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FEBRUARY 2012

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The sport of fitness

When a major corporation shines a spotlight on your industry, it suggests you've come of age. So the announcement that Reebok is launching a new global brand strategy to position itself as the world's leading fitness brand is a boost for our sector, highlighting both its relevance today and a widespread belief in its future potential.

The strategy – supported by a marketing campaign with the strapline 'The Sport of Fitness Has Arrived' – is designed to "change the way people perceive, define and experience fitness" and "bring fitness to the world". Particularly coming from Reebok – with its aspirational image, consumer credibility and the sort of adspend that can genuinely help shift perceptions – this represents a significant opportunity for the fitness sector.

But it's not just about the potential impact on the consumer; there is also opportunity in the way the concept encourages the fitness industry to think differently about itself. Reebok president Uli Becker explains: "There is a shift happening today in the fitness world that is born from the idea that fitness can be a sport, with all the elements that we love about traditional sport." Indeed, the Reebok campaign will focus on an exercise modality that meets exactly that brief – functional training-based CrossFit (see *HCM* Jan 11, p40) – with pop-up CrossFit gyms planned for iconic locations such as London Bridge and the Empire State building.

> 'The sport of fitness' idea is particularly interesting in an Olympic year, giving our industry a clear, ownable positioning that connects us to the Games just as we debate the shape of our Legacy

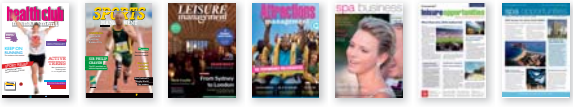
The 'sport of fitness' idea is particularly interesting in an Olympic year, and is something the fitness sector could latch on to – a clear, ownable positioning that connects us to the Games just as we debate the shape of our Legacy. While not everyone is motivated by sport, it's an attention-grabbing concept that will speak loudly to those who are. Provided it's leveraged as part of an improved approach to member segmentation, it could be a powerful message.

So how should we use this opportunity? Attitude is key: we need to recreate the buzz and camaraderie of sport for those who are motivated by this. If, rather than the excitement they've been led to expect – not just by this campaign but by all the other sport and fitness-related marketing in this Olympic year – prospects are instead faced with apathetic staff and a traditional gym floor full of rows of machines and solo exercisers when they walk through our doors, their disappointment will be all the greater.

But there's no need to reinvent the wheel, as many aspects of our offering already deliver just this sort of sporting vibrancy: in-house triathlon clubs (see *HCM* Jan 12, p50), group activities in functional zones, race nights on 'virtual reality' bikes, gym challenges and events whereby members train towards specific goals. Added to that are activities such as boxing, outdoor offerings such as Nordic walking, gyms' own running clubs, BMF – and of course the fast-growing CrossFit.

However, although all these elements exist in isolation, a next step might be to package them together more creatively in line with the 'sport of fitness' notion. Indeed, the Reebok campaign's biggest influence might turn out to be our sector's reaction to the concept, including our approach to segmentation: encouraging us to identify themes within our offering, and to package programming and communications around these as a way of targeting the different motivations that exist among members and prospects.

Kate Cracknell, editor
katecracknell@leisuremedia.com



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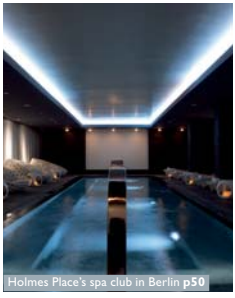

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write to reply

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

RIC OLDABEV MIKHAIL WWW.SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Risk assessments should enable people to enjoy, not restrict, their activities

new risk-based approach to health and safety

As part of the government's plans to reform Britain's health and safety system, the Department for Work and Pensions' Minister for Employment, Chris Grayling MP, commissioned an independent review of health and safety legislation. The review – carried out by professor Ragnar Löfstedt, director of the King's Centre for Risk Management at King's College, London – considers the opportunities for reducing the burden of health and safety legislation on UK businesses while maintaining the progress made in improving health and safety outcomes.

The UK already has one of the best health and safety records in Europe – testament to the rules and regulations in place – so we welcome this review, which broadly supports the current law. The report calls for a more risk-based approach, which in our industry is great news. Risk assessments should be used to enable people to enjoy their leisure time and certainly not to stop activities. All too often, we read negative stories about events being cancelled due to health and safety legislation. The report should go some way towards preventing this.

Reviewing strict liability provisions should also support a more risk-based approach. Leisure activities can make strict control measures, or completely removing the risk, impossible – removing the risk from rock climbing, for example, would negate the reason for doing it in the first place! Sector-specific regulation consolidation should help to remove red tape and make managing health and safety easier too.

However, I am concerned at the recommendation that the self-employed should be exempt from legislation if their activities aren't deemed hazardous. This needs to be closely monitored.

joe ryan
md, right directions health and safety

dir: triathlon training and racing in barcelona

We really enjoyed reading the recent triathlon feature (*HCM* Jan 12, p50). In response to a growing trend in Barcelona, with more and more of our members taking up triathlon, DiR has just launched a new course in all its clubs to help people prepare for the sport.

The course is led by Xavier Llobet, three times winner of Vila Triathlon in Barcelona, alongside specialist DiR instructors in each of the three disciplines. It is designed mainly to prepare people for the annual Vila Triathlon. The course includes individual initial assessment, personalised training programmes and online follow-up with a personal trainer, with five classes a month for 10 months.

