.

Working in partnership with the Parents and Teachers Organisation and the Youth Charter for Sport, Malbank School and Sixth Form College secured 50 per cent of the funding.



The facility's new dual-use health club was equipped by Precor

Cheshire Council contributed the remainder of the balance, with the extension also housing a Starbucks internet café, a family learning centre and an ICT suite.

Headteacher Jeannette Walker says: "To have state of the art equipment available for our students and our community is fantastic."

aspire secures contract for budget gym

Aspire Sports & Cultural Trust - which operates both GL1 Leisure Centre and Oxstalls Tennis Centre in Gloucester - has expanded its services by opening a budget gym in Cheltenham.

Located at Gloucestershire College Campus, Cheltenham, the new site has been branded 'Xpress Fitness' and will offer monthly memberships from £15.

Xpress Fitness Cheltenham features a number of CV and resistance stations, an exercise studio and outdoor multi-use sports area. According to a spokesperson, the trust aims to establish a portfolio of budget gyms in the region.

Steve Elway, chief executive of Aspire, says: "We are growing our brand into wider areas



The trust plans to establish a portfolio of budget gyms in the region

and markets. Since the trust's inception, we have worked hard to improve the quality of facilities and hope to build on our reputation and deliver quality, affordable services in this new community."

local authority to close stratford leisure centre

Newham Council will consult with local residents over plans for a new facility on the site of Stratford's Atherton Leisure Centre, which is to shut on 31 December.

It is expected that a full public consultation will get underway in mid-November to help

shape plans for the new facility, which will be built on the Atherton site.

The council agreed to close the centre, which is sited less than a mile from the Olympic Park, due to increasing costs relating to the ceiling over its main swimming pool.



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mma star plans gym expansion

Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) star Khalid Ismail has confirmed plans for the expansion of his Lions Den Gyms (LDG) business at locations "in a radius around London".

LDG was launched by Ismail in 2006 and currently has two centres, one in Chadwell Heath and another in Romford. It is hoped that a third site will open in early 2012.

Ismail told *Leisure Opportunities* the Romford club, which was founded in early 2010, was funded through re-investing capital following the success of LDG's first site.

Meanwhile, Ismail has also worked with local community groups in an effort to engage more young people to take up sport and to focus on learning and training.

Ismail hopes expanding LDG and offering a "gym for everyone, no matter what your age,



Ismail plans to expand the Lions Den Gyms brand across the UK

fitness level or background", will help address some issues that led to August's riots.

He says: "There is definitely a call for more centres like ours to be opened in and around London. The riots were about people being drawn into an atmosphere and a way of thinking which is destructive."

plummer in warning to uk fitness sector

Renowned US-based health and fitness expert Thomas Plummer has issued a warning to the UK fitness industry with regard to the advent of low-cost memberships. Addressing delegates at Leisure Industry Week, Plummer drew on his extensive experience of the US market to reveal that budget models were a "micro-trend".

Plummer told delegates: "[The US] is in the middle of a micro-trend and it's going to spill over here.

"You'll get around three or four years of disruption and then it will fail. It's failing in the US. There are only so many members in a marketplace. Some of you are thinking: 'I'll just halve my price, I'll be a budget club'. Some of you are already doing that. It'll work for a couple of years."



Budget models: Are these really a 'micro-trend' as Plummer suggests?

Plummer stressed the need for operators to move away from a membership-driven model to a results-driven operation in a bid to cope with increased competition that, he warns, "is coming".

the reebok club gets £100,000 re-investment

The Reebok Club in Canary Wharf has invested £100,000 in new equipment which was unveiled on 30 October.

As part of the investment, all of the independently-owned club's group cycling bikes have been replaced with 80 new ones, while

eight cross-trainers with and seven adjustable benches have been supplied by Technogym.

There will also be an additional six CYBEX Arc Trainers and the club will be the first in the UK to introduce the Power Plate Bike – a stationary bike with mechanical vibration.

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new products for dll's amida spas

David Lloyd Leisure (DLL) has secured a deal with Aromatherapy Associates, Rodial and Alpha-H to provide products for new treatments and therapies across its Amida Spa estate.

The products will be offered from October/November at all Amida Spa facilities, which are located at selected DLL racquet and fitness clubs and the operator's Harbour clubs. DLL business development manager Hazel Geary says: "These are exclusive products available at premium locations and, as such, are a perfect offering for Amida."



The award is designed for advanced instructors

online resources for exercise referral training

Ofqual-approved accreditation body Active IQ has announced the launch of new eLearning and online resources in support of its Level 3 Certificate in Exercise Referral. The award is designed for advanced instructors and personal trainers looking to work with special populations in areas such as cardiorespiratory and mental health issues.

New resources unveiled by Active IQ will offer greater support to learners working to build on existing Level 2 and 3 skills and provide a greater understanding of medical conditions.

keiser uk secures contract with athletes' commission

Fitness equipment supplier Keiser UK has become an official supplier to the British Athletes' Commission (BAC). The deal will see all BAC members being able to benefit from savings on Keiser UK equipment, as well as a range of special offers.

The British Athletes' Commission is the voice of all Olympic, Paralympic and world class funded athletes. The Commission was set up in 2004 to represent the interests of athletes in Great Britain to the key decision makers in sport.

vc deal for fitnessbooker owner

GramercyOne, the company behind the FitnessBooker software, announced that it has secured US\$14.5m (£10.5m, £9.2m) of VC funding from a raft of new backers led by Revolution Ventures – the company behind Living Social and spa resort Miraval.

The investment will enable the company to accelerate the development of all versions of its cloud-based software – such as FitnessBooker, SpaBooker and SalonBooker – which run off its generic Booker platform. It will also enable expansion into new vertical markets.

In announcing the deal, Revolution president Tige Savage said: "GramercyOne allows the e-commerce revolution to move from the sale of products to the sale of services. The company's applications finally make it as



The investment will go towards expanding the GramercyOne services

easy to purchase and schedule an appointment online as it is to purchase a song or a book."

Josh McCarter, CEO of GramercyOne, says: "Cloud-based tools are changing the way the world does business and we're looking forward to continuing to set the benchmark in this exciting and critical sector."

government grant for active leisure training

The government has revealed that the first round of bids to the Growth and Innovation Fund (GIF) will include a £1.7m grant being made available to increase skills in hospitality, while active leisure will benefit from nearly £900,000.

As a result of the money earmarked for active leisure, SkillsActive will create a Group Training Association for the sport and active leisure sector that will help employers shape and invest in training.

It will be given a target of increasing the volume of apprentices from 11,000 to 18,000 a year. SkillsActive will also deliver projects designed to improve the access to specialist training and qualifications for workers in the playwork and fitness and leisure sectors.



SkillsActive will set up the new Group Training Association for the sector

The funding is part of a £20m matched funding scheme that aims to help employers to deliver more effective skills solutions through more apprenticeships, new professional standards and closer partnerships with education and training providers.

technogym's arke kit for eis sheffield

Sheffield International Venues (SIV) has become the first company in the north of England to provide Technogym's Arke kit for gym users.

The Arke tools are new to the Fitness Unlimited gym at the English Institute of Sport-Sheffield

and are designed to improve co-ordination, stability, balance, flexibility, strength, speed, agility and respiratory capacity.

The 16-piece collection has a water, earth, air and fire theme and can be found in the functional training area of the gym.

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in brief...

star trac for fitness hut

Premium low-cost operator Fitness Hut recently opened its first site in Lisbon. The new club – the first of three sites planned to open before the end of January 2012 – has been equipped by Star Trac. Equipment includes the E Series CV range, HumanSport cable-based strength equipment complemented by Inspiration Strength machines, and a dedicated Spin studio.

Led by Nick Coutts (see *HCM* Oct 11, p46), Fitness Hut plans to open between six and 10 sites a year.

us ceo pledge

IHRSA is urging America's business leaders to become personally involved in leading the US to wellness by taking the CEO Pledge, a key component of the United States' first ever National Physical Activity Plan.

The plan is a comprehensive set of policies, programmes and initiatives aimed at increasing physical activity in all segments of the US population, with the goal of improving health, preventing disease and disability, and enhancing quality of life. CEOs who take the pledge vow to improve employee health and wellness by creating opportunities and resources for physical activity before, during or after the workday.

"The CEO Pledge makes it clear that business leaders have an influential role to play in addressing our country's health and healthcare crises," says Joe Moore, president and CEO of IHRSA. "With most working adults spending roughly half their waking hours at their job on the days that they work, it is incumbent on business and industry leaders to become part of the solution. By promoting physical activity and healthy lifestyles in the workplace, CEOs help their company's bottom line. But they also help society."

total gym enters colombia

BodyTech in Bogotá, Colombia – part of a chain of over 40 fitness clubs in the country – has become the first gym in Colombia to add GRAVITY programming.

genae to open club number five

Genae is set to open its latest club in January, in Bron – near Lyon – in France.

The 2,600sq m club will offer four studios – including a dance floor, 'zen' studio and a dojo – and a cycling area. There will also be a functional training zone, Freemotion circuits and a gym.



Genae currently operates clubs in France only, but international expansion is planned

As at its other clubs, the new facility will target families with activities for all ages; 40 per cent of Genae's customers have never been members of a club before. Also as at its other sites, monthly membership will be complemented by a 'pay by the hour' option (€5 an hour).

Formerly known as Domyos and owned by Oxyane, Genae is part of Geophyle, a company network created by the founder of Oxyane which encompasses companies in the fields of leisure and media.

The portfolio currently comprises four sites in France. Most will be rebranded Genae, and future clubs will also roll out under this name. Future expansion is planned in France and beyond – to markets such as Belgium, Spain, Italy and China, where the Oxyane brand already operates via its Décathlon stores.

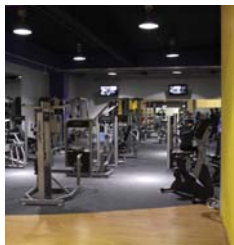
anytime's 100th australian club

Anytime Fitness, the world's fastest-growing fitness club franchise, has opened its 100th club in Australia.

The milestone comes just three years after the brother-sister team of Justin McDonell and Jacinta McDonell-Jimenez began serving as Anytime Fitness master franchisees in Australia.

The 100th Australian site officially opened in Thornton, New South Wales, on 1 October. The new club is owned by Steve Rollings, who now owns and operates a total of eight Anytime Fitness clubs in the country.

McDonell says his goal is to have more than 350 Anytime Fitness clubs in Australia within the next two years.



Anytime Fitness has more than 1,300,000 members across 1,600 clubs worldwide

planet fitness expands in the ukraine

Planet Fitness has opened a new club in Kiev – its first in the city and its fourth site in the Ukraine.

Enrollments began at the end of March and the club opened its doors for workouts on 15 September.

Facilities at the 3,250sq m gym include two group fitness rooms, free weights, cardio, swimming pools and a personal training studio. The aqua-zone contains an adult pool, children's pool, spa pool and sauna. Meanwhile, kids of all ages have

access to special areas of fitness, aqua programmes, developmental classes and recreation rooms.

The club also offers a wide range of spa procedures and a beauty salon. In addition, every member has the opportunity to visit the onsite physical therapy office, receive a functional diagnosis, learn about problem areas and receive treatment.

Planet Fitness now has clubs in Stockholm (Sweden), Donetsk and Kiev (Ukraine), and six cities across Russia.



As well as extensive indoor facilities, FitWellAthletics also offers outdoor fitness training

new independent club for russia

FitWellAthletics, an independent club in Rostov-on-Don in Russia, opened its doors on 15 September.

Facilities at the 6,000sq m club include a swimming pool, children's pool, gym and table tennis. Located in an attractive area of the city, near a large park, outdoor group training sessions are available in addition to indoor group exercise classes and personal training. The club also offers a café and childcare centre.

Suppliers include Life Fitness (including Hammer Strength), Everlast, SPRI, TOGU, Body Bars and Foreman.

Complementing the fitness facilities is a 1,000sq m spa area encompassing Finnish sauna, spa pool, solarium,

massages, baths and beauty treatments. The spa is scheduled to have its grand opening in early 2012.

The club is said to be the first in the south of Russia offering a combination of fitness, wellness and beauty services. In addition, all members receive a fitness test and medical consultation on joining.

Various membership categories are available – individual, group, child, corporate, off-peak daytime – with most being annual deals. The club's investor, Doninvest bank, set up credit schemes to facilitate pre-payment, but memberships can be suspended for periods of 10–90 days.

There are plans to build a second club in the near future.

intensity set to launch in jordan

Intensity, a new brand of premium MMA gyms and facilities, is set to open its first site in Amman, Jordan, this month.

The Intensity concept blends the traditional commercial fitness gym model with an extensive MMA offering. Facilities are split into three distinct areas: combat sports; strength, conditioning and cardio; and diet and nutrition.

Training options at this first club – a 1,400sq m site – include an MMA cage, kids' sessions, group cycling, a boxing ring and a kettlebell area. Cybex will equip the gym, and there will be live DJ sessions.

Owned by Midrar Capital Holdings, and with the launch supported by Proleisure, Intensity may now roll out via owned sites or franchise deals, with three sub-brands: Intensity 90, Intensity 180 and Intensity 360.

Intensity 90 is a community product focused on combat sports, with a smaller footprint, operating costs and profit margins. Intensity 180 gyms – including this first site – will offer a blend of lifestyle fitness alongside professional MMA coaching. The 360 product will offer all aspects of the 180 product but in a more intimate, one-to-one spa-style environment.

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reed replaces grey-thompson at efds

Charles Reed has been named as the new chair of The English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS), replacing Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, who has been appointed as honorary president. Reed will work alongside an expanded board of trustees.

Two other vacant positions on the board have been filled by Gerry Kinsella and Janet Williams. They will lead the organisation into 2012 and build on the legacy for disabled people in sport.



Philip Cooksey is York's new UK sales director

new uk sales director for york fitness

Equipment supplier York Fitness has appointed Philip Cooksey as UK sales director, who joins the company after seven years with Technogym. As part of his new role, Cooksey will be responsible for the company's performance weightlifting and home fitness businesses.

Cooksey says: "I build teams around genuine, honest and professional individuals who have a passion, not only for the fitness industry, but for the long-term relationship and success of its customers."

fitbug holdings appoints healthcare expert

Fitbug Holdings has appointed Joel Barnes, a senior US healthcare industry executive, as its new senior vice president for sales and business development.

With more than 20 years' experience in the US healthcare sector, Barnes' previous roles include a senior sales position at Bupa's US Health Dialog business.

As part of a phased strategy, the company has now opened a US sales and customer support office based in Chicago. The first US customer support staff has completed training, and the centre opened at the beginning of October 2011.

skillsactive ceo stands down

Stephen Studd, chief executive of SkillsActive, has announced his decision to stand down from the role with immediate effect. Studd held the position for eight years and is a leisure industry veteran. He began his career at the Crystal Palace National Sports Centre in 1975 before spending 21 years at the Sports Council Great Britain (now UK Sport).

Commenting on his departure, Studd said: "We've gone to considerable effort to restructure SkillsActive as a group and strengthen our engagement with employers and key stakeholders. I believe this new structure leaves SkillsActive in a stronger position to tackle the challenges and opportunities ahead. Now is the right time for me, on a personal level, to step aside and allow new leadership to take the organisation forward."



Studd, a leisure industry veteran, has been SkillsActive CEO since 2003

Chair of the SkillsActive Board Elaine Clowes added: "The board wants to acknowledge the fundamental contribution that Stephen has made in establishing first SPRITO and then SkillsActive, which has given the opportunity to the industry to shape its own skills agenda."

templeman named as new imspa chair

The Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (IMSPA) has appointed the director general of the Institute of Directors, Miles Templeman, as its new chair. Templeman took up the post from 1 October, replacing IMSPA's interim chair, Marc Newey, who stepped down from his position at the end of September.

During his career, Templeman has held senior management and consultancy roles, as well as non-executive directorships, at companies such as Lucozade, Stella Artois and Bulmers.

Templeman says: "The interim board has done an excellent job of paving the way forward



Miles Templeman took over the post of IMSPA chair on 1 October

for the Institute in securing chartership, which represents a real turning point in the sport and physical activity sector."

fairey to head alliance leisure's south-east operations

Tom Fairey has joined Alliance Leisure as business development manager. Heading up the South East region, he will work closely with local authorities, leisure trusts and educational establishments to convert underperforming sites into thriving, sustainable sites. Fairey joins Alliance from Gymkit UK, where he was

commercial sales director. His previous posts also include senior account manager at Precor.

He says: "Local authorities are under more pressure than ever to maintain service provision and standards despite shrinking budgets, and I feel that Alliance can play a truly valuable role in helping them achieve this."

PEOPLE PROFILE



Chris Spencer

A former England rower and law graduate, Spencer began working in leisure in 1988 as a 'fill-in' job – but never left. Diagnosed with cancer in 1997, he credits his strength of mind with having beaten the illness

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

I started work straight from studying at university in America. I planned to stay for a few months just to earn a bit of cash, but I'm still here 23 years later. I was initially employed by the London Borough of Havering and they were good to me, allowing me my freedom to train and pursue my sporting career, which is why I stayed.

How did your career progress?

My initial role was as a lifeguard for two months, then supervisor. I was then elevated to duty manager and, in very quick succession, to club manager. I studied some more and gained business, rather than leisure-specific, qualifications – I believe these are more marketable and transferable. I was eventually made business development manager for Havering Leisure. I joined SLM (Everyone Active) in 2006 and continue to work in the Havering contract.

You were diagnosed with cancer – how did that change your life?