DiR also participated in the Garmin Triathlon recently, entering three teams. The first team comprised a Catalan journalist, an actor and a famous female sailor, none of whom had participated in a triathlon before. The second team consisted of members, selected via a prize draw in which three tickets for the race were up for grabs. And the final team consisted of DiR instructors, who came an impressive fourth in the race.

raquel villacaña
communications director, dir

The new DiR course helps people train for Barcelona's Vila Triathlon

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OFT to investigate fairness of gym contracts

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has opened an official investigation into whether health club operators are in breach of the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations Act 1999.

As part of the investigation, the OFT will also determine if gym and fitness companies are engaging in any unfair business practices under the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations Act of 2008. The FIA was quick to respond to the announcement and has scheduled a meeting with the OFT case team in February.

Facilities at the club include an exercise studio

Fitness4less to open new Southend gym

Low-cost health club operator Fitness4less has announced it has secured a lease for a new 1,858sq m (20,000sq ft) gym at a Southend shopping centre, which is set to open in May.

Located on the first floor of the Victoria Shopping Centre, the club will provide membership at a flat fee of £14.99 a month, inclusive of all facilities and classes. The new Fitness4less site will be equipped with at least 150 pieces of equipment and include a unisex and ladies-only gym, free weights area, class studio and group cycling studio. A Powerzone nightclub-themed area will also form part of the club.

Sandown leisure centre renovation underway

Isle of Wight Council (IWC) has started work on a two-stage refurbishment of The Heights Leisure Centre in Sandown to help improve provision and reduce costs.

The project was given the green light by councillors in March last year, with phase one set to include the construction of a new Tone Zone fitness suite at the rear.

A new activity room and a revamped pool also form part of the first stage of work, which is due for completion in June. The second phase of the project will see the health suite given a new look.

Nuffield Health acquires Greens

Healthcare charity and fitness operator Nuffield Health has acquired Greens Health & Fitness, a chain of 15 fitness centres, from De Vere Group.

As a result of the deal, Nuffield Health's overall membership rises to around 300,000 across 66 consumer and 200 corporate sites, making it the sixth largest provider of fitness and wellbeing services in the UK.

The acquisition of Greens sees 15 more clubs join the Nuffield estate

David Mobbs, group CEO of Nuffield Health, says: "The acquisition is an important step towards achieving Nuffield Health's strategic ambition of a national network of fitness and wellbeing facilities, supporting more members to get fitter and healthier.

"The acquisition will allow UK health consumers to benefit from the unique proposition Nuffield Health provides, maximising the number of members who are able to achieve their fitness and wellbeing goals and get healthier. Our newest members will be supported by the UK's largest healthcare charity, which reinvests all its profits into improving its wellbeing services."

The deal is the third major acquisition for the group in recent years. It took over Bladerunner in 2010 and Cannons in 2007.

énergie Group to list on Stock Exchange

Health club franchise énergie is to list on the London Stock Exchange's Alternative Investment Market (AIM) later this year.

Speaking to *Health Club Management*, a spokesperson confirmed the plans but declined to confirm an exact date for the entry. It is believed that énergie will be reversing into a cash shell company already listed on the AIM – also known as a special purpose acquisition company.

énergie is looking to increase the number of company-owned clubs

As a result, énergie could be taking on board two new board members. Paul Campbell – a former Leisure Connection chief executive and more recently CEO of restaurant group Clapham House – is believed to be coming in as the new chair of énergie, while Nick Harvey is likely to be made the group's new financial director.

It is understood that the listing is part of énergie's plans to accelerate its expansion plans for the UK market. It currently operates 96 clubs, most of which are franchised.

The group has, however, expressed its interest in growing the number of company-owned clubs from the current seven sites. Last year the company announced that it is ramping up the expansion of its low-cost Fit4Less chain.

Énergie owns and operates five brands: énergie Fitness, énergie Fitness for Women, énergie Personal Fitness, énergie SHOKK (kids' fitness brand) and Fit4Less.

énergie has also launched its first commercial venture for Fit4Less, in conjunction with North Hertfordshire College. College students studying health and fitness-related courses will gain hands-on experience in the new Fit4Less gym that's opened on-site.

Once students have qualified from their courses, they will also be able to use Fit4Less facilities to start their own personal training, sports therapy, sports massage or beauty treatment businesses.

GLL latest trust to "go budget"

The Bexleyheath site will be GLL's first standalone budget offering

Leisure trust GLL has opened its first standalone budget gym in Bexleyheath, east London. Gym Bexleyheath houses 92 pieces of the Technogym CV and resistance equipment, a dedicated free weights and stretch area, plus modern changing facilities.

In order to keep costs to a minimum, the reception area is self-service, although the gym will be staffed at all times. Monthly memberships have been set at £19.95.

GLL initially entered the budget club sector with its GymLondon brand in 2008, but so far the concept has worked mainly as an option for members to gain limited, gym-only access at full-service leisure centres operated by GLL.

GLL operations director Andy McCabe comments: "The aim of this new venture is to offer a 'no frills' approach to fitness, but without compromising on standards. GLL is a new entrant to the budget gym market. However the concept behind Gym Bexleyheath sits well with our corporate commitment to making high quality fitness and leisure facilities more accessible; we already offer a low-cost, discount membership – GymLondon – within many of the leisure centres we operate."

Mosaic buys first freehold site

Welti Health and Fitness will now be renamed as The Shrewsbury Club

Mosaic Spa and Health Clubs has revealed that it has made its first move into ownership after buying Shrewsbury's Welti Health and Fitness out of administration.

The group operates a number of clubs around the UK, most of which are under the Fitness Express and Imagine Spa brands, and has confirmed the acquisition of its first freehold site.

Welti Health and Fitness has more than 2,500 members and comprises a large gym and two separate exercise studios, as well as a Kinesis zone, a boxing ring and a free weights area.

Facilities also include a swimming pool with a sauna and steamroom, six indoor and eight outdoor tennis courts. Following the deal, the venue is to be renamed The Shrewsbury Club.

Downing Corporate Finance, a venture capital trust that acquired a stake in the business in August 2010, funded the deal. Further investment is also planned to improve facilities.

Mosaic managing director Dave Courteen says: "We very much hope to take the business to the next level."

Survey reveals cost of poor phone response

Fitness operators could be losing out on potential members by failing to handle telephone enquiries properly, according to Leisure-net Solutions' National call-Focus Survey.

The survey tests telephone membership enquiries against sector standards. This year's results saw the national average score decline by 8 per cent – the worst score in the survey's five-year history. According to the findings, more than a quarter of all potential sales could be lost at the initial answering stage, while half may be lost because staff don't offer callers a tour.

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Jessica Ennis opens refurbed EIS gym

World heptathlon silver medallist Jessica Ennis has officially opened a new-look gym at the English Institute of Sport in Sheffield, following a six-figure refurbishment.

The Fitness Unlimited facility now offers an 83-station fitness suite with Technogym equipment, a new group studio and changing rooms. The gym has increased from 250sq m (2,691sq ft) to 472sq m (5,081sq ft).

Ennis was joined by former Olympic silver medalist and EIS regional director Peter Elliott, and by GB wheelchair basketball players Kevin Hayes and Ian Sagar.

Facilities will include a Bodyline gym and pool

February launch event for Holt Park project

A groundbreaking ceremony is due to take place this month to mark the start of work on the construction of a major new £27m wellbeing complex at Holt Park, Leeds.

Leeds City Council is inviting local residents to come forward with names for the complex, which will open in December 2013 and will feature a 25m swimming pool.

Holt Park's facilities will also include a hydrotherapy pool, a teaching pool, a multi-activity room and a Bodyline gym, as well as hubs for both older people and those with learning difficulties.

la fitness hit by social media storm

UK-based health club operator LA Fitness has agreed to waive the membership contract of a heavily pregnant woman and her out-of-work husband following pressure from social media users and a campaign by *The Guardian* newspaper.

The lady, who was a member at LA Fitness' Billericay club in Essex, wrote to *The Guardian's* 'Consumer Champions' column in January complaining that she had been unable to cancel her and her husband's 24-month contracts, which made them liable to pay £780.

IMAGE: WWW.SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/ZENON

Operators need to respond quickly to exposure on social media sites

The story was picked up by *Guardian* readers and the plight of the couple spread across social media platforms – especially on Twitter, where the operator's handle "@LAfitnessTips" trended for a while.

LA Fitness attracted thousands of angry and critical tweets and comments and four days after the first *Guardian* article appeared, the operator backed down and waived all of the couple's outstanding fees.

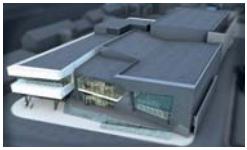
David Stalker, CEO of the FIA, says the recent LA Fitness experience is a perfect example of how important it is for companies to react quickly to negative exposure. "Social media has become a key part of our sector's communications," he adds.

Work starts on £15.3m Kirkcaldy facility

A turf-cutting ceremony has taken place to mark the start of work on a new £15.3m leisure centre in Kirkcaldy, which is one of three facilities to be developed across Fife.

Graham Construction has been selected by Fife Council and Fife Sports and Leisure Trust to deliver the project, which is scheduled for completion in summer 2013.

B3 Architects are lead consultant and joint architects with Cre8 Architecture on the project, with facilities at the new Kirkcaldy leisure centre to include a 25m, six-lane swimming pool and a training pool with moveable floor. The venue, which is expected to attract 200,000 visitors a year once open, will also offer a health suite with a sauna and steamroom, a 60-station fitness suite, an aerobics studio and a four-court sports hall.



A 60-station fitness suite will form part of the centre

The new Kirkcaldy facility is part of Fife Council's £55m Future of Leisure programme to improve local provision.

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truGym to open fourth facility

Independently-owned budget health club chain truGym is to open its fourth health and fitness club in Bromley, Kent, at the end of February.

The 1,300sq m (14,000sq ft) club will join sites in Maidstone, Peterborough and Plymouth. The equipment at each club has been supplied by Evolution Fitness.

All sites are open from 6am to 10pm and are manned during opening hours. Monthly memberships begin at £12.99, which includes a selected range of group classes such as BodyPump. Yoga and Zumba are also available at extra cost.

The new Bromley venue will join the operator's portfolio of three clubs

TruGym director and owner Parm Singh says the company is looking to expand aggressively, including adding franchising services.

"So far, all clubs have been company-owned, but we are looking to open our first franchised club later this year," Singh told *Health Club Management*. "In fact, we've very recently recruited our first franchisee, so we're actively looking for a site for him to operate."

Singh added that he is currently looking to add seven further sites during 2012, bringing the number of truGyms locations to 11.

Roll-out for Shropshire independent chain

Independently-owned health club business Bodytech is to roll out its affordable fitness concept throughout the UK by offering franchise opportunities to potential partners.