At first it was a complete shock – after dedicating my life to fitness and healthy living, to be told that my chances of getting through it were slim. After a few years of experimental treatments I finally underwent both a bone marrow and a stem cell transplant in 1999. It changed my outlook on life completely – it makes one live for today. I work hard and play hard as you never know what's around the corner. Prior to my illness, I would plan my life, my career, invest and save for the future. Nowadays I live life to the full.

Professionally, I don't understand those people who call in sick for minor ailments. The team I work with don't do this, and we try to instill the same ethos in everyone.

What is your typical day-to-day?

I'm a morning person, waking each day at 5am, and I'm in the gym most days

at about 6am and at my desk before 7am, showered, dressed and ready to go. Everyone Active is SLM's consumer-facing brand and we are encouraged to be seen to lead by example, so a group of us swim a few mornings each week – sometimes up to 10 of us.

Everyone Active is a paperless organisation, so much of the day is spent analysing reports, income and sales on the computer. We also tend to travel a bit to other Everyone Active contracts to network and share best practice, which is great.

How can the fitness sector play a role in preventative healthcare?

Everyone Active has really embraced this philosophy and it's at the heart of what we do – encouraging and educating people to exercise rather than sitting in doctors' waiting rooms. I do hope that the local authorities can persuade more and more GPs of the value of exercise, whether it be in one of our clubs or another provider's.

However, I think cost can be a barrier to fitness – particularly in some of the areas of higher deprivation – and we need to address as an industry.

What is the number one weakness in the fitness industry?

There are still many potential clients out there whose perception of a gym is the stereotypical body building type, and the industry needs to address this. We really need to educate and make these people aware of what we actually do as an industry.

What drives you?

I have never woken up and thought to myself 'oh my god, I have work today'. I enjoy coming to work, networking with both clients and colleagues. As a team, we tend to create the happy, enjoyable environment which we call work.

What is your favourite life motto?

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thoughts on low-cost gyms

• melissa rodriguez • ihrsa research manager

According to *The 2011 IHRSA Global Report*, over 44 million members use 48,000 health clubs in Europe. In some of the mature markets such as the UK, Germany and the Netherlands, consumers have a variety of options to choose from: low-cost and bare-bone facilities, premium and full-service clubs, wellness centres and so on. The low-cost gym sector in particular has shown significant growth.

Thanks not least to the global financial crisis, consumers worldwide have been keeping a close eye on their static (and maybe even still shrinking) income. Discretionary spending is still limited, making low-cost gym membership a suitable option for the cash-strapped. So how does a mid- or premium-scale operator respond to this development?

In order to answer this question, it helps to more thoroughly understand why this sector has grown. According to Ray Algar's 2011 *Global Low-Cost Gym Sector Report*, distinct drivers are fuelling the growth of this segment, many of which come down to the consumer: preferences for budget-friendly and no-frills options, infrequent attendance of higher-priced clubs where they were former members, and a lack of perceived value from a pricier membership.

Members expect a lot from a club charging €40-50 a month when they can meet all their basic needs for a complete workout for under €25 a month.

Consumers have become savvy and more discriminating regarding value. Fortunately, the industry appeals to a wide demographic, from the price-conscious to the affluent – everyone needs the health benefits of regular exercise. Some prefer an independent workout; others seek an integrated experience. If you are a full-service operator, target the latter.

In order to target this customer, identify what your club does best. Do you have an expert and friendly staff available to answer members' questions and help them with their fitness goals? Do you offer high quality group exercise programmes powered by a knowledgeable and spirited team of instructors? Do you have a wide array of sports facilities such as racquet courts, swimming pools and more? If any of these are characteristic of your club, build on them and promote them to your current and potential member base. Know



Fitness consumers are savvy and more discriminating over value

your target and send a clear message as to who you are, how you can help them, and why they should choose your club to help them with their fitness goals.

The low-cost movement has paved the way for intelligent consumers to demand that all business operators – in the health club industry and beyond – compellingly answer the question: "Why pay more?" If you offer a member experience beyond that of a self-service club, communicate this through your marketing efforts, engaging staff and effective programmes. In time, your consumers will understand that they are investing in much more than simple access to machines.

ask the experts..... personal training client retention

When a PT quits or is terminated, what is the best way to inform/approach their clients so they stay at your club rather than following the trainer to a new club?

"If a trainer quits, clients will usually be more accepting of the decision. If the trainer is fired, it becomes a very sensitive issue. Clients can take it personally – 'How could you fire my friend?'"

"I will typically call them and let them know that the personal trainer in question will be leaving. I try to set up a consultation with them so that I can reconnect and then place them with another trainer. Setting up an appointment with them shows that you care about their success."

Nicki Anderson, president, Reality Fitness



Members are the club's clients first and foremost

"The best approach is to make it clear upfront that clients are members of the club and not owned by the trainers. Periodically have other trainers train clients, and ensure PT managers have relationships with all clients so there is a rapport built.

"In the event that trainers leave, the manager who has the client relationship should schedule the next workout, meet the client, do a reassessment, check their mindset regarding the situation, and facilitate a two-session transfer programme to another trainer or two."

"Usually I find it best if the client experiences two PTs and can make the decision, so they are part of the solution. The key is to not really ask if they want to continue; assume they are staying and just move to the next phase of their programme. They are the club's client and the club will ensure their success."

Mark Miller, VP, Merritt Athletic Club

Read another answer to this question at www.ihrsa.org/industryleader



Scandinavian chain Fresh Fitness has six budget clubs in Denmark, and three in Norway with SATS

pay as you go at fresh fitness

Low monthly fees, a variety of services, and one only pays for what one uses. It's a concept that's attracting more and more fitness enthusiasts, and Scandinavian budget chain Fresh Fitness is putting this trend at the heart of its model.

Showers and group fitness are charged by use, and there are virtual group exercise and indoor cycling courses using proprietary technology developed with the Wexer online platform.

To make the idea of individual cost-control work in practice, the 2011 system uses a chip-embedded card or a silicone wristband to identify members

at check-in and enable them to cashlessly consume products and services. Vending machines for snacks and beverages are equipped with a Gantner module, and payment recorders are located in the shower area and group exercise rooms.

Thanks to 'pay as you go', Fresh Fitness is able to maintain low monthly fees, despite offering state of the art equipment and furnishings, and without having to cut corners – it offers extra services often not found in low-cost gyms. PT is also available.

Fresh Fitness has six locations in Denmark and, with SATS, three sites in Norway. Further expansion is planned.

events diary

Visit www.ihrsa.org/calendar

17 November 2011

Managing a Financially Successful Sales Team (Webinar)

25-27 November 2011

First IHRSA Road Show – Slovenia

8 December 2011

Increase Retention by Implementing a Comprehensive Member Integration Program (Webinar)

14-17 March 2012

IHRSA's 31st Annual International Convention & Trade Show – Los Angeles, California, US

reducing the risk of heart attack

Men who exercise vigorously three times a week have a 22 per cent lower risk of having a heart attack, compared to those of the same age who do not meet this level of activity, according to Harvard School of Public Health research published by the American College of Sports Medicine.

"We studied vigorous exercise because of its stronger association with coronary heart disease," says lead author Andrea Chomistek, Sc.D. "While we discovered that vigorous intensity exercise decreases a man's risk of heart attack, we also were able to partially determine why. The benefits of exercise on a man's levels of HDL-C, or 'good' cholesterol, account for approximately 38 per cent of that decrease. Other important markers included vitamin D, apolipoprotein B and haemoglobin A1c."

news in brief

2012 convention keynotes

The general session speaker lineup is set for IHRSA's 31st Annual International Convention & Trade Show (www.ihrsa.org/convention/), to be held on 14-17 March 2012 in Los Angeles, California, US.

Featured presenters will include: William Taylor, founding editor of Fast Company (sponsored by Matrix Fitness); Simon Sinek, founder of Simon Sinek Inc and author of *Start With Why, How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (sponsored by Precor Incorporated); and Guy Kawasaki, co-founder of Alltop.com, founding partner of Garage Technology Ventures, and former chief evangelist at Apple (sponsored by Technogym). All three presentations will be simultaneously translated into Spanish and Russian.

13 years of forumclub

For more than a decade, owners, managers and exercise professionals at fitness and wellness centres and swimming pools have been recognising ForumClub's ability to supply high-quality education. Indeed, the 2011 event saw more than 150 exhibiting companies and 6,500 visitors.

The 13th year of the event is scheduled for 23-25 February 2012 at BolognaFiere, Bologna, Italy. ForumClub will supply the industry's professionals with the tools they need to attain the best results from their everyday work – above all during tough times. Visit www.forumclub.it for details.

About IHRSA

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

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

great danes: lessons from denmark

Hans Muench reports on the success of Fitness World in Denmark, and its goals going forward

Over the course of six years, founder and owner Henrik Rossing has grown Fitness World to an estate of 72 clubs in Denmark, catering for 250,000 members – that's almost half of all gym members in this small country, which has a population of just five million and in which only four cities have more than 100,000 inhabitants.

the fitness world model

In 2008, Fitness World shook up the Danish market with a simple yet irresistible model: fees of 229 Danish Crowns (approximately €33) a month with no minimum contract length. This undercut the market pricing of the major Scandinavian chains (SATS, Fitnessdk and Elxilia) by almost 40 per cent.

Many Danes prefer to be outside during the summer, so Rossing also allows them to freeze their memberships at no cost. "We do not lose these members," he explains. "In September this year, for example, we had 30,000 people reinstate their memberships, which had no associated marketing or sales costs."

Fitness World does not believe in pre-selling memberships, but this does not mean that they do not advertise, or that they start the club operation slowly. In fact, a recent opening yielded 1,000 members on the first day.

"We rely heavily on social media such as Facebook," explains Rossing. "We have a sophisticated monitoring system which tells us, based on the 'chatter' about the club, whether extra promotional work is necessary."

A new Fitness World club in Copenhagen, scheduled to open in December, was a former SATS location which closed in August. A nearby Fitness World club, at almost 10,000 members – very crowded at times – will benefit from a transfer of some of the membership to a location close by, with new equipment and more space to move.

However Rossing, who serves on the Danish Fitness and Health Organisation



Fitness World relies heavily on social media, with sophisticated monitoring of online 'chat' about its clubs

(DHFO) board, also plans future growth in smaller towns with a population as low as 15,000. "We feel our concept can attract 3,000 to 4,000 members in such markets," he predicts, adding that these figures are independent of the level of competition in those markets.

driving penetration

While the national penetration rate is 12 per cent, Rossing's goal is to get 30 per cent or more of the population in his clubs' catchment areas as members.

Rossing's lofty goal is not unrealistic. At the Fitpiration event in den Bosch, Holland, on 16 September, keynote speaker Mark Mastrov (formerly of 24 Hour Fitness, and currently involved in over 800 clubs across 20 countries – brands including Hard Candy, Mrs. Sporty and UFC Fitness Clubs) stated that 24 Hour Fitness alone had a 31 per cent penetration rate in parts of southern California. When other (competitor) clubs were included, the total local health club penetration rate surpassed 40 per cent.

In smaller markets, higher penetration can also be achieved. For example, Hardy's in Greifenberg (a town of 12,000 people, 40 minutes west of Munich, Germany) has 3,000 members, which translates into a 25 per cent penetration rate.

the competition responds...

"Grudging acceptance and respect for what they have achieved so far," is how Rasmus Ingerslev summarises his

thoughts on Fitness World. Ingerslev operates six Fresh Fitness value clubs in Denmark – a joint venture with SATS, which also operates three clubs under the Fresh Fitness brand in Norway.

With 16,000 members in Denmark, plus 8,000 in Norway, Fresh Fitness has just 10 per cent of Fitness World's membership base, but it believes it can make inroads into the market. "Our price is lower than Fitness World, but cost of membership is not the only criteria members consider when making their purchase decision," explains Ingerslev. Fresh Fitness therefore also uses elements such as online membership sales, technological innovations (see news item on previous page), indoor cycling and group exercise video classes on demand to attract clients to its low-cost clubs.

Meanwhile Tom Hoel of Aerobic Garden in Frederiksund, one hour south of Copenhagen, felt the effect of Fitness World entering his city immediately. "We lost over 100 members," states Hoel, who is also on the DHFO Board. "However, we have local knowledge and relationships built up with members and the community, which will buffer medium-term effects of this large competitor."

Other major chains in Denmark, as cited in *The 2011 IHRSA International Report: Size & Scope of Key Health Club Markets*, include: Fitnessdk (36 clubs), Dansk Fitness (19 clubs), Motion & Trivsel (15 clubs), Butterfly Women (15 clubs), Sport og Fitness (14 clubs) and SATS (13 clubs).



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The Fitness Industry Association reports on the 'Our Greatest Team' initiative – a national campaign for operators to latch onto the power of the Olympics and Paralympics

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



vanguard

When the greatest marketing circus comes to town, you have two choices: either be part of it, or watch it pass you by." So said David Stalker, CEO of the FIA, at the launch of the fitness industry's 'Our Greatest Team' initiative during this year's Leisure Industry Week.

Exclusively open to FIA members and Technogym partners, 'Our Greatest Team' is the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games initiative in association with Technogym – the official equipment supplier to the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. Facilities are invited to register now, to be involved in the major national consumer campaign launching in January 2012.

more people, more active

Designed to act as a catalyst to get more people more active, participating operators will be able to become a registered 'Our Greatest Team Community Hub': clubs and leisure centres throughout the UK will become venues at which consumers can make activity and wellbeing pledges in support of the Games.

This is a national campaign with approved Olympic/Paralympic branding for all participating clubs – a great way to create engagement with the public in our Olympic year. Operators will be supported by a multi-media campaign, which will help them leverage the power of the Olympic brand while simultaneously supporting their member acquisition and retention strategies.

Participating facilities will be provided with support materials, including:

- Branded marketing collateral – posters, point of sale materials and so on, as well as web tools to facilitate registration.
- Consumer marketing materials such as content for Facebook, Twitter Community Hub newsletters etc.
- An 'Our Greatest Team' mobile app, which will allow consumers to monitor and upload their performance and activity achievements.



The initiative will invite the public to make activity and wellbeing pledges for the Olympic year

Operators will also be able to win Technogym equipment from the Olympic Village Gym – equipment previously used by the world's elite athletes during the Games – while REPs-registered trainers will be able to win the opportunity to work with the elite athletes in the Olympic Village Gym during the Olympics and Paralympics – a once in a lifetime opportunity.

legacy partners

The big plus of the campaign is that the public will be invited to make, and be supported in sticking to, activity and wellbeing pledges during 2012. These will be monitored via a web link, tracking the success of the campaign; the web portal will also provide an opportunity for operators to showcase all the exciting ways people can get active.

"Imagine being a high visibility Legacy partner of the greatest show on earth, in your local community. And imagine the power of the 'Our Greatest Team' branding on your business. The potential is breathtaking and the opportunities unparalleled by anything in our industry's history," says Stalker.

He continues: "Our Greatest Team" has the potential to be the landmark industry initiative that will propel us into the hearts and minds of every consumer's health and wellbeing consciousness."

Tony Majakas, Technogym's London 2012 project director, adds: "We are delighted that Technogym and FIA registered customers will be able to really make London 2012 a Wellness Olympics."

"We want to be able to inspire the nation to make a pledge and to complete a pledge – something that will benefit each individual and the local community as we showcase how our industry can link sport and health in our Olympic year in 2012."

OUR GREATEST TEAM

'Our Greatest Team' is the 2012 Olympic theme that's designed to link the 900 members of Team GB with the rest of the country – a nation of 60 million people supporting their team.

Team GB comprises 550 Olympic athletes and 350 Paralympic athletes who will be competing in London next year.



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4 & 11 DECEMBER 2011 santa run 5k & 10k

Around 2,000 Santas are expected to take part in these MS Trust runs which will be held in Greenwich Park in London on 4 December and in Heaton Park in Manchester on 11 December.

A free Santa suit is given to each person who enters and participants will have the option of running a 5km or 10km route at each venue. Children from the age of eight upwards can also take part.

Entry will cost £20 and minimum sponsorship is £100. Funds go towards MS Trust, which works with and for people with multiple sclerosis in the UK. Details: www.mstrust.org.uk



Sporty Santas: Runs will take place in London and Manchester



Egypt: A three-peak challenge

29 MARCH–1 APRIL 2012 care egypt challenge

In this three-day hike, participants will be led by Bedouin guides to tackle three mountains in Egypt's Sinai desert: Mount Sinai at 2,285m, the 2,629m-high Mount Catherine, and Mount Jebel el Banat at 2,187m. Along the way they'll see numerous archaeological sites and monuments, as well as passing through amazing scenery. On behalf of CARE – a humanitarian organisation fighting global poverty – minimum sponsorship is £1,100. Details: www.carechallenge.org.uk



A husky challenge in Lapland

13 MAY 2012 davina's diva100

Children's charity Action Medical Research has organised a series of 100km bike challenges – RIDE100 – across the UK for next year, and a particular highlight will be the women-only event with Davina McCall.

Participants will get to cycle alongside the TV star on a 100km ride that's hard and hilly. There is, however, also the option of a gentler, 50km road route. Both are set in Midhurst, West Sussex.

McCall says: "This is my first cycling event for Action and I hope lots of ladies saddle up and join me for this new fundraiser." Registration is £28 and the sponsorship target is £50. Details: www.action.org.uk



Cycle alongside Davina McCall

20–26 JANUARY 2012 dog sledding challenge

Choose any charity you wish for this event, which will see you drive your own team of huskies over 200km of beautiful, frozen landscape.

The starting point is Kiruna, the northernmost city in Sweden in the Lapland province, and the route will take in snow-covered forests, glorious mountains and – if you're lucky – a glimpse of the Northern Lights. Along the way, participants will take total responsibility for the care and welfare of their dogs. The deposit is £595 and minimum sponsorship is £4,250.

Details: www.charitychallenge.com

NOVEMBER 2011

8-9 | Spa Life UK

Venue Center Parcs, Elveden Forest, Suffolk, UK
Summary

More than 400 professionals from around the country are expected to attend this event, which is dedicated to the spa and wellness industries.
Web www.spaconference.co.uk

10-13 | ECA World Fitness/Thrive

Venue Marriott Harbor Beach Resort & Spa, Florida, US
Summary

ECA World Fitness conventions, for the health and fitness sector, are said to offer an "advanced level of education, innovation, excitement and energy".
Web www.ecaworldfitness.com

12-13 | APPI 3rd Annual Pilates Conference

Venue Royal College of Physicians, Regents Park, London, UK
Summary

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



Spatex, to be held in Brighton in February 2012, is in its 16th year

JANUARY 2012

28-29 | B-Fit Expo

Venue ExCeL Convention Centre, London, UK
Summary

A new fitness and lifestyle event for companies wanting to promote and sell to those looking to improve their fitness, body, shape, diet and wellbeing. It will specifically target female fitness and nutrition.
Web www.b-fitexpo.co.uk

FEBRUARY

4-6 | Spatex

Venue Brighton Hilton Metropole, Brighton, UK
Summary

This exhibition for the pool, spa and lifestyle sectors is now in its 16th year. It will include a three-day programme of workshops organised by the Institute of Swimming Pool Engineers (ISPE).
Web www.spatex.co.uk

16-19 | IDEA Personal Trainer Institute™

Venue Alexandria, Virginia, US
Summary

The IDEA Personal Trainer Institute is billed as one of the longest-running and leading events dedicated to personal trainers. The conference will offer 97 educational sessions, with up-to-date research, training techniques, new programme ideas, business trends and career-enhancing suggestions.
Web www.ideafit.com/ptrainer

23-25 | FORUMCLUB

Venue Bologna, Italy
Summary

International congress and expo for fitness, wellness and aquatic clubs. Also includes ForumPiscine, a trade show exhibition and congress that targets pool and spa professionals.
Web www.ncforum.com

MARCH

8-11 | ECA World Fitness Conference/ OBOW Show

Venue New York City, US
Summary

ECA World Fitness is an international organisation for the wellness and fitness community. Its One Body One World NY show has a strong dance programme.
Web www.ecaworldfitness.com

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everyone's talking about . . .

the banks

How do the banks perceive the health and fitness industry? It's certainly harder to borrow money, but is this because they've fallen out of love with the sector or simply the impact of recession?

The old adage states that banks are great at offering an umbrella when the sun is shining and taking it away when the rain starts.

And it seems that many operators are finding this now: entrepreneurs keen to open an independent club, franchisees who want to open a second site... many in the industry are reporting that borrowing money is getting tougher.

So is the economic climate to blame for this, or is the reluctance to lend down to the banks' perceptions of the fitness industry? It's well documented that the banks are currently tightening the purse strings generally, but the

health and fitness sector is weathering the recession better than other discretionary leisure sectors. Isn't it therefore worthy of investment?

The answer would seem to be yes, but not universally: there are definitely business models that banks prefer at the moment, specifically low-cost and high-end. It's the beleaguered mid-market clubs that are once again out of favour.

The industry's former reputation of mis-selling contracts might have caused some suspicion in the banking world too. We have received feedback that credit card companies are holding onto card payments for three months, or even longer, causing cash flow problems.

The banks' view on this is that they have to insure themselves against the cardholder potentially arguing that they were mis-sold to and making a claim on the card. However, Barclays Corporate head of hospitality and leisure, Mike Saul, questions the need for credit cards in clubs when memberships tend to be via direct debit anyway.

Nevertheless, the sector faces a challenge – so how will it respond? Will more clubs take the budget route? Will franchisees team up to raise funds? Will entrepreneurs wait to take the plunge? Will business plans become more creative generally? We ask our panel of experts...

HOW DO BANKS VIEW THE HEALTH AND FITNESS SECTOR? EMAIL US: HEALTHCLUB@LEISUREMEDIA.COM

jan spatichia

énergie • chief executive



"I think the entire independent sector, including franchising, is suffering as banks are trying to de-risk. It's a very different situation from five years ago, when we could get banks to fund 80 per cent of a project – now we don't expect more than 50 per cent, and in some cases it's as low as 30 per cent. Franchisees currently going for their

second site are finding it harder to borrow than before, even though they have proven themselves.

Banks do consider franchises to be less risky propositions on account of the fact that they have already been screened: 22 per cent of new businesses failed last year, but only 2.4 per cent of new franchise businesses. In spite of that, we are now seeing some franchisees partnering one another because they can't get sufficient bank funding to go it alone.

Banks are increasingly making use of the Enterprise Guarantee Scheme, which means that the government will guarantee 75 per cent of the loan. However, banks do need to understand that it's impossible to completely de-risk when you're lending money and, in order to fuel the economy, they need to support entrepreneurs."

mike saul

barclays corporate • head of hospitality and leisure



"We are in this market and there is a willingness and a balance sheet to lend. Our lending model hasn't changed through the recession, but the market has got tighter and we are focused on quality, not quantity.

Typically in a business lending application, we will want to know about the market, the consumer, the nature of

the income and cost lines of the business, as well as getting an understanding of the forecasts, the balance sheet and the detail of the cash flow. Finally, we want to know about management expertise and the operational running of the business. We heavily weight a business plan on the ability and track record of the management team and what they want to achieve, with the combination of short- and medium-term business plans.

The discretionary nature of the health and fitness sector is an issue. However, it has been less affected during the recession than, for example, casual dining and the cinema space. We believe opportunities lie in innovation: using social networking and technology. We are exploring innovations around loyalty schemes to incentivise secondary spend and are keen to hear from operators about ideas we can help them out with."



Banks are being very positive when lending to the budget sector, according to the low-cost operator Fitness4less

dave wright

fia • independent operator representative



Banks have fallen out of 'love' with traditional health clubs and lost interest in funding them. Independent health clubs have been particularly hard hit by the cutbacks in lending resulting from the banking crisis: their revenues are generally not that big, and the banks have focused their limited lending on businesses with higher turnovers.

As an illustration of the banks' thinking, in December 2008 NatWest ran a TV advert about NatWest MoneySense, in which they were advising a customer to "cancel their gym membership and run outside". The industry complained and it was removed, but this just goes to show the banks' belief that health club membership is a luxury rather than a necessity. As they don't believe in the benefits, they are not keen to fund it. The only exception is the low-cost clubs, as they do seem to be keen to encourage lending based on that model.

Banks don't understand equipment, so don't value its residual value. Equipment should be used as collateral: without equipment, there is no business. However, despite the banks' view, the health club industry has been through three recessions, yet memberships are still increasing."

steve bradley

fitness4less/topnotch • operations manager



The banks are showing some trepidation around the traditional health and fitness sector – clubs that remain mid-market – particularly as there is still a question mark over the extent to which the budget clubs will impact on them.

However, banks are being very positive in lending to the budget sector: the business model works well and banks are looking to get involved. If mid-market clubs are already considering moving towards the budget end, then the banks might give them a further push in this direction.

The banks have become more stringent, but I don't think they have changed their policies towards the health and fitness sector. Even though health club membership is considered a discretionary spend, we are finding with our exit surveys that more and more people are considering it a necessity – they're only leaving if they're moving house or job, rather than for financial reasons. Our industry needs to be relating these facts and shouting about our successes: the health and fitness sector is a safe investment, is here to stay, generates lots of cash and turns over several billion pounds a year."

LAURA KERBY

The MD of Nuffield Health Fitness & Wellbeing – Nuffield Health's consumer health club division – talks to Kate Cracknell about outcome data and a truly holistic approach



With the importance of demonstrable outcomes being promoted across the fitness industry, Nuffield Health is leading by example. An advertising campaign launched in September headlines with the statement that: "Seven out of 10 members got healthier and fitter with us. Fact" – and it's a statement that, as managing director Laura Kerby is quick to stress, is indeed backed up by scientific fact.

Every member who comes through Nuffield's doors is offered a Health MOT. Launched two years ago, this comprises a set of tests covering everything from blood pressure and cholesterol to BMI and VO_2 max. Based on the results of the MOT, each individual is then given a health score: a percentage rating of their wellbeing (see *HCM* Sept 10, p32). If their score

has improved in a second MOT three months later, members are offered rewards: a free month's membership, for example, or free PT sessions.

"A total of 36,000 people have now gone through a second MOT, which gives us a strong body of evidence showing how the programmes we've designed for them have helped improve their scores," says Kerby. "For example, 30 per cent of people reduced their cholesterol; 58 per cent lost weight and reduced their BMI; 73 per cent improved their aerobic fitness; 50 per cent of men and 43 per cent of women reduced their waist size; and 71 per cent increased their overall health score."

"We could have said nine out of 10 members, as most people have seen a few areas of improvement, but this is proper clinical evidence – clinically significant changes – ratified by our medical director and signed off by Nuffield Health."

"If the industry tries to copy our message, we will challenge them and ask for proof. Because we're serious about what we're trying to do with

this. It's not about promotion – it's about proving outcomes."

member motivation

Kerby continues: "By the end of this year, we will have done the best part of 65,000–70,000 Health MOTs. That's 52 per cent of our membership base. We're seeing a significant uplift in people wanting second MOTs too: about 38 per cent of members have had those."

"The MOTs enable us to engage with customers in a different way, providing a more meaningful and compelling reason to exercise. People are motivated when they first join a gym and start to feel a bit better, but they then disengage when changes aren't quite as dramatic. At Nuffield Health, we can continually show them the difference they're making to their health: their BMI, body composition, blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose level and so on. That's far more motivating, and our retention for this year has improved by six percentage points."

"We're also growing as a business – we have an extra 8,000 members using our facilities and have grown our clinical services too, so our revenue growth is going to be about 12 per cent."

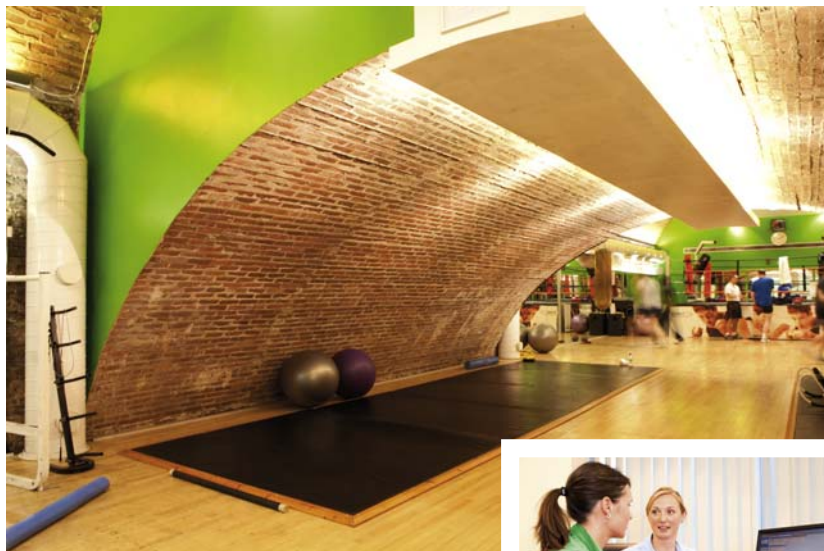
a holistic offering

The growth of the clinical services offering has been a key focus for Nuffield Health over the last couple of years, with a roll-out of health clinics to create integrated wellbeing centres (see *HCM* Jan 09, p34). Typically comprising four or five rooms, these on-site clinics house GPs, physiotherapists, physiologists and a pathology lab. Across the 51-strong portfolio, 15 centres now have a clinic; by the end of the year, the aim is to have reached half of the estate.

Members receive a discount on clinical services, but these are also

'Meet the experts' sessions have engaged 38,000 members since they were launched in early 2010





"WE CAN CONTINUALLY SHOW PEOPLE THE DIFFERENCE THEY'RE MAKING TO THEIR HEALTH - BMI, CHOLESTEROL AND SO ON"

accessible to non-members, driving a more diverse customer base through the door. The next step, as Kerby explains, "is to look at how to blend these services with membership packages". That will involve a further evolution of the health assessment process, already piloted in Nottingham and now set to be trialled at the Farnham site, which opens at the end of 2011.

"The Farnham proposition is going to be adult-only. When you join, as part of your membership you have a full health assessment – not a Health MOT but further tests that include a spinal postural assessment, stress assessment, sleep pattern analysis and hydration tests. It also includes a full nutritional analysis, really getting into what people are eating, their habits, their emotional relationship with food and so on.

"It's an in-depth assessment with a physiologist, who will then work with the fitness instructor to write an exercise prescription and a wellbeing programme that will allow us to

monitor, and also help people with, behavioural change.

"There will be a new membership category with these additional services included, which will probably command around a 10 per cent premium. This will allow us to cater for those who are interested in their holistic health and wellbeing, without disenfranchising those who just want to come for fitness – we are in the fitness industry and we absolutely accept that some people just want to come to keep fit.

"These holistic programmes are starting to look incredibly exciting. The industry has talked about programming for as long as I can remember – whether it works, whether it's cost-effective. But how can you programme if you don't understand what you're really trying to change? If we can genuinely crack it in a way that brings the customer with us, I think it will be Nuffield Health's success.

"So phase one is getting a clinic into all our sites, and really getting the Health MOT working. And phase two – our



Nuffield expects to have completed up to 70,000 Health MOTs by the end of 2011

platinum membership if you like – is the new package, the full holistic offering. If it proves successful, we'll roll it out to all 15 centres that already have a clinic by mid-2012."

managing risk

She continues: "We're positioning ourselves as a place where your health and your fitness will be taken seriously, where you'll be incentivised to do something about it, where you'll have an opportunity to look at how to change your behaviour, and where you'll have supported programmes to do just that.

"After an MOT, we categorise members by colour. Red flags are people who would normally need a GP referral letter to be allowed to exercise, but we aim to cater for them in our centres. Then there are 'amber complex', who normally ▶



► have more than five risk factors – again, we drill down to really understand the issues and provide them with the appropriate programme. Ambers just need a light touch and a bit of advice and suggestions along the way. And people categorised as green are good to go.

"Unbelievably, only 35 per cent of those who've gone through our MOT are green; 3 per cent are red and the remainder are amber or amber complex. But people aren't aware of their conditions. And trying to explain, via messaging into the market, why it's important to look at your underlying health is a difficult thing to do, because people don't connect with it. People don't think about their health in real time – they only think about it when they're sick. They don't recognise the risk factors they can address now in order to potentially improve the longevity of their life, and certainly improve their quality of life in the short, mid- and long term.

"So the challenge is getting people to understand the concept of risk, not in a way that we make them fearful of it, but just in a way that lets them know they have a choice. We're not saying 'never drink alcohol, never have a bar of chocolate' – it's not about preaching. We just want to help people realise they have choices to make every day that will impact on their health. If we can get the whole risk management side of things really working, I think it will put clear water between ourselves and the rest of the fitness sector.

"Once we get people into our centres and start having these conversations



with them, they start to connect with this more. But you have to make it more experiential. We run 'meet the experts' sessions, for example, which have engaged 38,000 members since they launched early last year – sessions such as cancer self-awareness checks with our doctors. At that particular event, the queues were so long we could barely satisfy the requirement."

making a difference

Kerby adds: "We also run Marks & Spencer's mammography bus, looking after all of its female staff – we do about 10,000 breast screenings a year for them. Now that our clinical services and fitness divisions have come closer together [Kerby was formerly MD of Clinical Services, before being handed the brief to integrate the two sides of the offering in the consumer arena],

Kerby says the company recognises that some members will just want to visit for fitness

we've been parking the bus outside our centres, so our members now have access to breast screening if they want it.

"It's anecdotal, but there's a story that I'm very proud of. We had a lady in Cannock who was under the NHS age for breast screening, which is currently 50. She was 40 years old, and a member of our centre, and decided to have the check. She was found with a lump, had that lump removed, and we're now helping her with her recovery through our centre.

"She sees Nuffield Health as part of saving her life, and that's where we should be – health awareness at a much, much more serious level is, I think, part ►



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► and parcel of what the industry should be aspiring towards.

"But, although I believe the industry is really trying, setting up some good conversations and taking steps in the right direction, it will be hard to find the investment necessary to deliver this in an increasingly competitive marketplace – driven by the budget clubs – as well as in the current economic climate.

"I also believe, without wanting to be critical of the industry, that it sometimes uses wellbeing as a means of selling – a promotional tool – rather than a means of truly understanding what's happening with customers and really trying to make a difference."

new ventures

So what other initiatives has Nuffield been developing? "We started a weight management pilot last year, but we didn't want to do an online scheme or a WeightWatchers-type approach where you go into a group and step on scales. We bought a small company called Food Calculator – an online tool – which we use as a means of assessing people's dietary habits, but our programme is as much about the relationship with food – the emotional side.

"We put together a nine-month programme, aligned to NICE guidelines, with a view to sustainable weight loss, in which participants have a one-hour, one-to-one session with a physiologist every month. We've benchmarked it against WeightWatchers and Slimming World and we've had some terrific results, but the really interesting thing is that, even though it cost an additional £25 per member, we had 98 per cent retention across the nine months."

Nuffield's new in-depth health assessment includes tests such as a spinal postural assessment



"WITHOUT WANTING TO BE CRITICAL OF THE INDUSTRY, IT SOMETIMES USES WELLBEING AS A MEANS OF SELLING"

And how about specialist programmes for specific conditions, as per the diabetes programme currently available in 35 Nuffield centres around the country (see *HCM* Oct 11, p50)?