Jeff Anderson founded the Shropshire-based Bodytech chain in 1998 in Shrewsbury, before opening a second site in Market Drayton with business partner Peter Metcalfe in 2006. Further sites opened in Whitchurch and Chester (2007) and Oswestry (2009).

Jeff Anderson (right): "We have created a powerful, well-known brand"

Each Bodytech club has a floorspace of 743–929sq m (8,000–10,000sq ft) and offers a personal approach to customers.

Anderson now believes that the model can be replicated across other small market towns, and says the concept offers an alternative to "impersonal" budget gyms as the populations in those locations are too small.

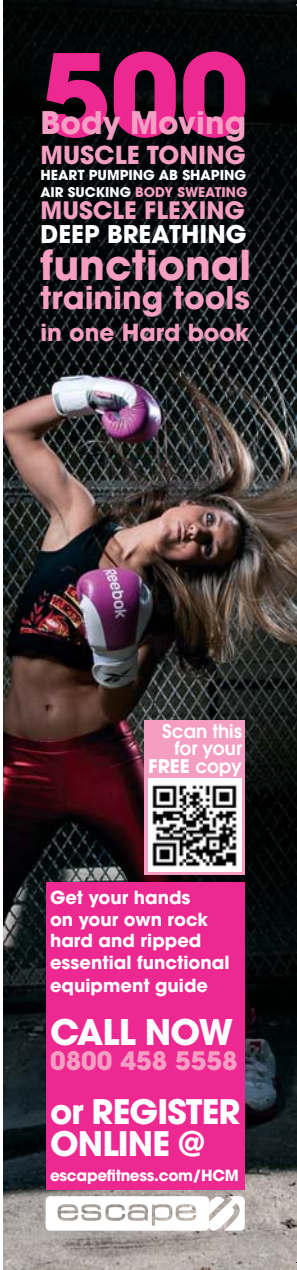
"We have created a powerful, well-known brand and have accumulated a great deal of experience," says Anderson.

Independent supplier wins entrepreneur award

Paul Bodger, director of Edinburgh-based supplier Anytime Fitness, has won the Scottish Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

Anytime recently completed its first acquisition of rival supplier Cardinal Sports and was forecast to achieve a turnover of £4m in 2011.

Bodger, who is also owner of independent health club operation Time Fitness, says: "To get this sort of recognition from the judges and the other leading Scottish businesses validates everything we're striving for." The award is handed out each year by WeDO Scotland.



Active IQ upskill qualification

A new qualification designed to upskill health and fitness industry professionals, and help them achieve practitioner status, has been launched by awarding organisation Active IQ.

The Active IQ Award in Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (QCF) is now available at Levels 3 and 4 and is endorsed by the Institute for Learning. Mandatory units include the roles, responsibilities and relationships in lifelong learning; the use of inclusive learning and teaching approaches; and the principles of assessment.

Three centres – ICON Training, UK Fast and YBFIT Training – have been given the green light by Active IQ to deliver the Level 3 award.

Active IQ executive director Suzy Gunn says: "The new qualifications are the first step towards practitioner status and, as such, are invaluable for those wanting to progress their career.

"Through working with training providers like YBFIT and introducing new qualifications, we're constantly providing up-to-date and industry-relevant qualifications that will help the next generation of fitness professionals."

IMAGE: WWW.SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/ZENON

The programmes are designed for staff looking to advance their careers

Premier Training to open five new venues

Premier Training International (PTI) has announced that it will open five new UK venues in the first half of the year as part of an ongoing expansion strategy for the provider.

New training centres in Exeter and Sheffield are scheduled to launch during the next couple of months, with three more sites in Teddington, Chigwell and Bath to open by the summer.

The additional facilities will join the existing PTI portfolio, which offer fitness professionals the chance to enhance existing skills, as well as helping those looking to change careers.

All venues will operate a full range of Active IQ-accredited health and fitness qualifications, which have been recognised by employers and the Register of Exercise Professionals.

Premier will open new training centres across the UK

PTI global sales director Victoria Branch says: "Expanding our portfolio of venues allows us to qualify thousands more exercise professionals. We work closely with key stakeholders to ensure our courses deliver the skills and expertise our students need to thrive."

Pulse onside with youth zone contract

Pulse is to supply charitable organisation OnSide North West with a range of equipment and supporting services to several of its youth facilities across the region.

The facilities are designed to offer an environment in which young people can interact and engage in a range of activities, from fitness to arts, as well as receiving health and wellbeing advice and enterprise opportunities. The Pulse contract, worth more than £250,000, involves four OnSide North West projects – in Carlisle, Manchester, Oldham and Blackburn.

LMI will offer its programmes directly to clubs

Les Mills takes control over distribution of UK classes

Les Mills International (LMI) is to be the exclusive distributor for Les Mills group fitness programmes in the UK after reaching a deal with Fitness Professionals (FitPro).

The agreement will see LMI acquire the division of FitPro which has been responsible for the distribution of Les Mills programmes in the UK.

LMI will work alongside FitPro to ensure a smooth handover, with the Les Mills UK office based at FitPro's current offices until May before relocating to east London.

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in brief...

bonga gyms opens third club

Mexican operator Bonga Gyms opened its third club last month, in Azcapotzalco (Mexico City).

Bonga Gyms is the first budget operator in Mexico, offering clubs of over 1,000sq m with the latest kit, plus lounges with snacks and drinks.

Its first two clubs opened in March and May 2011. (See *HCM* June 11, p16)

holmes place iberia deal

Holmes Place International last month acquired the 29 Holmes Place Health Clubs in Spain and Portugal.