"There are two big projects at the moment. We've signed a contract with Great Ormond Street whereby we're looking after cystic fibrosis children, predominantly in Bloomsbury but across our network as well. They're using our swimming pools with our physiotherapists, and also our gyms where appropriate.

"The second is with Macmillan, looking at ways of helping both carers and recovering cancer patients. But as with our diabetes programmes, where we found people didn't want to be labelled, we're doing it subtly. Those with diabetes wanted a membership like everybody else, in which they were simply treated in a slightly different way. Similarly, it wouldn't be appropriate to launch cancer memberships – it's more about handling individuals respectfully and appropriately.

"So we have relationships with Diabetes UK, Macmillan and Great Ormond Street, and we're very proud of the things we're doing with those organisations."

national reach

And how about coming out of public sector leisure centre operation, handing over the management of these centres to GLL (see *HCM* Aug 11, p30)? Kerby says: "These centres weren't core to our proposition, but given our focus on the broader public health agenda, we wanted to offer GLL the opportunity to

continue to use our capabilities" – Nuffield reserves the right to run clinical services through the 15 centres handed over to GLL, and both sides envisage a time when this might be rolled out to the remainder of the GLL estate.

Says Kerby: "It gives us an opportunity for additional network – we're not national in terms of coverage yet and we're very keen to get there, either through partnership or potentially acquisition in the future. We have a number of conversations going on, but nothing concrete as yet.

"We also have a strong eye on technological developments, because fitness is going to become all about smartphone tracking – looking at the whole picture rather than just what someone's doing in a specific fitness facility on a specific piece of equipment. That technology gives Nuffield the opportunity to have a more national product outside of a physical platform, and that's very exciting.

"All in all, I think we've made significant progress over the last two years. We've built the clinics, we've really got the Health MOT going, we have great outcome data, we've launched what I think is a market-defining weight management programme, and we've started to look at platinum membership and bundling packages for customers who want fitness and wellbeing and a more holistic view. But as I say, we're part of the fitness industry; if people want to come to Nuffield Health just for fitness, that's absolutely fine."



kate cracknell
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Kate Cracknell pays a visit
to the new Stars Gym in
Battersea, south London

a star is born

Can a martial arts club ever be mainstream? The answer, if new independent Stars Gym in London is anything to go by, is yes – if the right balance is struck.

Director and general manager Richard Coates explains: “If you’re exclusively a martial arts club, it needs to be raw – a fighters’ gym in a warehouse-style building, with basic kit. But it’s hard to make that pay nowadays, especially in a location like ours. We do have a serious martial arts offering, and can cater for everyone up to champion level, but we want to bring it to the masses and we

cater for beginners too. Also, while we focus on martial arts, we offer much more besides.”

He continues: “There are four elements to our offering, with martial arts being one. We also have strength and conditioning, including a sports-specific focus for those who want it – golf, cycling, mountaineering and so on. Wellness encompasses beauty treatments, nutrition, life coaching and physiotherapy. And we have CV fitness.”

Nonetheless, martial arts very much lies at the heart of the Stars concept. While seasoned exercisers will no doubt get an immediate buzz from the energetic environment, non-gym users who walk in and immediately see a boxing ring and dojo – albeit in a nicely designed club – could feel intimidated and put off joining. Would Coates agree? “We very much welcome and cater for everyone, and we do have some total beginners among our members, some of whom have chosen us thanks to our

proximity and convenience – there are 5,000 office workers within half a mile of our club, and we’re also located in a prime residential area. However, people joining a gym for the first time will often tend to choose a cheaper option.”

accessible quality

At £100 a month, or £1,000 a year, there will indeed be cheaper options than Stars Gym. But then again, how many clubs offer classes run by World Champion athletes? I tried a Kick & Thai Boxing session while I was there, run by Mati Parks – former British, European and World Thai Boxing Champion – and have to say it was one of the best classes I’ve done in years. And Parks is just one of a number of resident instructors who have competed – or still compete – in their sport at a national level.

Stars is also flexible with its packages: if you can’t afford £100 a month, you can pay a £50 joining fee for life and then buy ‘pay as you go’ packages of 10 day passes that work out at £12 a day. “We’ll also try to do a deal for any young people who are into sports but can’t afford our fees,” says Coates. “We’re



Stars Gym is located in a former art gallery by the side of the Thames



Stars Gym offers a large sprung-floored dojo with punch bags. There's also a cardio area, boxing ring and martial arts Hexagon

already working with local schools to offer kids' judo, but we'd like to set up a full scholarship scheme."

And even those who pay for a year upfront aren't tied in: membership can be cancelled with 30 days' notice, with any unused months paid back to the member pro rata. "Why should we let people over a barrel?" asks Coates. "It takes nothing in terms of effort on our part to cancel a membership."

Stars Gym opened on 6 June; three months later it had 120 annual members and 60 'pay as you go' clients, with a target of just over 1,000. Services such as beauty and physiotherapy – the latter offered in partnership with Pure Sports Medicine – are also open to non-members; members receive a discount.

maximising space

Occupying a great location beside the Thames in Battersea, south London, Stars Gym was created within a former art gallery, with the team working

closely with architect Amir Sanei of Sanei Hopkins on a total site redesign and re-fit.

Located in a glass-walled development – Albion Riverside – the gym enjoys lots of natural daylight, which the design of the gym has maximised.

Although not a huge footprint – around 740sq m (8,000sq ft) including a mezzanine level – the club feels much larger, in part thanks to double-height ceilings and mirrors covering the full height of any exposed walls. The two studios and the dojo run the length of the outside wall, but the dojo is open-fronted and the studios only separated from the gym by a frosted glass wall. This maintains the flow of daylight and ensures the spaces feel part of, rather than eating into, the overall floorspace. There's also a clean, modern colour scheme throughout – white, silver, grey – which further ensures the sense of space is maintained.

Straight ahead as you come through the door is reception – and what a

joy. Without knowing who I was (the journalist tag had not preceded me), I was simultaneously greeted by both the receptionist and an instructor. "Customer service is so often lacking in the fitness industry," says Coates. "We won't tolerate that. Manners are everything, starting with a smile. In fact, we ask on our sign-up form why people chose to join, and one person actually wrote: 'Because I was standing outside and I saw your receptionist smile at me.' That's the sort of feedback we want.

"Our core philosophy is to put quality back into the sector. It's all about creating an experience (see p44), not just delivering a product, and we've developed bespoke training for all our staff. They need to be engaged with the members. Someone might ask how to use a piece of equipment, for example, and the instructor will end up working out with them for a while. If it's quiet, we also allow staff to work out during working hours – it's in our interest for them to be fit."

Returning to the layout of the open-plan gym, to the right of reception is a modestly sized Life Fitness strength



**"WITH A START-UP, YOU REALLY HAVE
TO LIVE AND BREATHE YOUR OFFER
TO ATTRACT AND KEEP MEMBERS"**



► training area – cables, free weights and plate-loaded stations rather than selectorised machines. The studios – one for pilates, yoga and conditioning sessions, the other a Keiser group cycling studio – are also to the right, and can be opened up to create one big studio. To the left, a 5x5m Protec boxing ring, battling ropes and tyre hammer sit alongside the 80sq m, sprung-floored dojo, which features punch bags all around the edges.

Clean, modern changing rooms – kitted out by Kemmlit and Ojmar – and the physio/beauty treatment room are behind the far wall of the gym, with additional smaller lockers on the gym floor for anyone not requiring full changing facilities. Beauty treatments are by Dermalogica and Essie Nails.

A spiral stairway then leads up to the mezzanine floor, which looks down over the gym and houses a martial arts Hexagon by Protec, a heavier Life Fitness resistance area and a CV floor featuring a wide range of equipment. "We wanted to offer something a bit different," explains Coates. So while the Concept2 rowers and Life Fitness CV kit are fairly standard, the gym also offers three Wattbikes, a Power Plate, a Versaclimber, a Marpo Kinetics grappling machine and a Freedom Climber from Revolutionary Products.

staffing matters

Originally the brainchild of Parks, Coates came onboard to bring business expertise and financial backing to the

Stars project; the multi-million pound club is all self-financed. There are now five directors, "all of whom are passionate about sport and want to share that enthusiasm with the members," says Coates who, an endurance sport athlete himself, leads the club's running sessions in neighbouring Battersea Park. "With a start-up, and particularly in this economic climate, you have to really live and breathe your offer to attract and keep members," he adds.

Perhaps testament to this enthusiasm is the fact that the gym has already been approached by *Men's Health* magazine to be the London sponsor of its 'Survival of the Fittest' challenge in November. "It's a big compliment for a small brand like us," says Coates.

Stars employs 10 staff in a shift pattern, alongside therapists and nutritionists working as contractors and personal trainers who – rather than paying rent – are called in only when needed and paid a set fee per session. "We could cover a lot of running costs by renting out space, but we don't feel that's a good way to go about it," says Coates. "We don't want an atmosphere where PTs fight over clients."

One-to-one personal training costs £65–£85 an hour, depending on the profile of the trainer, and 15–20 per cent of members have already taken it up; Coates now aims to grow this

**There are 50 classes
on the club timetable –
everything from pilates
and group cycling to circuit
training in the local park**

significantly. Small group personal training is also available: "If four participants split the £100 cost between them, training with a world champion becomes very affordable," he says.

The timetable offers a 50 classes a week – everything from pilates to circuit training in the park. Stars does not run Les Mills-type sessions, instead offering its instructors the freedom to use their own expertise in designing and varying the format. All martial arts training is run as PT or classes, with no more than 12 to 15 participants per session to maintain quality.

replicated roll-out

So will there be more Stars Gyms? "In year one, we have to test the business model and see if it works," says Coates. "If it does, we'll look to open more sites in London, but only if we're confident we can repeat it to the same high standards. Opening one gym is hard; replicating that without diluting the brand is even harder, and a lot of brands in the fitness industry fall foul of that."

"Assuming we do roll out, we want to take our staff with us – our receptionist now might end up as HR director, for example. Ultimately, it's people who make your business a success."



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BRANCHING OUT

Kate Cracknell reports on
the opportunity for
operators to enter the
arena of training provision

“We’re fed up with the multiplicity of providers and qualifications that exist in the fitness industry,” says Mark Sesnan, MD of GLL, by way of explaining the need for the new SPELG (Skills Protocol Employer Leadership Group) project – an initiative that will help ensure employers have more say on the type, and content, of qualifications in the sector.

“SPELG comprises a group of eight chief executive level persons – two each from the FIA, sports (trusts), the private sector, and CLOA (public sector) – plus an independent chair. It isn’t just about training – it’s the first time we’ve all worked together and it’s working well, looking at changing the way the industry protects itself. But when it comes to training, historically it’s been a mess, and we are determined to bring order. We’ve been working together quietly over the last 18 months to try and make sense of it all.

“At the moment, for example, kids who go into college are given the impression that they’re being trained for a job in the leisure industry, but when they come out at the end of their course, we have to retrain them – the leisure management courses they’ve done don’t actually contain any components of leisure management!

“We need a single qualification structure – a system for everything

and everyone who provides training. Hopefully we’ll end up with a Chartered Institute, and everyone who works in the sector will hold a skills passport.

“It’s a journey, and we’re not quite sure how we’re going to get there, but we do have to agree on the destination. Employers have to stick together, irrespective of any competitive differences, to make sure that we get this single structure. It might take two

MBODIES ACADEMY

The new pilates-focused Mbodies Academy is part of a dual-purpose public use/training facility in Oxfordshire, and will also deliver training in hosting centres around the UK.

The new training arm was developed in response to a perceived need for education beyond Pilates Level 3 to effectively work with special populations. It therefore delivers not only traditional pilates equipment qualifications, but also specialist, evidence-based education for pilates work with people with specific medical conditions.

“We believe that pilates principles offer a better foundation for the teaching of all populations than traditional exercise principles do, and therefore these principles underpin all of our teaching,” says Mbodies director Chris Onslow.

“Our training will go way beyond government standards at Level 2, 3 or 4, with much deeper content and more contact time with course instructors: it’s not just about meeting standards but about taking an approach that allows our graduates to be creative and effective.

“It’s easy for training providers who are not operators to become interested only in meeting the standards set by

REPs and industry regulators, because they don’t have the relationship with the end user. However, while this may guarantee training at a consistently good standard, it’s easy for that training not to be exceptional.

“While I welcome the SPELG initiative as a framework geared towards making the industry more responsive to customer needs, I hope we will see those involved in setting standards stretching the expectations of knowledge and ability outside the comfort levels found in our existing standards for PTs, pilates instructors and group exercise teachers.”

SPIRIT TRAINING

In 2009, Spirit became the only health club operator to be awarded the status of National Skills Academy (NSA) provider, with access to government funding to deliver apprenticeship programmes. In 2010, it began supporting the NSA to deliver gym instructor qualifications to young people gaining work experience on the Future Jobs Fund.

Spirit currently has four UK-based Centres of Excellence from which it delivers training to both internal and external candidates. "Spirit employs close to 300 employees, all of who receive continual training. In addition, we have delivered training to around 350 external candidates so far this year," says Mark Mantell, health and fitness operations manager UK & Ireland. "All our qualifications are accredited by awarding organisations and recognised across the industry."

"Our training caters for the full spectrum of candidates – from entry level to experienced professionals looking to move into personal training, management or develop a speciality – and we offer the full range of fitness qualifications up to Level 3, statutory training including Lifeguard and First

Aid, through to a fully accredited Leisure Management certificate.


"Operators are, in theory, better positioned to gain first-hand insight into the changing needs of a busy health club operation, and to evolve their training provision accordingly – all our training has been formulated from, and adapts to, real and practical needs."

"It's also possible to offset internal training costs through external revenue generation and even achieve a cost-neutral model: Spirit achieved this within the first 12 months."

"In addition, the benefit for operators of becoming training providers is that the training resource is readily available: it can be mobilised at any time if there's an internal training need."

"However, as a club operator, the provision of training is not our primary or core business. Our philosophy is therefore about quality delivery within a self-funding model, rather than a 'for profit'-only operation."

He concludes with a word of caution: "If you are fully reliant on government-funded training, this could be a potential risk if government policy changes in this area."



Spirit currently has four UK-based Centres of Excellence from which it delivers training

years, it might take five, but eventually you won't get an interview for a job in leisure, sport, health and fitness unless you have a passport containing all your qualifications.

"Everyone will know exactly what their training plan is and there'll be a standard

set of qualifications across the industry – and an open, competitive marketplace for training providers."

Neil King, commercial director of Everyone Active, adds: "Four or five years ago, I don't think many operators had really got to grips with the skills agenda, and fortunately the training providers picked up the baton and ran with it. But I think employers are now realising what their role should be in the process and SPELG has come into its own, looking at the bigger picture from an employers' point of view."

AN OPEN MARKETPLACE

Sesnan is clearly not alone in his observations regarding the shortfalls of certain qualifications, and many operators will no doubt already be experienced in training their staff – not only in their company's ethos and way of doing things, but at times even in the fundamentals of working in the leisure sector. Might this go a step further with the advent of an "open, competitive marketplace", with operators branching more overtly into full-scale training provision?

In fact, there are already a number of operators with a training arm that goes well beyond CPD, delivering a full range


of industry qualifications (see information boxes above, left and p43). GLL is among these, with its London Leisure College – a National Skills Academy Centre of Excellence for leisure operations, which is involved in initiatives such as Routes to Work for school leavers, as well as schemes for Jobcentre Plus.

"Whether it's private training companies or employer training companies, it doesn't matter, as long as they're all working to the same rigorous, accredited standards," says Sesnan, acknowledging that some operators may start out on this path in co-operation with a specialist training provider.

OPERATOR PERSPECTIVE

So what makes operators good training providers, and what – aside from the obvious revenue potential of offering qualifications to external candidates – are the benefits to operators of developing their own training arm?

Gary Lee, sector support manager for SkillsActive, explains: "Employers drive the vocational skills agenda. They have the best understanding of the skills, knowledge and competencies their businesses need. They are therefore best placed to shape and prioritise the training their staff receive."



Mbodies says its pilates-based courses go beyond government standards



- “Employers can tailor the content of courses to reflect the real world operational pressures and balance learners’ study time with on-the-job training. Using a training provider or a mentor with sector experience also adds value to the training.”

He continues: “The consistent message SkillsActive receives from employers is the need to improve the ‘soft’ skills of both new entrants and those already working in the sector.

“Much of the training for key roles rightly concentrates on statutory and health and safety requirements, or the technical aspects of service provision. While this training meets the needs of delivering a safe and effective workforce, it’s the personal experience of the customer that the operators are striving to improve.

“Central to this is the way employees interact with customers – especially their communication and listening skills.

This can only be effectively taught and improved in the working environment with real customers, and this is where operators can add particular value to the learning process.

“In addition, funding for training is increasingly being channelled to providers who can demonstrate a positive impact on their learners’ employability. Operators are therefore in a great position to capitalise on their natural advantage when it comes to delivering training.”

Debra Stuart, CEO of Active IQ, adds: “Offering employers the chance to take control of the delivery of funded training means they can tailor the training to meet the specific needs of both the employees and the business, as well as boosting the budget that is allocated to training by removing the need to outsource.

“Active IQ provides a wide range of vocational qualifications and can

offer help and guidance to employers who are interested in delivering their own training. Alternatively, if employers already have their own in-house training that matches National Occupational Standards, we can accredit this, allowing them to deliver their own branded, nationally recognised qualifications. A successful example of this is Spirit Health Clubs (see p41), which worked together with Active IQ to accredit its own in-house leisure management qualification.

“We’ve seen some great success stories working with employers who’ve taken a ‘bull by the horns’ approach and accessed government funding to boost their own training budget: this has allowed them to deliver training that supports the business objectives.”

WAY OF THE FUTURE

These are interesting times, and perhaps more operators will in future be taking



The Soho Academy enables new recruits to train alongside qualified fitness professionals

SOHO ACADEMY

The Soho Academy was set up by Soho Gyms in autumn 2009.

Academy manager Rebecca Weissbort explains: "We saw a gap in the market to train new fitness professionals alongside qualified fitness professionals in a gym environment. We were unhappy with some of the skill sets we observed when recruiting PTs and instructors – courses were too basic and didn't prepare people for the real world. We felt we could do better in preparing people for the real fitness environment."

"Training and mentoring students on the gym floor itself, alongside real PTs and with work experience integrated into the training, means they are able to fully understand and apply their learning to real situations/clients. We aim to produce quality PTs, not just qualified PTs."

All students also receive a free membership to Soho Gyms, to enable them to fully immerse themselves in the environment.

The academy – which is accredited by CYQ – caters for everyone, including external candidates, with top performers often recruited by Soho Gyms; the academy therefore provides a steady stream of potential employees who Soho Gyms knows will be able to meet its own high standards, and in whom the Soho Gyms brand ethos is already instilled.

Nevertheless, it is also open to training other operators' staff, as Weissbort explains: "Our courses run over the weekends and only on the occasional weekday – perfect for operators who want to send staff, or for those people who wish to study on a flexible schedule."

Weissbort concludes: "Operators are the biggest employer of fitness professionals, and it's in their interest to have better qualified staff. I believe it therefore makes sense for them to be part of the training solution. The government should support employers in achieving this."



up the mantle. SPELG's requirement for every employee to have a training plan, and for employers to have a planned approach to delivering the training required by their entire workforce, could contribute to this.

"If an operator can be part of the delivery solution, rather than relying solely on indirectly funded or bought-in provision, meeting these obligations will be easier," says Lee.

But as Sesnan explains, there will be space within an open marketplace for any organisation that is able to deliver "the right training, at the right level, and at the right cost"; operators may increasingly venture into the training arena, but specialist training providers will still have a role to play.

Martin McKenzie of Fight Fit observes: "If operators have the time, resources and focus to provide standards of training that match leading specialist training providers, I don't

see an issue in them entering this area. However, in the current climate, sticking to core business and looking at fresh ways to improve the existing offer may well prove to be the best way forward for many operators.

"It has been demonstrated time and time again that organisations which stick to their core business and constantly look at ways to refresh and improve their offering will, in general, find themselves in a much stronger position than those organisations that diversify too much and then find themselves unable to give the new ventures the attention they need.

"Working with a training provider that understands the clubs' outcomes and objectives, and that is able to personalise the elements of the training to incorporate the operators' philosophies, in my opinion, gives a stronger product to members."

Denise Page, director of YMCAfit, concludes: "The right balance is important: if operators existed without independent training providers, this could result in a lack of variety in training provision."



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ARE YOU EXPERIENCED?

Stuart Dyson investigates how the rise of experience management is leaving traditional member retention activities behind

In 2000, The Fitness Industry Association (FIA) published its groundbreaking report, *Winning the Retention Battle*. Since then, according to the FIA's 2008 *National Retention Report*, these findings have been put to good use: overall, around 66 per cent of members have retained their membership for at least 12 months, compared with 61 per cent in 2000. What's more, the median membership lifetime has increased from 9.5 months in 2000 to 16.7 months in 2007.

However, these measurements tend to focus on rational and analytical 'left brain' information, with little consideration for the emotional aspects of customer experience, satisfaction and loyalty. We absolutely need to monitor our progress, but acting on numbers alone can create a sharp mismatch between the organisation's approach to customer expectations and what customers actually want, often resulting in the failure of retention initiatives.

The largely subconscious aspects of an experience that stimulate emotions

and stir the senses play a tremendously important part in customer satisfaction and subsequent behaviour: there's no question that talking to members more regularly – the most commonly touted strategy – can have a positive impact on retention, but surely we can do better than this? We need to counterbalance 'left brain' measurement with 'right brain' creativity to drive a genuinely member-focused retention strategy.

However, at the present time it would appear that few leisure operators factor this customer-centric thinking into their operations, and even fewer know how to go about it.

FROM CRM TO CEM

Traditionally, member retention – and indeed customer retention across most industries – has fallen into the domain of Customer Relationship Management (CRM), consisting of various planned cycles of contact to ensure members are 'on track' and not in danger of attrition. Those identified as 'at risk' receive an even more intense round of



Median lifetime membership across the sector rose from 9.5 to 16.7 months between 2000 and 2007

contact to 'recover' the member and move them out of the at-risk zone. Operators may even pay a company to do this on their behalf.

But designing compelling experiences requires a different set of skills – the application of creative 'right brain' thinking that focuses on the member's point of view, stripping away any internal systems or attitudes that conflict with this. Now known as Customer Experience Management (CEM), its



promoters argue that designing great customer experiences delivers loyalty and improved retention as a natural consequence of happy customers – as this quote from the 1994 *Harvard Business Review* explains: “Profit and growth are stimulated primarily by customer loyalty. Loyalty is a direct result of customer satisfaction. Satisfaction is largely influenced by the value of services provided to customers.” (Alan Dick and Kunal Basu).

In their seminal book, *The Experience Economy*, authors Joseph Pine and James Gilmore maintain that competing on product and service alone is no longer enough, as greater efficiencies and economies of scale are leading to widespread commoditisation of service, with little opportunity for profitable differentiation. For example, if a budget club differentiates itself primarily on price, what happens when the next budget club opens down the road?

Research has also shown that only 50 per cent of customer experience derives from the physical performance of an organisation – facilities and price, for example (Colin Shaw and John Ivens, for their 2002 book *Building Great Customer Experiences*). While it's true that customers will always want 'better and cheaper', it's not the full story: Jones and Sasser pointed out in their 1995 *Harvard Business Review* paper that rationally satisfied customers can defect just the same as dissatisfied customers.

In their book, Pine and Gilmore explain how a typical service business will charge for the activities it performs, while an experience business charges for the good feelings customers get when engaging with it. They also go on to outline a final stage based on customers paying for the level of 'transformation' benefits provided by the service. Personal trainers take note.

LEARNING FROM APPLE

Many businesses, large and small, have been quick to understand and adopt CEM; its adoption has proved particularly beneficial for traditional experience-based businesses such as hotels and attractions. However, there have also been stunning successes among more unlikely businesses, with Apple being the most notable example. To witness the power of experience design, walk into any Apple Store and look around. Here are a few highlights:

DECOR – Ron Johnson, the man behind the Apple Store design, described the physical layout of the store as “inviting, approachable, warm, interactive and intelligent”. The clever use of natural materials such as stone, wood, glass and stainless steel bring to mind a hip boutique hotel – indeed, much of the initial research was based on looking at what the best hotels and ‘hip’ museums do in their public areas.

ATMOSPHERE – The Apple Store was one of the first chains to have fully

Lessons to learn: Apple Stores are a stunning success story in customer experience management

connected computers on display. Customers could come in and check their email and browse the internet for as long as they liked. This was an inspired move, as it let customers interact with Apple's hardware and software and created that all-important buzz that draws in even more people. In fact, the stores often resemble more of a cool hangout than a retail unit.

STAFF – You may be surprised to learn that Apple retail employees aren't paid commission at all. This is to ensure that their focus is on promoting the 'Apple experience' rather than high-pressure sales tactics. All store staff are avid Apple fans and have an almost tribal affinity with the brand, showing great pride in their Apple lanyard and T-shirt. In addition, while most retailers are reducing their staffing to an absolute minimum, Apple is intent on investing even greater resources in front-line staff: it believes good facilities will only get you so far, with people the key.

BUYING NOT SELLING – The Apple Store may not look much like a typical shop – a distinct absence of POS terminals (cash registers), for example – but don't be deceived: the process for extracting money from customers has been honed to a fine art. Rather than ▶

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retention series

LA Fitness revisited its member experience after finding that staff typically only spent 13 per cent of their time on customer service

- ▶ focusing on sales, the Apple ethos is to help people to buy – so much so that it designed its own POS software and hardware to support the experience. As staff walk the floor they can provide assistance but, crucially, their modified iPod Touches can process the sale, read a credit card and capture a signature on the spot. Want a receipt? No problem, it's emailed straight to your inbox.

SERVICE – Another major factor for the Apple Store experience is the level of engagement with customers. With technicians working behind the Genius Bar ministering to customers' ailing iPods, MacBooks and iPhones, and with designated 'personal trainers' giving one-to-one instruction and leading workshops, the store is much more than place to 'buy stuff'. The aim is to build a lifetime customer relationship, with the store as the hub for all things Apple.

One final word of caution regarding the Apple experience is the sheer effort and attention to detail involved in its creation. Prior to the launch of the first store, a full-size mock-up was built in a secret warehouse; only then did they realise they had it completely wrong and set about making the necessary changes before even building their first store. In other words, making great experiences requires creativity and hard work, plus exceptional execution skills.

THE FITNESS SECTOR

So what relevance does this have for health club operators? While it's a tall order for any organisation to trump Apple, brands no longer compete solely against the companies in their immediate industry. Customer experience leaders like Apple, Starbucks and Lego delight their customers on a daily basis. These great customer experiences, in turn, continually reset people's expectations for the types of interactions they believe they should be able to have with organisations such as yours.

Could the adoption of customer experience design also transform



retention levels in the fitness industry? LA Fitness, for one, seems to think so: Arthur McColl, chief operating officer, explains how the introduction of the new LA Experience has provided a much improved customer focus to all areas of operation: "It felt to me that we needed to get back to basics, as I believed there was too little focus on members and too much 'operational noise'. The research we undertook seemed to confirm this, as we discovered that only around 13 per cent of a typical member of staff's time was devoted to customer service.

"Since then, we've invested heavily in the usual operational aspects of the business such as cleanliness, better resource scheduling and so on, but we've invested the most in creating the best possible experience for members.

"In the past, the LA member experience lacked structure. It was inconsistently staffed and it suffered

Customer experience leaders
like Apple and Lego delight their
customers on a daily basis



from too much paperwork. Now our member journey is clearer, we have an interaction toolkit and we're able to measure the key metrics. It's still early days but I feel that, by putting the customer back at the heart of everything we do, LA Fitness stands a real chance of reaping the rewards from enhanced customer experience."

However, although the beginnings of experience design initiatives seem to be stirring in the industry, as a whole we still appear to be reliant on scientific-style metrics (retention/attrition) that encourage inward-looking behaviour, as opposed to more customer-focused metrics that measure quality of experience, satisfaction and loyalty.

DRIVING RETENTION

We all know that bad experiences travel faster and further than good ones, and that correcting the impact of a bad experience is time-consuming and expensive, so it's vitally important to consistently deliver the best possible personalised experience, measure its effectiveness and rapidly feed that back into positive operational change.

In many ways, Customer Experience Management and Design are arriving just

at the right time for the fitness industry as we wrestle with the 'retention problem'. Designing experiences that deliver the right combination of acknowledgement, recognition and personal engagement, plus the subtle touches that make members feel valued, will generate the sort of warm feelings that inevitably lead to satisfied, loyal customers and retention levels previously unseen in the fitness industry.

In the next article, we'll take a look at some simple design tools and methods that can help you to become adept at experience and transformation design, delivery and measurement.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stuart Dyson is the founder and former managing director of SDA Solutions. His new project, bodybook.com, is designed for people of all ages to have fun, get fit and do some good at the same time. <http://uk.linkedin.com/in/stuardyson>



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There's much to be said for pitching to retirees: they're reliable, use cash and are available at off-peak times. Kath Hudson looks at some inspiring health initiatives for the older generation

active ageing



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/ANDREW

A dult activity levels tend to drop from the age of 45 onwards across the UK. However, engaging older populations is more important than ever, with evidence showing how physical activity can help prevent and manage a broad range of conditions associated with older age groups. Indeed, the recent CMO report – with its physical activity recommendations – included the importance of strength training among older people for ongoing health.

Tone's Flexercise programme has been shown to help improve mobility, alertness and mood among older people

But is the health and fitness industry doing enough to engage with these groups? With the 50+ market spanning a huge range of ages, should it be further segmented – the over-80s, for example, becoming a new target audience? And do more outreach programmes need to be created to reach those people intimidated by gyms, or who can't physically get to them?

We take a look at a selection of health and fitness initiatives for older people.

TONE

As part of its remit to get local people active, Somerset-based social enterprise and charitable trust Tone has started taking fitness into old people's homes

with an exercise programme, Flexercise, that's been developed specifically for this purpose. Groups of around 12 people sit on chairs, in a circle, to do activities that include stretching exercises with Thera-Bands, as well as playing games of catch.

"It keeps older people supple, helps prevent mobility problems, works the joints and improves the mood. Most importantly, it's fun," says Louise Bulmer, Tone's officer for Active Lifestyles – a scheme to promote healthy living and activity across the Taunton Deane area.

Since April 2010, Tone has trained 19 people, in 14 centres, to carry out the classes; Bulmer estimates that the programme is now being offered in 40 residential homes across the county. Feedback has shown that participants enjoy greater mobility, enjoyment, improved mental alertness and mood, are more engaged with lifestyle, are more active on a daily basis and become more socially active with other members of the group.

Tone is also running seated sports sessions in community halls and at Somerset County Council's Active Living centres, for players aged between 70 and 100. Seated badminton and football already have quite a following, and seated hockey is a new addition. Bulmer came up with the idea: "Football may not seem the most obvious choice for a ▶





Everyone Active's over-50s walking groups have proved popular (left). Bob Halls (below) won a FLAME award for his community work



"OUR CLASSES THAT APPEAL TO OLDER PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS AT LEAST 70 PER CENT FULL, AND OFTEN 100 PER CENT"

► seated sport, but with a bit of creativity it works really well and has proved very popular. The participants develop their teamwork skills as well as their cardiovascular fitness and co-ordination. It also introduces light strength training in their arms and legs."

A postural stability class is also now being run in two homes, which uses balancing and resistance exercises to work on muscles that are prone to wastage, thereby reducing the risk of falling. Those who can lie on the floor are taught ways of getting themselves up if they fall. Also coming soon is a singing class, with accompanying movements to improve hand-eye co-ordination.

EVERYONE ACTIVE

Leisure operator Everyone Active runs a variety of classes for those aged 50+ across its centres, with walking groups proving a real hit. These sessions typically attract up to 40 participants and often inspire people to volunteer their time to set up additional walking groups. "Our classes that appeal to older people are always at least 70 per cent full, and often 100 per cent," says group exercise manager Michelle Bletso. "People like the social element."

She continues: "Completion rates on exercise referral schemes are also much higher among adults over the age of 50 than with younger age groups, and they commonly continue with exercise after. Not only that, but the majority of our cash comes from the older age group because they prefer to pay and play."

Bletso thinks the marketing approach needs to change across the whole

industry: "We don't see enough of the 'silver surfers' in our marketing, and also we need to start recruiting older instructors. Mature people feel more comfortable and unintimidated when the age of their instructor is more in keeping with their own."

Everyone Active is very proud of its Future of FLAME award winner, Bob Halls, from the Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre – a shining example of how a more mature instructor can inspire others. A retired police inspector, Halls then started a second career in fitness. Under the umbrella of Everyone Active, he set up a cardiac rehabilitation scheme to which over 100 clients have been referred from local hospitals and GPs, as well as working voluntarily as a health walk trainer for the Walk for Health initiative – including training over 250 walk leaders. He takes a

number of weekly classes aimed at seniors, which have proved very popular due to the great social atmosphere he creates. He has also expanded this into outreach classes for older people, held in sheltered accommodation and local community centres.

REDHOLME CARE HOME

Technogym is actively trying to find ways of reaching out to, and improving the health of, elderly people. Its Easy Line equipment range is said to be ideal for this purpose, since the range uses a low level of technology and a hydraulic system, meaning there are no large weight stacks.

At Redholme, a residential care home in Liverpool for people suffering from dementia, the use of a Technogym gym resulted in a 20 per cent reduction in

Redholme residential care home installed Technogym's Easy Line and saw a 20 per cent reduction in falls in nine months



falls in nine months. With falls often necessitating hip operations – which cost up to £30,000 – this starts to present a compelling case to the NHS.

"What Technogym is trying to do is bring about behavioural change by taking equipment outside of traditional fitness settings, which is why we are focusing on care homes," says Mark Jones, medical and health business manager for Technogym.

Jones admits putting gyms into residential homes is not an easy sell, but Redholme has found exercise helpful in looking after its residents. Indeed, as well as a reduction in falls, Redholme has reported that residents have found it easier to eat and sleep, and there has also been a reduction in medication, including anti-psychotic drugs.

According to matron Anne McCann:

"Older people with dementia are at the bottom of the list when it comes to funding and inclusion. We wanted to look at a creative way to enhance the quality of life for the residents in our care and promote active lifestyles. Residents who are agitated and aggressive are taken to the gym – a workout reduces the level of aggression and we've also found that people have been more compliant with medications and nursing interventions."

CENTRAL YMCA

The Community Activator programme was started by Central YMCA with a Big Lottery Fund grant. According to Robin Gargrave, director of innovation and development at Central YMCA, it was founded on the belief that generally the best people to support behaviour change are not sport and health development workers who are parachuted into neighbourhoods, but people who are embedded in and trusted by the community. In other words, "people like them".