Holmes Place Iberia had been separated from the International Group since 2005. "This deal marks the fulfilment of our long-held desire to see the brand reunited under one ownership structure," says Doron Dickman, CEO of Holmes Place Europe.

Meanwhile, Holmes Place has closed three clubs in Austria (see p21).

énergie moves into italy

The énergie Group has announced an agreement to take the fitness chain into the Italian market.

Roberto Trisoglio assumes the position of master franchise holder for énergie Fitness for Women (EFFW), with exclusive franchising rights to the EFFW product in Italy.

The five-year goal is to reach 30-plus franchise locations.

new model for curves europe

The whole of the Curves Europe business has moved to a master franchise model, aimed at putting the decision-making power into the hands of local experts.

Master franchisees Joanna Dase and Frank Polman will now oversee over 400 clubs in the UK, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Germany, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg.

Previously, all of Europe reported directly to the brand owner at Central HQ in Texas, US. That relationship will continue to exist, but the master franchisees are now able to make autonomous decisions at a local level.

reebok club for reykjavik, iceland

Reebok Fitness club opened in Reykjavik, Iceland, in November 2011.

A family-owned site, the new club is independent of other Reebok facilities – the owners are the distributors of Reebok and adidas in Iceland.

The 3,700sq m club houses a gym, hot yoga and indoor cycling studios, and CrossFit area

The 3,700sq m club offers a gym with cardio and strength equipment from Star Trac – resistance equipment comes from various Star Trac lines: Inspiration, Impact, Instinct, HumanSport, Leverage and Max Rack. There is also a selection of Reebok fitness kit. Other facilities include an indoor cycling studio with 100 bikes, a large hot yoga studio, three other large studios and a CrossFit area.

With monthly fees of just 2990 ISK (approximately £15) and no contract, membership at the club is half the price of its competitors. The indoor cycling studio is also larger than at competitive clubs, and members book their spot online so they don't have to queue before popular classes.

The owners plan to open further sites once the initial club has reached its target membership base.

fit4fun academy for kuwaiti kids

Fit4Fun Academy, which soft-launched in Kuwait last month, is a new premier kids' gym and sports academy.

The Academy promotes physical fitness and children's health by offering fun activities and classes for kids and teenagers. These include mixed martial arts, hip hop, break dance, jumping, Parkour, boot camp, target shooting and so on.

Fit4Fun Academy is based on the philosophy that fitness should be fun. "Only if we enjoy our workout we will stick to it. And only if we engage in an active lifestyle while we are young will we create an exercise habit and keep on moving throughout our lives," says managing director Michaela Fitz.

Fun fitness: The new academy in Kuwait offers activities for kids and teenagers

intenz launches virtual gym concept

Corporate wellbeing service provider Intenz (High Five Health Promotion) has created a new virtual gym concept – its my life – launched last month in the Netherlands, Finland and Sweden.

The concept is based on an accelerometer-style activity monitor, which records steps taken, distance covered, activity time and calories burned. Data is then downloaded to a website, with personal trainers/coaches able to access the information and provide advice and motivation.

Primarily a corporate offering, companies will pay €200–300 per year, per person for the software licence, activity monitor and personal coaching on behavioural change.

The website also offers tips and other content to help participants develop a greater awareness of their exercise habits, and to encourage them to exercise more.

The product will be rolled out to Germany and Belgium in April, and to other European markets in the second half of the year.

Moscow is the second Hard Candy Fitness club to open, with Madonna as the brand's figurehead

hard candy opens in moscow

Madonna – in partnership with her manager Guy Oseary and Mark Mastrov, chair of New Evolution Ventures (NeV) – has launched her second Hard Candy Fitness centre in Moscow.

The 3,250sq m club, which opened in December, is spread over four floors and offers a large gym offering more than 100 pieces of strength equipment and free weights, with functional training accessories from Precor, Hoist, Freemotion and TRX suspension training. CV equipment is by Precor, plus Versaclimber, Marpo Kinetics, WaterRower and Concept2.

Other facilities include a mind-body studio, a cycling studio, a 25m indoor pool and a juice bar/café. Original classes designed specifically for Hard Candy Fitness will be available, such as the signature Addicted to Sweat classes, featuring movements exclusively designed by Madonna and her dance team.

The club is operated by Irina Razumova, founder of Russian chain Planet Fitness.

The new opening marks the first anniversary of the original launch of Hard Candy Fitness in Mexico City. A third location is set to open in St Petersburg, Russia, in early spring 2012. The brand will also open in Toronto, Canada, in 2012. Other options being explored include Italy, the UK, France, Australia, Argentina and Brazil, plus further clubs in Canada.

healthcity international launches re-size

Multi-site operator HealthCity International last month introduced a new weight loss programme in an exclusive deal for the Netherlands and Belgium.

Developed by European personal training institute LAPT (Los Angeles Personal Training), RE-SIZE is a brand new, four-week programme developed by medical biologist Dr Remco Verkaik.

Although there is a strong nutrition component, the primary focus of the programme is on training. The body is trained to switch from sugar combustion to fat burning, leading to lasting effects.

Tests show that, in the space of four weeks, men lose an average of 5– 10kg, while women lose on average 3–6kg.

Jennifer Wilson, international product director at HealthCity International, says: "We chose RE-SIZE because the programme is not based on tricks or pills: it's based on healthy diet and unique training methods. The results speak for themselves. The participants of our internal pilot lost on average 6kg in four weeks, look great, have more energy and confidence and feel more energetic. These are the results we want to deliver to our members."