This scheme takes volunteers who have good interpersonal skills and who are interested in health and fitness – without being health and



Central YMCA's Community Activator scheme has great benefits for older people, not least offering company to those who live alone

fitness instructors – and gives them the skills and knowledge they need to bring about behaviour change in people. Following their training, these 'community activators' go out into the community and set up fitness initiatives such as guided walks, as well as dancing, stretching and circuit-style classes in venues such as community halls and offices – anywhere people in the community feel comfortable going.

While the scheme targets all ages, the benefits for older people are clear: those who have taken part in the activities and walks have said they do so to get out of the house, for the company (many live alone) and for the health benefits, as they fear becoming immobile and housebound.

In January, Central YMCA is partnering with Bristol and Bath Universities in a programme called the ACE Project – a controlled study in 12 wards in Bristol. Six wards will have intervention schemes set up; six won't.



It's aimed at the 75+ age group, with community activators trained in the requirements of older people.

The activators will lead physical activity sessions, promote physical activity to the older community, support behaviour change and signpost older adults to physical activity opportunities. Working with sedentary men and women aged 65 to 85 in a community setting, including residential care environments, the two-year project will evaluate participation rates and adherence to physical activity, along with health outcomes.



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research round-up

A Swedish study shows that regular exercise is just as effective as drugs or relaxation therapy in treating migraines

making headway

“This non-pharmacological approach [physical activity] may be an option for the prophylactic [preventative] treatment of migraine in patients who do not benefit from or do not want daily medication,” wrote Dr Emma Varkey, lead author in a Swedish study published in the journal *Cephalalgia* in October.*

The aim of the research was to evaluate the effect of exercise in warding off migraine – a chronic neurological disorder characterised by moderate to severe headaches and nausea, which affects 10 per cent of people worldwide.

Doctors use a variety of methods to prevent migraines, including topiramate – an anti-epilepsy drug – and relaxation exercises. While exercise is also prescribed, there has not previously been sufficient evidence that it works.

three-month study

Conducted by scientists at the University of Gothenburg, the randomised trial was based on 91 migraine patients. The patients were all women – the disorder is more prominent in females – from a headache clinic. Aged 18–65, they got headaches between two and eight times a month.

The women were split into three groups. One-third were prescribed a daily dose of topiramate, which was slowly increased to the individual's highest tolerable level (with a maximum of 200mg a day), while another third carried out relaxation exercises according to a recorded programme. The final group of women were asked to exercise on a static bike for 40 minutes, three times a week, under the supervision of a physiotherapist.

The study lasted for three months in total and over this time the patients'



Migraine is more prominent in females, and doctors treat it in various ways

migraine status, quality of life, aerobic capacity and level of physical activity were evaluated before, during and after their treatment.

surprising results

The results show that migraine attacks decreased by approximately 75 per cent across all three groups and that there was no significant difference between them.

Commenting to *Reuters Health*, Dr Varkey said: "Topiramate is a drug of first choice that's shown great effects in studies. It was a bit surprising and very interesting that the change in the number of migraine attacks was similar in all three groups.

"The only parameter where topiramate was better than exercise and relaxation was the reduction of pain intensity. On the other hand, the non-pharmacological

options were free from adverse events and the exercise group increased oxygen uptake, which is very positive."

While women in the exercise and relaxation groups had no issues, eight women who took topiramate had side-effects – such as tingling, fatigue, depression, vertigo and constipation – and three dropped out as a result.

Varkey told *Reuters Health*: "From a wider health-based perspective, it should be stressed that patients with migraine are less physically active than the general population, and that exercise has positive effects in terms of general wellbeing and the prevention of disease.

"Additional and larger studies are, of course, need to verify our results and to gain evidence for exercise as migraine treatment, but our results are hopeful."

* Varkey, E et al. Exercise as migraine prophylaxis: A randomized study using relaxation and topiramate as controls. *Cephalalgia*. Vol 31, no 14, 1428–1438, Oct 2011

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LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Darren Weiss investigates ways in which geolocation technology can help equipment manufacturers boost their bottom line

Since the first GPS units hit the consumer markets in the late 1990s, people have been fascinated with the concept that a tiny device in your car or your phone can sync to a satellite miles above the earth and determine your location within feet, all in the blink of an eye. In recent years, satellite tracking has gone a step further with geolocation, which uses GPS data to assess location and provides numerous dynamic capabilities.

As is the case with most new technologies, geolocation reached the consumer market first. Location-based social services like Foursquare, Loopt and Gowalla rely on geolocation, and massive companies like Google and Facebook employ the technology for some of their services as well.

But shouldn't such an innovative technology be used in more transformative ways than finding out the

best restaurant in the West End? Couldn't it be used by companies to drastically change how their workforce operates? The answer is yes – and it already is.

driving service quality

Like their brethren in nearly all service industries, health club equipment service technicians have been stuck in the dark ages of technology for a long time, only recently dropping their clipboards, pens and Post-Its in favour of iPhones and tablets. But these new devices, with their state-of-the-art geolocation software, offer capabilities – delivering work orders on the go, real-time access to inventory, re-routing based on scheduling – that have a direct impact on a company's bottom line and help improve efficiency and quality of service to their clients.

Today, a number of health club equipment manufacturers are actively using geolocation to optimise their entire service operation, from vehicle tracking and route guidance to real-time mobile communications and ordering spare parts on the fly, and the results have been impressive.

Precor, a fitness equipment manufacturer that sells its equipment all over the world, is a great example of a business that's taking advantage of geolocation. Precor's UK operation has a team of 17 mobile field service engineers, based from their homes, to cover the UK and Ireland. Each technician has his/her own van full of parts, and those vans are fitted with a vehicle tracking system that serves a number of purposes. When a service

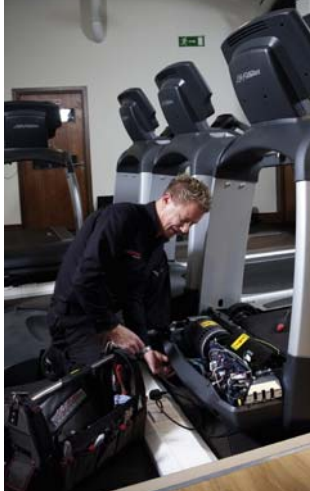
call comes into the office, the dispatcher can scan the system for the closest service van to the customer site and send it out, minimising the time between when the call comes in and when the technician arrives.

The tracking system also provides location awareness to give drivers updates on traffic and weather delays, logs driving speeds to mitigate inefficient driving, and tracks drive time and stop time. Additionally, managers can extract historical analysis from the system to check for excessive technician overlap.

Not all service calls are of equal importance and some must be prioritised. If your biggest client calls saying 100 of your machines in 15 clubs are not working, chances are you're going to focus more resources on them than on the small club with a single stationary bicycle out of order.

Geolocation can play a key role here as well. Instead of adding less critical support calls onto an already busy technician's schedule, geolocation software can search for the nearest available technician to that tier-two call and route him to the customer location. The software can then alert the

Precor's technicians are alerted of service calls via their PDAs



Geolocation software allows for real time tracking and display of technician location, plus more efficient driving routes





customer via SMS, email or phone as to how far away the technician is. Imagine the satisfaction of telling your customer the service technician is exactly 10 minutes away instead of: "He should be there between 3.00pm and 6.00pm."

Chris Hope, Precor's UK service manager, has seen firsthand the advantages that geolocation can offer businesses. "We have instances where a club phones the Precor service desk to log a call, and because we send the job out in real-time to the closest technician, we can turn up within an hour or two of the club making the call," he says. "I've had technicians contact me to say they have been to a site for a job that's just come through on the PDA and the customer has said: 'Wow! I only logged a call an hour ago and you have turned up already – that's what I call service.' It shows how this type of technology can improve both the efficiency of the technician and the service that the customer receives."

on-site support

Geolocation also assists service technicians when they are on-site. Life Fitness uses a geolocation system that has proved extremely helpful. While on a call, a technician will not always have every part needed for the job. Life Fitness technicians using geolocation can process parts orders at time of visit so that parts are requested same-day, resulting in a faster fix time and reducing potential equipment downtime. The ordered parts are electronically labelled with the order time and the customer's location, ensuring they're delivered to the right place as quickly as possible.

Like Precor, the Life Fitness system also allows for real-time tracking and display of technician location and status, as well as more efficient driving routes – all of which makes life easier for both the service technicians and, most importantly, Life Fitness customers.

"The speed of getting work quickly and accurately out to our field teams has already proved beneficial and has been particularly valuable when clients wish to request additional work while our technicians are already on-site," says Margaret Vane, services manager for Life Fitness. "Geolocation enables us to spend more time adding real value to our service deliverables and focusing on what customers need from us. Having a fast, accurate way of sending and receiving data between service centre and field was a critical factor in achieving a scalable, efficient and customer-orientated service delivery model."

securing buy-in

Some see geolocation-based vehicle tracking systems as an invasion of privacy. Hope says Precor technicians had concerns at first, which the company did its best to assuage. "Initially there was a feeling among technicians that this was like a spy in the cab," he says. "To minimise their concerns, the benefits of the system to both the company and the driver were explained, and the weekly summary reports obtained from the system are also sent by email to each of the technicians so that they can see exactly what the system is providing. A six-month period of settling in occurred before the system was accepted as part

Using geolocation, the Life Fitness system can process parts orders at the time of visit, speeding up parts delivery and minimising downtime

of the normal way of working, with the benefits appreciated by the technicians."

Vane also recognised this need for buy-in from her teams at Life Fitness. "To reduce the learning curve for our field teams, we introduced them to laptop-based technology around 12 months ahead of the system going live," she says. "This provided them with valuable time to become accustomed to remotely locating data, service-specific and company information, as well as developing general data skills, before we transitioned to the new service model. It has already started to save technicians time every day."

Still in its infancy, the benefits of geolocation to businesses are only just being realised. Geolocation is one of countless innovations reshaping how businesses function, reforming customer interactions and padding the bottom line for businesses. Its future capabilities remain to be seen, but they will no doubt serve to improve customer service and drive up profits.

About the author

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Yapps instant booking

Premier Software has launched Yapps.com, an online directory and marketing tool for health clubs, offering a one-stop shop to consumers looking to research and book immediately online. Using a keyword and postcode search, both existing and potential clients will be directed to a list of businesses that match their criteria. Each listing provides a profile section, map, opening hours and other data.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORDS
premier software



A new machine and two updates from Total Gym

Total Gym has released updated versions of its bodyweight training machines. Total Gym GTS now offers 22 incline levels, harnessing between 1 and 62 per cent of bodyweight, with a new release lever to vary resistance. Total Gym PowerTower retains the motorised incline tower, adjusting to any height to harness between 3 and 72 per cent of bodyweight. A new addition to the range is Total Gym Sport, replacing the Total Gym 14000 incline trainer.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORDS
total gym

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Viper strikes with Flexi-Cord technology

Ideal for studio workouts, the Viper Belt from SAQ International can be used for resisted plyometrics, short running out-and-back drills, assisted acceleration, and horizontal and vertical resistance. All can be carried out while holding a tennis or squash racket, a cricket bat, or catching or throwing a ball. Suitable for use either indoors or out, the belt is made of heavy duty webbing and padding and has a safety harness and quick release buckle. It has three attachment links for the Flexi-Cord.



fitness-kit.net KEYWORDS
saq international



Studio Sports' new BaSE for training

This year's LIW event saw the pre-launch of the BaSE (Balance & Stability Exercise) training platform from Studio Sports. The BaSE platform is a motorised unit providing a series of rotational stretching exercises that can be used for passive mobilisation or passive-active exercise. It allows for a wide range of functional and sport-specific exercises to be performed under the controlled stresses of maintaining balance and stability. It also increases proprioception – the sense that indicates whether the body is moving with required effort, as well as where the various parts of the body are located in relation to each other.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORDS
studio sports

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LIW 2011

We review some of the new product launches and events from this year's Leisure Industry Week

Leisure Industry Week (LIW) 2011 took place at the NEC in Birmingham from 20–22 September. Once again, the show delivered a multitude of CPD opportunities, networking events and a wealth of innovative exhibitors, representing the entire spectrum of the health and fitness industry.

PRODUCT LAUNCHES

Visitors were treated to a number of new launches, many of which are outlined below:

- **Star Trac's** Spinner® Blade and Leverage® range of strength equipment had their UK debut at LIW 2011 after being previewed globally at IHRSA in the United States earlier this year. The Spinner Blade is the latest in a long line of high performance Spinning® bikes from Star Trac, while the Leverage range is said to be set to redefine the plate-loaded strength training category.
- **Red Bull** launched its new website, Red Bull Locker Room. The stand featured Olympic gold medalist Zac Purchase and offered visitors the chance

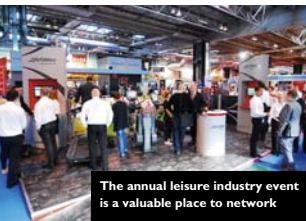
LIW is a popular launchpad for new equipment and programmes - and visitors can get to try out products at first-hand

to 'Challenge Zac' in attempting to beat his time on the rowing machine.

- As a strategic partner and exclusive distributor of the TRX and Reebok professional line in the UK and Europe, **Escape Fitness** delivered a high-energy stand. Products launched included the TRX Rip Trainer, Reebok Easy Tone Step and the new Escape cross-training range (Bulgarian Bag and Steel Bell).
- As UK agents for Les Mills, **FitPro** launched the new core training programme CXWORX to the UK – a programme that was also showcased in a CPD Masterclass. FitPro has also teamed up with the biggest-selling children's TV brand in the world, *LazyTown*, to offer KidzMove. The show's main character, Sportacus – aka Magnus Scheving – made an appearance at the show and brought with him a

fantastic atmosphere to the new Youth Engagement Zone.

- **Precor's** latest innovation, the P80 touch-screen console, made its UK trade show debut. Also launched were additions to Precor's Experience Strength S-Line range. There are five dual-function machines: a multi-press, bicep curl/tricep extension, pull-down/seated row, leg extension/leg curl and abdominal/back extension.
- **Jordan Fitness** added three new sandbag products from Alpha Strong to its range, designed to complement the hugely popular Powerbag™ range. Thy Sandball™, Thy Beast™ and Thy Coach™ are being hailed as the strongest sandbags in the industry. Jordan also added Lifeline to its product range, specialising in functional fitness equipment such as the Jungle Gym XT,



The annual leisure industry event is a valuable place to network





Fitness professionals were able to gain CPD points by taking part in various Masterclasses



Matrix stand: James Cracknell announced his involvement in an ambassador programme

the Power Wheel and the Portable Power Jumper.

- The **CYBEX** stand provided the perfect platform for the company to launch new products to the UK market – notably the Bravo functional trainers – as well as demonstrating a comprehensive range of premium cardiovascular and strength training equipment to the thousands of fitness industry professionals that attended throughout the three days. CYBEX ran eight demonstrations each day of the show, focusing on the Big Iron, the Bravo series and the Arc Trainer.
- **Dynamic Activity** showcased its new bodycore FreeStyle functional training platform – a smaller, affordable option for functional training zones.
- **Wattbike** introduced Power Cycling, which was developed in partnership

SHOW FLOOR ACTIVITY

CPD Masterclasses

Debuting this year, the CPD Masterclasses (powered by SkillsActive and sponsored by MYZONE) gave visitors the opportunity to earn REPs-accredited CPD points by taking part in a diverse programme of taster training sessions. These classes included the brand new CXWORX® format from Les Mills, the TRX Rip Trainer showcased by Escape Fitness, and Powerbag training from Jordan Fitness. All of the CPD Masterclasses took place on the show floor, adding energy and buzz to the already lively health and fitness hall.

New world record

Supported by Jordan Fitness, ultra-endurance athlete Mike Buss broke his 43rd world record. He completed the six-hour Iron Soldier Powerbag Challenge, which involved shuttle runs carrying various weights of Powerbags, beating his target of 200 reps in six hours by achieving a total of 261 reps, and therefore adding another world record title to his already impressive list of achievements.

Buss says: "To not only break the world record but to also exceed my reps target was fantastic. I'm now looking forward to a well-earned rest before starting my preparation for

the next challenge! As a professional athlete, I'm always looking for the edge to keep me at the top, and using equipment like Powerbags, the Beaverfit rig, and my favourite piece of kit – the Milokit suspension training system – is how I do it."

Youth Engagement Zone

Fit for Sport, in partnership with COMPASS – the new trade association for coaching providers – introduced the UK's first accreditation scheme for leisure organisations and professionals working with schools and young people. The brand new Youth Engagement Zone represented a move towards encouraging a strong partnership between innovative solutions providers and the passionate organisations, coaches and instructors who are involved in delivering youth engagement programmes.

Energy Management at LIW

In a move towards stronger and more comprehensive educational content of appeal to all sectors, this year the Energy Management seminars were launched. Contributors included powerPerformer and BRE, as well as a panel of experts who debated how to manage a diverse and demanding leisure facility.

with British Cycling and FitPro to offer an authentic indoor group cycling experience via the gym/fitness industry. For gyms, it opens up a whole new market where cyclists and triathletes can train indoors during the winter, not only improving fitness but also perfecting technique on the Wattbike.

Individuals taking part in Power Cycling will be encouraged to become a British Cycling member, while the gyms will also have the opportunity to set themselves up as accredited cycling clubs with British Cycling.

- Cross-trainer specialist **Octane Fitness** chose LIW 2011 as the

NEW EDUCATION VILLAGE

This year, the LIW seminar content was grouped together in one central Education Village on the show floor, resulting in an inclusive atmosphere that encompassed all sectors of the leisure industry.

'Our Greatest Team'

Technogym's launch of its 'Our Greatest Team' campaign to the health and fitness industry, in conjunction with Team GB and Paralympics GB, was a highlight of the educational content. This national campaign, which sets up fitness facilities as community activity hubs, encourages FIA members and Technogym partners to grab the once in a lifetime opportunity presented by London 2012.

Tony Majakas, London 2012 project director at Technogym, says: "Technogym, as the official supplier of fitness equipment to the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, was delighted to register over 250 locations for the campaign at LIW."

IQL Forum

The IQL UK Forum revealed the plans for the eighth edition of the National Pool Lifeguard Qualification (NPLQ). Working alongside IQL UK, a representative group of industry professionals – known as the 8th Edition Programme Board – identified that the NPLQ at the very least needed updating, and in many areas

needed additional elements to address the needs of trainer assessors and Approved Training Centres.

Tara Dillon, executive director of IQL UK, says: "When embarking on a project of this magnitude and importance, it's absolutely essential that research and consultation is at the centre of the decision-making process. I'm very excited by the feedback we received at LIW and look forward to the launch of the NPLQ 8th Edition in 2012."

Independent Operators Unite

Independent gym owners and operators from across the country were invited to attend the IOU seminar programme, featuring topics including secondary spend, working with social media and ensuring compliance with the Corporate Manslaughter Act.

A highlight was the first ever UK presentation from health and fitness expert Thomas Plummer, who issued a warning to his audience about low-cost gym memberships. Plummer stressed the need for operators to move away from a membership-driven model to a results-driven one in a bid to cope with increased competition.

The day's education closed with an insightful IOU member panel discussion, which provoked questions from the floor and lively debate. The evening offered even more networking opportunities at the annual IOU party.

- ▶ launchpad for the Octane Pro 4700, which has an electronically adjustable stride length from 18"-26", allowing users to quickly change between walking, jogging or running stride lengths on their cross-trainers. The new cross-trainer also comes with a brand new Cross Circuit feature.

- **Matrix Fitness Systems** welcomed James Cracknell to its stand to announce his involvement in a new ambassador programme with fitness equipment experts (and Matrix parent company) Johnson Health Tech UK (JHT). The latest initiative has been launched to promote the JHT quest for a fitter Britain.

- **Diary Systems'** Clocksushi® chose LIW to launch its Gym Booking service for online bookings. Clocksushi works on a low-cost, Software as a Service (SaaS) model and follows the growing number of businesses delivering hi-tech solutions through the Cloud. Gym managers/owners can quickly set up a profile web page and be ready to take bookings from their fitness clients in less than an hour.
- **Pulse** showcased a wide range of products on its stand, including the



Keiser hosted demos of its indoor cycles and education at the show

Evolve strength range, with a new suite of complimentary frame and upholstery colours, as well as the latest generation of its software solution SmartCentre.

- **Keiser UK** launched its new Education Team at LIW. The team includes five trainers who will deliver Keiser Installation, Foundation and Advanced Module courses throughout the UK. The team hosted



Pulse: Scale models for new projects were on show



Technogym's Arke functional range in use on the stand; Kinesis Stations were also launched

demonstrations on the M3 Indoor Cycle and M5 Elliptical throughout LIW.

- Visitors to stand H50 experienced the next evolution in vibration training when they tried the **Power Plate® powerBIKE™**, a stationary bike with mechanical vibration technology. Combining the acknowledged benefits of vibration training with a cardiovascular workout, it complements the existing Power Plate machine range by adding another dimension to the way members train.

- **Gladstone Health and Leisure** launched three new software products: the iPhone booking app; Contact Manager, which simplifies the sales process and helps operators secure new members; and the Learn 2 Swim course management module, which will simplify the often complicated and time-consuming swim school administration process by allowing operators to register people on courses, manage accreditation and ease the movement of pupils between the

EVENT FEEDBACK

"The children's activity area was fantastic, and in fact seems to be an area that's growing each year – very positive to see. It was encouraging to see the busy Independent Operators Lounge within the main show. LIW provides a really effective way to keep in touch with associates within the industry" – *Debra Stuart, CEO, Premier Global*

"Three days of hard work and enjoyable social networking events have resulted in plenty of leads which we hope will generate ample new business. We look forward to the show next year" – *Tom Reed, sales co-ordinator & sales business development, Amazon Leisure*

"It's an excellent idea to have an opportunity for personal trainers and fitness professionals to directly benefit from masterclasses, both in terms of learning new skills and in receiving REPs CPD points for doing so" – *Ben Laundon, senior trainer, Corpus Fitness*

"We were very interested in the Pool & Spa area. It was good to see new things that we hadn't seen before and that will drive revenue. We came from Dublin and it was well worth the trip" – *Willie Sheils, chair, South Dublin Leisure Services*

different swimming levels and stages.

- Official Olympics fitness equipment supplier **Technogym** launched its 'Our Greatest Team' campaign, encouraging clubs and locations to join in with the once in a lifetime opportunity offered by London 2012. This was combined with the UK launch of Kinesis Stations, which will be showcased in the Olympic Village Gym during London 2012.

- Visitors to the **AlterG** stand were witness to the UK fitness launch of the AlterG – an anti-gravity treadmill.

- **PocketFit Training** launched a range of health and fitness-related courses, with all resources designed to fit on playing cards to enhance the accessibility of its programmes, as well as making them easy to maintain.

- Design company **222 Sports** chose LIW 2011 to launch Swimtag, a training aid and monitoring system that tracks your progress in the pool. The team brought two Swimtag systems along to the show to demonstrate the functionality of the system and the benefit to swimmers.



Familiar faces: The exuberant Mr Motivator visited the show

SPOTTED!

- James Cracknell on the Matrix Fitness stand
- Mr Motivator introducing himself to the Speedo swimwear models
- Alex Reid taking a look at the Jordan Fitness equipment
- The Biggest Loser's Paddy Cunningham with the CYBEX team
- Olympic mascots Wenlock & Mandaville enjoying the FIA keynote
- Zac Purchase being 'challenged' on the Red Bull stand
- WBC International Challenge Champion, Nasser Al Harbi, at the Fight Fit stand



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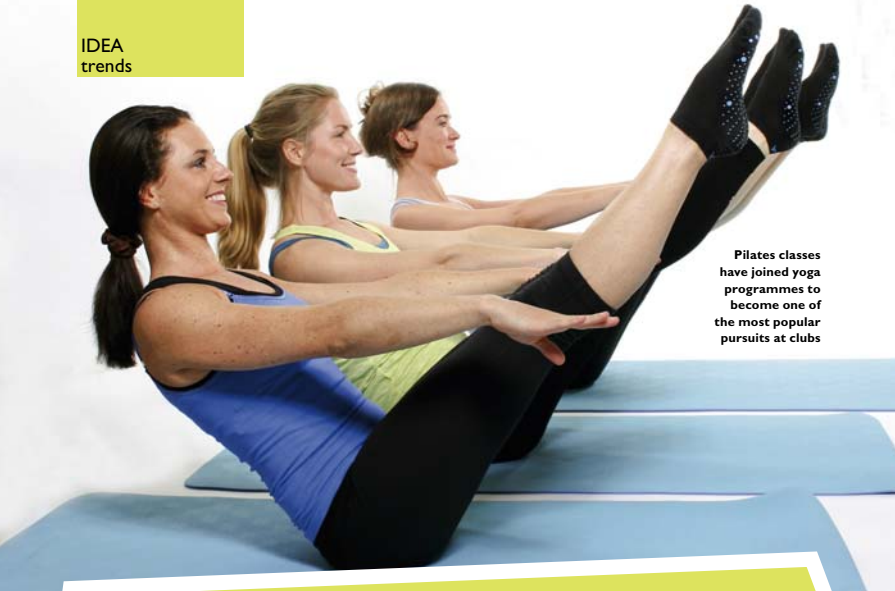
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Pilates classes have joined yoga programmes to become one of the most popular pursuits at clubs

TRENDING NOW

The 2011 IDEA World Fitness Convention attracted more than 5,000 attendees from around the globe, showcasing groundbreaking sessions taught by industry experts alongside an exciting expo hall filled with the latest innovations. Health club owners, programme directors and fitness professionals witnessed the launch of new products, and 130 key figures were surveyed to compile IDEA's 16th annual report into fitness programmes and equipment trends.

Kathie Davis, IDEA's executive director, says: "Given the millions of Baby Boomers who are now becoming active seniors, training is becoming all about balance and function, promoting a better quality of life, reducing injuries and keeping people more actively engaged in life as they age."

Here we look at the top trends in programming and training identified by IDEA, and review development opportunities for the leisure industry.

mind-body programmes

Pilates participation has steadily increased over the past nine years. On

Rhianon Stevens reports on the top trends identified by the 16th annual *IDEA Fitness Programs & Equipment Trends* report

average, facilities offer 14 pilates and yoga classes a week, with an average of 13 members attending each class. In addition, among those surveyed, use of pilates equipment has risen from 29 to 44 per cent over the last eight years.

Glenn Withers, founding director of the APPI Health Group, believes the current trend towards mind-body programmes is mainly down to a renewed self-assuredness in the public's ownership of their own health. "The public are now more educated than ever, and are seeking a more 'intelligent' way to exercise," he says. "The future will see consumers demanding an increased professionalism from the fitness sector, and we'll see a push towards more highly skilled practitioners."

"For health and fitness clubs, the opportunity is huge. Operators have the ability to create multi-faceted health clubs with fitness, physiotherapy, pilates, nutrition and health screening all

under one roof. I predict that, in years to come, the health club will become one of the largest private healthcare providers in the UK."

bodyweight & functional strength training

The bodyweight leverage category is one of the fastest growing training modalities. It is currently offered by 70 per cent of trainers, with 73 per cent of those surveyed believing this programming will continue to grow.

TRX Suspension Training dominates this category, which also includes ropes, climbing ladders and other devices that leverage the user's bodyweight to improve strength and overall fitness.

Randy Hetrick, inventor of the TRX system, says: "To see this level of widespread acceptance for suspension training and the overall growth of the bodyweight training category is exciting – and this is only the beginning." ▶



► "As consumers are greeted with a growing number of bodyweight exercise alternatives, TRX is committed to the ongoing mission of education and programme development to foster and ensure the most responsible, safe and effective use of this form of training by clubs, professionals and consumers."

While strength training trends have really leaned towards own body weight training, the IDEA report also picks out functional resistance training using equipment as a growth area, with a wide array of products now available on the market – from ViPRs to kettlebells, sandbags to cable-based functional trainers. TRX, with its new Rip Trainer, predicts a rise in not only personal use of such equipment, but also as part of functional resistance classes.

group personal training

In the 2011 report, small group boot camp and circuit training sessions were added to the personal training category. These services are currently offered by over half of all managers surveyed.

Mark Townsend, national fitness and wellbeing manager at Nuffield Health, says: "Group personal training, or 'small group training', is something that is constantly evolving alongside the one-to-one personal training product. This format has taken the social and sometimes competitive benefits of group exercise to offer a hybrid solution.

"Using innovative kit like kettlebells, suspension training systems and ViPR, small group training allows people with similar goals to achieve results in a fun and motivating environment. This type of training typically appeals to those members not currently using a personal trainer, but who are looking to add variety to their workouts."



The best group programmes are an important driver of regular club attendance

group exercise programming

Group exercise classes have led the way in 2011 and this trend looks set to continue through 2012 and beyond.

Stephen Buckley, communications manager at FitPro, says: "Clubs understand that the very best group exercise classes are an important driver of regular club attendance, and that strong group exercise brands such as Les Mills also attract new club members."

"Having said that, there's no doubt that traditional group exercise is being challenged by smaller, PT-influenced classes. Classes such as the new CXWORX appeal because they combine more of the technical coaching and individual attention that you'd expect from a personal training session with the social aspect of a group class."

This year, Star Trac launched a new class using MVE (Maximum Versatility Exercise) chairs from Peak Pilates – the first instructor-led, chair-based class

to launch in the UK, and the first time traditional and contemporary pilates moves have been performed to music. This innovation takes full advantage of the growing trend in both group exercise and pilates.

outdoor activities

Outdoor activities such as walking, outdoor personal training, hiking, running and cycling are reporting a significant rise in participation. Gill Stewart, head of marketing and business development for Nordic Walking, feels there are two driving forces behind this trend: the economy and the demand for functional training. "People perceive outdoor exercise to be free, or certainly less expensive than joining a gym or visiting a leisure centre," she says.

"More personal trainers, local authorities, charities like Age Concern and even the National Trust have started to provide outdoor exercise options, with walking still proving to be



Clockwise from this image: ViPR outdoor sessions, MVE chair-based classes, CXWORX and TRX Suspension Training



the most popular, followed by cycling. There is a likelihood that the Olympics will fuel the popularity of cycling and running, while growth in the number of outdoor stores has helped to make walking and trekking more fashionable. "This is the one trend I believe health clubs can really maximise. A third of adults in the UK say they prefer to exercise outdoors, and we find many people take up activities like walking because they simply do not like being indoors. Health clubs and leisure centres are missing a trick. There is definitely an opportunity to offer more outdoor exercise, capitalising on this preference to train in the open air."

balance training

The most popular pieces of fitness equipment promoting balance and function, as cited by IDEA attendees, include: BOSU balance trainers, disks, wobble boards, balance boards and machines such as the BalanceMaster.

IDEA's Davis sees the growth in balance equipment and training as a reflection of fitness professionals "being creative enough to keep training fun and interesting, with new tools".

Jason McMahon, general manager of BalanceMaster, adds: "Balance training is proven to be effective for gains in muscular strength as well as, in contrast to strength training, the equalisation of muscular imbalances. Improved muscular balance is an important part of injury prevention. The application of balance training is not only important for the young and active but also for the older generation, as balance and strength decrease with age."

For more information on the IDEA World Fitness Convention and its annual *IDEA Fitness Programs & Equipment Trends Report*, visit www.idealift.com



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creative thinking

Mintel's senior leisure analyst Michael Oliver examines the consumer reaction to gyms and health clubs in 2011, and the opportunities to get more people active



Mintel's latest *Health and Fitness Clubs - UK* report looks at the market for health clubs and examines the consumer reaction to the fitness sector post recession in 2011. But what are consumers actually doing while in the facilities – and crucially, what can operators do to build on interest or revitalise offerings to capitalise and re-entice lapsed users back to the sector?

As consumer confidence and the UK economy begins its slow path of recovery, clubs are going to be looking towards expansion once more and the signs for future development of the market continue to be rosy, with a sizeable proportion of ex-users interested in using clubs again and a similarly large proportion of people who have never used a club showing interest (see *HCM* Sept. p56).

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

Mintel's research shows that flexibility around joining fees and membership formats is the biggest factor likely to encourage people to join; with much of the growth in the market coming from the budget sector – a sector in which many operators already offer this flexibility – the industry is well-positioned to capitalise on this.

Given the increasingly transient lifestyles of modern consumers, it's not surprising that nearly a quarter of potential users expressed an interest in being able to sign up to a short-term contract – the second most popular incentive to use private health and fitness clubs identified by Mintel. A sportsperson who trains outdoors in

the summer but who would like to be able to train indoors during the winter months, a student away at university, or someone on a short-term work contract – these are all examples of audiences who would find this option useful and may become customers as a result.

Short-term memberships would therefore be one way in which clubs could maximise their appeal, even to people who are only in their catchment area for a short period of time, or who only want to use their facilities at certain times of year. Additionally, clubs may be able to use these memberships as 'springboards' to encourage people to upgrade their membership to a year-round one.

Going alone to a health and fitness club can be quite an intimidating prospect, and it's understandable that more than a fifth (22 per cent) of respondents in the recent survey said that having a friend or family member to go with would encourage them to use a club. This can also help people who are struggling for motivation or starting to make excuses to themselves about why they shouldn't go. However, perhaps there is scope for a more imaginative approach here in terms of rewarding people for going together – perhaps giving them a free class or personal training session for a certain number of visits they make together?

'Try before you buy' is already an established part of the marketing armoury of clubs, and a fifth of potential users agree they would be encouraged by this. Overcoming the mental hurdle people face in terms of walking through the doors is one of the hardest tasks



In one survey, over 22 per cent said they'd be more likely to visit a gym if they had family/friends to go with

clubs face, and this is one way in which people can be persuaded to think 'what have I got to lose?' by trying out for free.

Brits have never been busier, and a 24-hour culture now pervades our daily lives. With PIN code access to many budget health clubs, combined with CCTV surveillance, 24-hour fitness has now become a reality – a positive development that makes health clubs accessible to a wider cross-section of the population. Indeed, 15 per cent of potential users expressed an interest in this as an incentive to use private health and fitness clubs; many people work flexitime or shifts, and it makes sense for clubs to try and stimulate usage outside of the key trading periods when gyms are often chock full of users.

Although it is probably not practical for large club sites with swimming pools to open round the clock, there is little reason why other operators cannot introduce similar technology to their clubs and gain additional business.



HI-TECH OPPORTUNITIES

Looking to the future, there are definite opportunities for clubs to extend their brands into new markets: Fitness First has demonstrated with its NewU Fitness First Personal Trainer game for the Nintendo Wii that it's possible to extend a fitness brand into new areas. It has also used this to drive new business into its gyms, through the trial membership offers included with the game, and has launched a range of branded fitness equipment that can be used with the Wii.

However, other operators have been slow to capitalise on this trend and it's something they should be looking at, since it allows them to reach new consumers and have the chance to convert them to members in the future.

Additionally, there must be potential for health clubs to move into mobile phone fitness apps, just as British Military Fitness has done, and again leverage this product to drive membership at their clubs.