New leisure club manager for Notts Moativation

Club Moativation at the Crowne Plaza Nottingham hotel has named Chris Phillips as its new leisure club manager.

Phillips has been with QMH hotels since graduating from Luton University in 1998 with a degree in Leisure Management.

Phillips says: "I'm delighted to be joining and heading up the team at Nottingham. It's clearly a well-run club with loyal members and I'm keen to uphold that reputation as well as explore new ideas to help us be even more successful. It's an exciting new challenge and I can't wait to get stuck in."

Blackmore: Business development for Hattrick

Richard Blackmore joins Hattrick from FIA

Richard Blackmore has joined Hattrick marketing as the company's business development director.

Blackmore joins Hattrick after spending five years at the Fitness Industry Association (FIA) where he was sales and membership director.

Blackmore says: "I'm excited to be joining an experienced and dynamic marketing consultancy which will allow me to continue working with operators and suppliers in the industry, helping them achieve their commercial goals."

Carn Brea appoints new management team

Leisure Trust Carn Brea has named Barry Holding as the new centre manager of its Carn Brea Leisure Centre in Redruth, Cornwall.

The appointment is part of a restructure at the centre and Holding, who joined the centre staff as a lifeguard in 1994, will succeed Alex Clifton, who has become the centre's strategic development manager.

Holding will be joined by Rachel Silvester - who joins the company as its new finance manager - and Andy Williams, who has been appointed as duty manager.

Fitness First changes top team

Fitness First has changed its top management team after experiencing a difficult period of trading at both its UK and Australian businesses.

Effective immediately, CEO Colin Waggett and CFO Duncan Tatton-Brown will step down from their roles. They are replaced by turnaround specialist Chris Stone as CEO and Jan Kengelbach of BC Partners as interim CFO. John Gamble will also leave the business following a five-year stint.

Andrew Newington has been appointed chair and has been tasked with overseeing the changes. Donald Featherstone of AlixPartners will work with Newington as chief restructuring officer.

In Australia, Pete Manuel – who joined the company in 2011 – will be supported by Chris Martin of AlixPartners, who will become interim financial director. In Germany, Stefan Tilk will be joined by Peter Neubacher of AlixPartners to strengthen the team.

In the UK, Kengelbach will act as interim MD, while the team at Fitness First's low-cost arm Klick will report to Martin Seibold.

Colin Waggett steps down as Fitness First CEO

Two new appointments for US-based ACE

Anthony J Wall, director of professional education

The American Council on Exercise (ACE) has appointed Anthony J Wall as director of professional education and Dr Adam Bordes as senior health strategist.

The appointments are part of the ACE's long-term strategy to educate the public about the benefits of fitness and to reverse the obesity epidemic.

ACE chief executive Scott Goudeseune says: "The expertise of Adam and Anthony will further our mission to educate the American public in enhancing their quality of life through health and physical activity.

"We're constantly growing to meet the public's demand for clarity and leadership in fitness through cutting-edge research and comprehensive educational tools."

Prior to joining ACE, Wall served as national personal training manager for Les Mills BodyTrainer Personal Training Systems in New Zealand.

Vale Castro named new president of Portugal's AGAP

AGAP, the Portuguese fitness association, has announced its new national board.

Jose Julio Vale Castro is the new president, succeeding Jose Luis Costa. Armando Moreira is vice president and Antonio Fiuza Fraga is general assembly president.

Four main principles were identified for the trade body to pursue in 2012: lobbying government on tax matters; harmonising national legislation with EU laws; compliance with anti-doping programmes; and promoting activity and fitness as preventative healthcare.

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

PEOPLE PROFILE

Alex Reid

Mixed martial artist and *Celebrity Big Brother* winner Alex Reid is about to launch his Alex Reid Academy concept. We find out more about his plans.

Where did the idea for the Alex Reid Academy come from?

A lot of celebrities think it's a no-brainer to put out a workout DVD. What makes me slightly different is that I'm an expert in this field. I've competed at the highest level and have been training people for nearly 20 years.

I've trained and competed with some of the best martial artists around the world and for the past 10 years I've been planning to release not just a workout DVD but an entire exercise concept. There's a gap in the market for what I'm doing. Mixed martial arts is fantastic – it's definitely one for the future and it's already very trendy.

Who will the academy target?

I want to offer ways in which the whole family – not just professional fighters – can use MMA training to reap the benefits. I've develop a concept which is a 'one size fits all' way of doing mixed martial arts.

It really is for everybody. People can do the same exercises that a pro athlete might do – maybe to a slightly lesser degree, but they're essentially doing the same thing.

How does the concept differ from other combat-based training?

When people take part in Alex Reid Academy sessions, they are going to be pushed – but more importantly they will push themselves. The idea is to teach people how they can do this – how they can learn to set goals for themselves. Because at the end of the day, nobody can push you better than you push yourself. As we all know, the hardest bit is to get to the gym in the first place. Once you've done that, you've halfway there.

What targets have you set for the new venture?

I'd like to see my workouts being introduced in gym chains across the UK, as well as leisure centres and sports halls. The first stage is to roll out the concept nationwide but – and this might come across as delusions of grandeur – I have a goal to sell the academy in several other countries too. If Bill Blanks can do it with tae bo, then why shouldn't we be able to do it with MMA?

But you have to be careful. I have some exciting ideas, but you have to be careful and walk before you can run.

How will the concept be rolled out?

I've signed a joint venture agreement with the énergie Group whereby anyone who wants to open an Alex Reid Academy can do so, using my brand and with me delivering the initial training, but with énergie's franchising set-up as the framework behind it.

énergie will also be launching Alex Reid Academies in its own clubs, and I'm going to open a Fit4Less by Alex Reid budget club with an Alex Reid Academy alongside.

What drives you?

Being able to help people lead healthier lives. I'm lucky that, through my celebrity status, I get noticed when I talk about something I'm so passionate about.

When I was a kid, I remember history lessons where we read about all these great people who made a big difference in the world. I wanted to be one of them!

My aim is to make MMA accessible to the entire society – so everybody and anybody can go in and pound the bag, release some endorphins, get rid of their stress and take out their frustration in a healthy gym environment.

What's your favourite life motto or quote?

If life gives you lemons, make lemonade.

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Ayurveda in Sri Lanka

• hans muench • ihrsa director europe

Invented in Sri Lanka, the ayurveda system – with its roots dating back 5,000 years – involves cleansing the body and spirit. I recently visited Oasis Resort and have never received better service anywhere in the world. It's a true wellness role model and I want to share my experience with you all.

The Sri Lankan culture permeates the entire experience, which includes five or more treatments every day, healthy food, medicine twice a day (based on local herbs), and with only modest creature comforts (one television channel). There is a simple fitness centre, but with two yoga classes available each day, as well as a swimming pool and a white, sandy beach 200 yards away, it gets sparse usage.

Back to service: we tipped generously each day, which here means giving therapists, restaurant, cleaning and garden staff US$1-2 each per day. Though they were happy to receive it, we never had the feeling that it was expected or that the service would be any less friendly or swift without it. We experienced a genuine culture of friendly, attentive natives – with a headcount of 1.5 staff for each guest. Staff earn, on average, less than US$1,000 a year.

The daily head, face and body treatments were augmented by doctors' consultations (there are four on-staff), herbal and flower baths, nasal treatments and inhalations and special ayurveda applications as required – such as foot, acupuncture, and shirodhara (special oils applied to one's forehead). Two to three hours a day was enough but not too much, considering there was also relaxation, three meals daily plus tea, excursions to national parks, visits to temples, shopping and so on.

The ayurveda system involves cleansing the body and spirit

Two weeks (some stay for three or more weeks) of bliss: a wonderfully relaxing, cleansing experience, which also provided ample time and impulses for reflection. In our western world – increasingly fraught with burnout due to deadlines, permanent availability thanks to smartphones, email overload and social media – it's good to take a step back, or a step aside, to think about how we lead our lives, what is important to consider in the pursuit of happiness, and get some perspective, all the while having a healthy experience in a different context.

My takeaway for health clubs: middle- and upper-end clubs can provide their own 'oasis' for members and a temporary escape from the hustle and bustle of modern living. Genuine friendliness and caring can leave lasting impressions, where the lowest price is not being sought by the consumer. The experience has me wanting to return to the resort, which is what we want our club members to do.

Additionally, my increase in energy was felt by those around me on my return, and shared with friends and business associates in various forms (in person, in writing, via social networks, etc), which again is what we hope will result from our customers' experiences.

ask the experts..... measuring sales staff productivity

How do you measure the productivity of your sales staff? Eddie Tock, partner at REX Roundtables, offers his thoughts:

The key measurements analysed in the REX Roundtables which result in increased sales are the number of appointments you schedule today for a future date, and your efficiency rating (sales per hour). Both of these will have different numbers for every club, depending on size, marketplace and niche in the market. Typically, after 60 days of carefully monitoring sales, you can benchmark both of these numbers for your club.

The ultimate goal is to increase sales – and while performance counts in sales, it is accountability that really pays.

Eddie Tock says accountability is key to success

Accountability simply means being held answerable for your own actions and results. If you wait until the sales reports are in, it's simply too late. You'll need to track performance along the way.

There are two keys to implementing accountability in your club:
1. You must create a culture where your sales team freely and willingly accepts the premise that each person is responsible for their own successes and their own failures.
2. You must have a system in place for measuring and monitoring factors other than pure sales results.

If you're a sales manager at a health club, it means that you have three primary responsibilities: to lead your people, teach your people and coach your people.

Find another answer to this question – from consultant Casey Conrad – at www.ihrsa.org/industryleader

IHRSA
International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association
Health Club Management is IHRSA's European Strategic Media Partner

PIC:WWW.SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Energy efficiency was found to be one of the most popular initiatives in the area of sustainability

IHRSA publishes green survey results

In December 2011, IHRSA released the results of its third annual green survey, which gathered data on the opinions of health club operators from around the globe on environmental sustainability, along with specific practices implemented throughout 2011.

Results suggest that most respondents have a positive outlook on green practices, and that basic initiatives have already been established within their clubs. Participants also indicated an opportunity to develop strategic plans for 'going green'.

"Clubs have been focused on practices such as recycling, improving energy efficiency and water conservation," says Jay Ablondi, IHRSA's executive vice president of global products. "However, although results show that many club operators believe green initiatives will increase profitability, they are less clear on the impact sustainability will have on membership growth and retention." (See information box, right)

Among participating clubs, some of the popular initiatives in the area of sustainability include:

- Recycling – bottles and cans, paper and cardboard
- Energy efficiency
- Water conservation
- Green cleaning supplies

Meanwhile, some of the lower-ranking initiatives include:

- Purchase of carbon offsets
- Measuring greenhouse gases (GHG)
- Purchase of green power

"In spite of conflicted beliefs on the impact of sustainability on business, overall club operators are optimistic about green practices," says Melissa Rodriguez, IHRSA's manager of research. Nevertheless, surprisingly three out of five (60 per cent) of respondents indicated that they have no strategic plan around sustainability, even though they have implemented green initiatives.