Looking further forward, there could also be an opportunity for a health club chain to launch its own TV channel on Sky or stream classes into the home via

the internet as a way of reaching more consumers – again building awareness with a view to increasing membership levels in the long term.

BUILDING CONNECTIONS

However, the biggest thing that clubs could do differently to please consumers and attract more members would be to drop their joining fees. Understandably, clubs are reluctant to do this because they view it as a sign of commitment on the part of new joiners – as well as a valuable additional source of revenue – but if clubs are not keen on dropping a joining fee altogether, they could structure it so that members are reimbursed when they reach certain milestones of membership. The cost of doing this would surely outweigh the marketing and recruitment costs associated with attracting and converting new joiners in the usual way.

As discussed, clubs need to become more flexible about membership contracts generally, allowing people to sign up for shorter periods of time. Some clubs are already doing this, but there is still considerable scope for improvement. This is something

that Mintel has found particularly appeals to lapsed users interested in becoming users again, suggesting that the inflexibility may have contributed to their original decision to lapse.

But it's networks – whether social or business – that will play a truly lucrative role in future engagement and retention. Now a major feature of people's lives with the emergence of services like Facebook and LinkedIn, it makes sense for clubs to encourage their members to link up as well. Given the large number of potential users who say they may be encouraged to use a health club if they had a friend or family member to go with, perhaps there is scope for operators to develop mobile phone apps that enable friends to co-ordinate their visits to the gym with one another.



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Mintel is offering *Health Club Management* readers a 20 per cent discount on the purchase of the new *Health and Fitness Clubs – UK report*. Visit www.store.mintel.com/hcm and type in the reader code: **HCM20**



Winners celebrate at the 2011 Health Club Award ceremony, held alongside Leisure Industry Week

could you be a winner?

Hot on the heels of the success of the first ever Members' Choice Health Club Awards at LIW, supported by *Health Club Management* (see *HCM* Oct 11, p8), some exciting new categories have been announced for 2012.

new for 2012

Firstly, 2012 will see the launch of the Individual Award, whereby members of health clubs and leisure centres will be given the opportunity to nominate individual members of staff, in addition to rating the overall level of service and value for money offered by their club.

"Belonging to a health club is a great feeling. Successful clubs have a relaxed, friendly and invigorating atmosphere – a place where everyone is welcome and nobody feels awkward, and a haven for members from their frantic day-to-day



New awards categories and a call for entries – the Health Club Awards, sponsored by Centrum Performance, gather momentum into 2012

lifestyle," says Brown. "To create a club like this requires a lot of hard work and a belief that members should have a rewarding experience every time they visit. We believe staff who've been integral to the customer experience should be recognised for their efforts. All staff – whether a receptionist, instructor or manager – are eligible for this award, which offers the chance to be recognised locally and nationally for their hard work."

The top five nominees will be presented with a highly commended trophy at the awards next September.

There will also be a new category of Grand Prix winner in 2012, with Best Budget Chain (a category exclusively open to budget clubs) joining the line-up alongside Best Small Chain (three to nine sites), Best Medium Chain (10-30 sites), Best National Chain (more than 30 sites), Best Club in the UK (fewer than 2,000 members) and Best Club in the UK (2,000 members or more).

enter now for 2012

The success of the awards in the fitness industry already has been largely down to

the unique way clubs are rated, as Brown explains: "There's no judging panel, no submission to write, no telephone interview – just the thoughts of thousands of members on how good their own club is. By ranking clubs this way, we'll find out who's giving the best membership value in the UK."

Clubs and leisure centres that enter can also receive their own Feedback Report, providing valuable details of their members' ratings and comments with regional and national comparison data.

The awards are open to all private health clubs, gyms and local leisure centres in the UK; each of the 14 regional winners is presented with an award, as well as the six Grand Prix winners. Initial entry is free for operators, with online voting running from January to March 2012. Winners will be announced at Leisure Industry Week in September 2012.

The 2012 Awards will be sponsored by Centrum Performance (www.centrum.co.uk). Deadline for entry is 31 December 2011 – health clubs and leisure centres can register now at www.healthclubawards.co.uk

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*16,000 members voted in 2011, we expect at least a 50% increase for 2012.

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The SteelBell shift

New from Escape Fitness, the SteelBell can be used in place of traditional weights. Ranging from 5–200lbs, they are made of stretchy neoprene with a steel shot-filled core. The shifting movement of this core challenges the target muscles and offers enhanced core stability training. SteelBells are said to be a cross between a sandbag, a dumbbell, a barbell, a medicine ball, a stability pod, and a kettlebell.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORDS
escape fitness



TRX - testing muscles and preconceptions

According to Fitness Anywhere, the face of functional resistance training has changed. Its latest product – the TRX Rip Trainer – is a 40" steel bar with a sheathed elastic resistance cord. The asymmetrical loading of the cord challenges the user's balance and forces muscle recruitment. Scaleable to all fitness levels, it's easily portable and can be used virtually anywhere by fixing to a secure point.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
trx

fitness-kit.net

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

Finding a balance with the Easy Tone Step

A new addition to the Reebok family, the Easy Tone Step features integrated balance pods which have been engineered to create natural instability. This forces muscles to compensate and adapt, which encourages toning. The intensity of the instability is controlled via an adjustable airflow valve on the underside of the platform. Great for group workouts, the Easy Tone Step provides a multi-purpose functional training platform which offers a diverse range of exercises.



fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
reebok

Covering all the bases with freeFORM

As well as personal training and physical therapy applications, group exercise with freeFORM covers all the bases including cardio, strength, endurance, balance and flexibility. The freeFORM board also replicates a wide range of reformer pilates-style exercises and is ideal for both one-to-one sessions and group classes. It offers various modes of operation, including acting as an unstable step, static rotation disk and multi-

directional rolling platform. The board is large enough to support the hips, elbows, knees, hands or feet, but also small enough to move and flow around the body.



fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
freeform

CHANGING TIMES?

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SUPPLIER: Big Wave Media

CLIENT: aspire Sports & Cultural Trust

Aspire Sports & Cultural Trust was created in October 2008 to take the reigns at Gloucester's flagship leisure facilities. Big Wave Media worked in close partnership with the trust from its inception, helping to build a strong brand identity, market the facilities and grow membership.

The initial task was to help the trust form an identity that included a strong name and branding. From initial meetings in late 2008, Big Wave Media quickly arranged focus groups, question and answer sessions and board presentations. The name 'aspire Sports & Cultural Trust' was forged and, from mood boards and concept artwork, new logos and brand feel were finalised.

Working with aspire department heads, Big Wave created an annual marketing plan, budget and deadline matrix. Account managers then worked behind the scenes to ensure deadlines were met and marketing collateral was delivered on time and on budget.

For internal signage and displays, Big Wave installed a number of units including bespoke customer feedback boards to create a channel for customers to communicate with the trust, as well as wall-mounted branded leaflet racks and recruitment boards. Externally, the sites were transformed with large poster boxes, lamppost banners and impressive light columns to advertise to passing traffic.

From empty shells back in 2008, the sites are now buzzing with a vibrant, clean and consistent brand and style. Advertising and display was also carefully positioned to benefit from high footfall and now assists with upselling and information delivery.

Aspire was also among the first of Big Wave's clients to trial its dedicated e-flyer package – 'eCampaigns' – and



now sends regular monitor communication to customers through this new media channel.

Steve Elway, CEO of aspire Sports and Cultural Trust, says: "From the moment we met Big Wave Media, we were impressed with their commitment and belief in true partnership working. They really do see the success of our business as integral to their success."

"From the moment of awarding the contract to Big Wave, they have backed up their words with actions, delivering our requirements with great passion and expertise. Their proposals have provided innovative ideas and solutions that are cost-effective to our business."

"Big Wave are not only passionate about what they do, but they are also delivering to our tight timescales with great commitment and use their in-house expertise to advise us and interact with us on different options throughout our branding, graphic design, marketing and IT challenges."

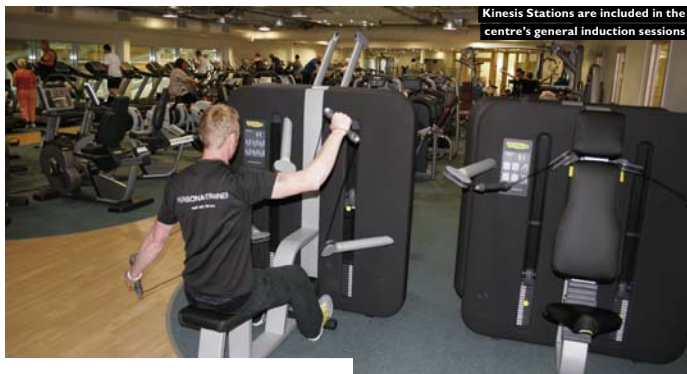
"We have no doubt that our business will go from strength to strength through our partnership with Big Wave. With our drive and Big Wave's knowledge and commitment to work with us to improve our business, we can see that our partnership will lead to success for us all."

Now entering the fourth year of partnership, aspire continues to grow apace and expand. With innovation and support from Big Wave Media, the trust continues to explore new marketing opportunities – most recently through Big Wave's social media packages and training, and the introduction of QR codes on literature.

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

Bespoke customer feedback boards allow customers to easily communicate with the trust





Kinesis Stations are included in the centre's general induction sessions

ACTION STATIONS!

SUPPLIER: Technogym

CLIENT: Wychavon Leisure

Kinesis Stations add to the vast range of equipment for practising the Kinesis discipline of strength, balance and flexibility in a new, easy and effective way for all users. Wychavon Leisure Community Association installed Kinesis Stations at Evesham Leisure Centre in May 2011.

"Wychavon Leisure is always looking for new and innovative products to enhance the member experience, and Kinesis Stations have been a great addition, complementing and extending the range of equipment on offer at Evesham," says Peter Williams, MD of Wychavon Leisure Community Association.

Kinesis Stations combine the benefits of functional strength with the simplicity of traditional equipment, allowing for a progression from a simple, guided workout to

something that's much more free and natural. Incorporating Full Gravity Technology, the cable-based machines enable all users to perform simple, natural movements in a variety of angles and directions to maximise the range of motion. In addition, by activating entire kinetic chains rather than individual muscles, this system makes it possible to develop greater co-ordination, stability, balance, flexibility, strength, speed and agility. A virtually unlimited number of exercises can be achieved, providing variety and progression for members to enhance their workout.

To maximise the use of Kinesis Stations at Evesham, the equipment is included in the induction process, demonstrating the workout possibilities to new members who join. Kinesis Stations are also being used in PT sessions on a one-to-one basis, and in 20-minute training sessions run by an instructor for up to four people.

To ensure that Wychavon Leisure could make the most from Kinesis Stations, a full training session was delivered on-site for the fitness team and the personal trainers. Craig Swyer, product and training manager for Technogym, comments: "We maximised the full training session, delivering it to the whole fitness and personal training team to fully demonstrate the product benefits and uses, as well as ways in which it can be used to facilitate interaction and generate revenue for the centre."

Nigel Grundy, fitness manager at Evesham, says: "With over 2,500 members, we chose to install Kinesis Stations to add variety on the gym floor and offer members something new and exciting. The member feedback has been excellent – everyone who tries them really enjoys the experience."

A customer survey was introduced in June 2011* to obtain detailed feedback from the members, and 93 per cent of respondents said they would recommend Kinesis Stations to a friend. Other feedback included: "Lovely – gym fees well spent, thank you", "A great addition to the gym that fills a gap between free weights and selectorised equipment", and "Provides several exercises and a range of difficulty to suit all".

For more information, visit www.technogym.com

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* Survey at Evesham Leisure Centre between June and August 2011 based on 30 questionnaire respondents.



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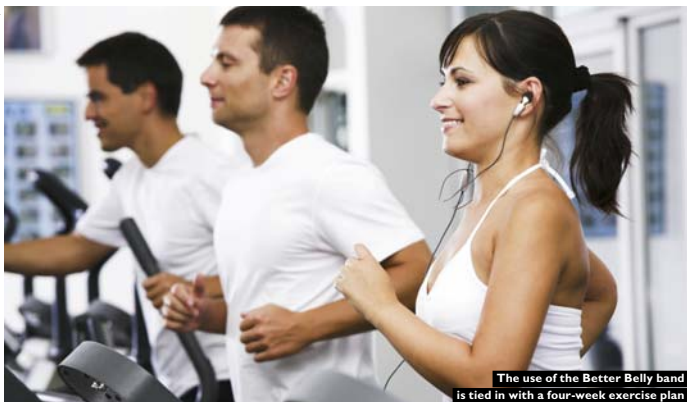
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The use of the Better Belly band is tied in with a four-week exercise plan

LOYALTY THROUGH RESULTS

SUPPLIER: Better Belly

CLIENT: Bodyconditioning fitness centres (Netherlands)

Launching now in the UK, the Better Belly® Health & Slimming belt has been available in the Netherlands for two years. Essentially an infra-red band that's worn around the waist during exercise, the product has been proven to stimulate loss of fat by increasing the temperature in the body's so-called 'cold areas'. This increases the exerciser's metabolism and helps to burn fat during cardio training.

Better Belly involves a four-week exercise programme – three 45-minute cardiovascular workouts a week, all wearing the band – with the average inch loss being two dress sizes in four weeks, and some participants achieving up to 15cm fat loss.

Tested at Bodyconditioning fitness centres – two independent clubs in the Netherlands – Better Belly has not only helped individual members with inch loss, but has also driven profitability at the clubs by attracting new members. "Better Belly has proven to be a very effective marketing tool," says

Bernadine Boog of the

Bodyconditioning clubs, who is now rolling out the inch-loss concept with her husband and business partner Peter. "In addition to having satisfied, regular clients, the placing of a simple

advertisement directly led to an unexpected influx of new clients. We've found that the Better Belly concept stimulates previously inactive people to make the effort to exercise – real results can be achieved quicker, so they become more inclined to go to the fitness centre."

She continues: "In fact it was my 67-year-old mother-in-law, who always told me we'd never see her at a gym, who attracted me to Better Belly in the first place. She saw an advertisement and, in spite of her attitudes towards going to a fitness centre, was tempted to try it out. When we launched it at our clubs, she signed up immediately."

Suitable for use in conjunction with nutritional advice from everyone aged 13 and upwards, Bodyconditioning was able to sell the Better Belly programme to 350 participants in the space of around two months. "I've been in the industry since 1989 and in my experience, localised fat-burning does not work. However, in this case I've been proved wrong. We've achieved amazing results for our members – and for our business as a direct consequence," says Boog.

"An additional benefit of the infra-red is that it has a positive effect on aching muscles, tendons and joints," she continues. "This improves the rate of recovery, and several physiotherapists in the Netherlands are also using the product with their clients."

"Over the past six months, we have been using Better Belly for patients who are suffering from chronic and acute backaches. To reduce pain in one's back, it's important to improve the blood flow and reduce muscle tension. And to prevent the pain from returning, the client must exercise regularly."

"In the past, we would always first try to reduce the pain symptoms, and only then start a training programme. The Better Belly enables patients to start exercising immediately, and prevents them from having pain after training. This leads to faster results. We have observed that even patients who are suffering from a hernia or chronic lower back pain are free of pain and experience reduced symptoms within weeks."

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



The company says the product is effective for inch loss

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Boog Fitness is an expert in the field and the distributor of the Better Belly concept.

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JUST DESSERTS FOR LONDON XMAS RACE

For festive fitness fun, get yourself to London on 3 December for the Great Christmas Pudding Race.

The event, now in its 31st year, will see teams of six negotiate themselves around an *It's a Knockout*-style course in the West Piazza of Covent Garden while balancing a Christmas pudding on a tray. Along the way they'll face inflatable objects and obstacles while also being hit with foam, flour and water for good measure.

Fancy dress isn't a must, but most contestants wear costumes and there's a prize for the best group. Themes in previous years have included Ozzy Osbourne, Medieval knights, cowboys and (of course) Christmas puddings.

The event is organised by CRAC – part of the voluntary movement of Cancer Research UK – and entry is set at £25 per person. The aim is to raise £600 per team.

Details: www.xmaspuddingrace.org.uk



POM POM IT UP WITH CHEEROBICS DVD WORKOUT



Cheerobics®, a workout programme that combines aerobics and cheerleading, has launched a new home experience DVD.

The programme has been specially created to work on fitness but in a fun way. The DVD even comes with a pair of poms poms, so people can really get into the cheerleading role.

The woman behind Cheerobics® is 26-year-old Jessica Rossi. Rossi, who founded the freelance London Zoo Fever cheerleading squad, launched her workout for health clubs in January 2011 and now has more than 30 instructors in training around the UK. Details: www.cheerobics.net



DOH: SCOOPY DOO IS MOST ACTIVE CARTOON

The ghost-hunting great dane may constantly seek out burgers and snacks, but Scooby Doo is the most active cartoon character, according to the Department of Health (DoH).

On behalf of the DoH, PCP Research Consultants analysed the top 20 characters on UK children's TV. Each was rated on their activity levels and earned marks for things like walking and playing sports.

Thanks to his running away from scary situations all the time, Scooby Doo was found to be the most active. Second was Shaun the Sheep.

The healthiest character, judged on diet and exercise, was *LazyTown's* Sportacus. Now the makers of the show have partnered with Change4Life to encourage two- to five-year-olds to eat better.

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Oz Show. And existing research by the University of Yaoundé in Cameroon, Africa, also seems to back up the claims.

The most recent study, in 2009, was based on 102 people over 10 weeks. Half took a placebo, while the others took a mango seed supplement before meals three times a day. Those who took the supplement reported more weight loss, improved blood fat and glucose values and lower blood pressure.



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