Full results are available to IHRSA members at ihrsa.org/green

Topline results

Key findings from IHRSA's recently released green survey include:

- Three out of five participants (59 per cent) indicated that senior management at their clubs have a strongly positive perspective on implementing green practices.
- Roughly half (49 per cent) of respondents believed that green practices would increase profits, while half (49 per cent) believed they would have no effect on membership growth.
- Nearly three out of 10 (28 per cent) of clubs reported that they are unsure of the impact sustainability would have on member retention.

news in brief

holmes place austria

Holmes Place has placed three of its Austrian clubs into administration with a debt, as reported in Austrian publication *Finanzen Versicherungen und Kredit News*, of €41m. According to the CEO of the Holmes Place Group, Jonathan Fisher, the debt referred to is almost entirely comprised of shareholder loans that were used to establish and support these clubs.

"The three clubs – all located outside of Vienna – suffered from onerous rent conditions and ultimately the landlords did not show sufficient flexibility to allow for a restructuring outside of an insolvency process. The four Holmes Place clubs in Vienna are unaffected and Austria remains a market with significant growth potential for our brand," says Fisher.

events diary

Visit www.ihrsa.org/calendar

14–17 March 2012
IHRSA's 31st Annual International Convention & Trade Show – Los Angeles, California, US

30 August–1 September 2012
13th Annual IHRSA / Fitness Brasil Latin American Conference & Trade Show – São Paulo, Brazil

1–4 November 2012
12th Annual IHRSA European Congress – Vienna, Austria

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

show preview: ihrsa convention

IHRSA's 31st Annual International Convention & Trade Show takes place in Los Angeles next month

IHRSA 2012 will provide an extraordinary opportunity to experience the best that the health club industry has to offer: inspiring speakers, special panels, educational workshops, unparalleled networking opportunities, receptions and social events.

This is the premier event at which to mix business with pleasure. The action takes place at the LA Convention Center in Downtown Los Angeles, which is located in the middle of one of the world's most exciting entertainment complexes: L.A. LIVE.

You'll get to see the latest developments in fitness equipment during the two-day trade show – some of which will be revealed for the first time ever – and meet the movers and shakers who make the health club industry one of the most exciting sectors in the world. IHRSA 2012 will give you the tools you need to succeed in today's competitive environment.

The vibrant city of Los Angeles will provide an exciting backdrop to this year's IHRSA Convention

ABOUT LA

Each year, an estimated 10 million visitors pass through downtown Los Angeles for business or pleasure. Attracting travellers from around the globe, the downtown area's expansive range of hospitality options make it a desirable place to stay for tourists and business professionals alike. With a number of unique restaurants, shopping experiences, museums and more, downtown LA is the perfect destination for those who want to explore the rich history and culture that this city has to offer. As the entertainment and creative capital of the world, Los Angeles offers a wealth of experiences that few other destinations can match.

The recent renaissance of downtown Los Angeles has attracted a great deal of attention. With numerous attractions and cultural sights – and plenty of new hotels – the area has transformed into a bona fide world-class destination.

To receive visitor information, maps and restaurant listings, as well as a host of other useful information, you can connect with the Los Angeles Convention & Visitors Bureau at www.discoverlosangeles.com

educational sessions

For IHRSA's international guests, approximately 20 educational sessions will be simultaneously translated into both Russian and Spanish, as will all four general sessions, as follows:

- **Practically Radical: Transforming Your Company & Challenging Yourself** – William Taylor, founding editor of Fast Company (sponsored by Matrix Fitness)
- **How Great Leaders Inspire Action** – 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)
- **The Art of Enchantment** – Guy Kawasaki, co-founder of Alltop.com, founding partner of Garage Technology Ventures, and former chief evangelist at Apple (sponsored by Technogym)
- **An Open Forum with the President's Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition** – Shellie Y. Pfohl, M.S., executive director of the President's Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition (sponsored by SPRI Products)

additional highlights

- First-time and/or solo attendees shouldn't miss the Making Connections Orientation on 14 March from 7.30-9.30am. IHRSA staff will be there to help you get acquainted with other delegates.
- On 15 March at 8.00am, IHRSA president and CEO Joe Moore will report on the state of the global health club industry.
- International attendees and their invited guests will gather for friendship and fun on 15 March, from 7.00-9.00pm, for Planet IHRSA: The International Reception, sponsored by Snap Fitness.
- Learn strategies for combating VAT from IHRSA's Public Policy team on 16 March from 10.00-11.00am, during one of the concurrent education sessions.

register today

Visit www.ihrsa.org/convention to learn more about this event and to register.

UK delegates booking through the FIA will receive a discount of US$100 on current member/non-member rates. Book online at www.ihrsa.org/register quoting the discount code FIALA.

Questions? Contact IHRSA's International Department at intl@ihrsa.org

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Email: david@mcleaneventsinternational.com

Web: www.sibec.co.uk

An Olympic Year

January saw the dawn of our Olympic and Paralympic year, and with it a clear representation of how we will deliver the bid team's promise to inspire a new generation to take up sport. David Stalker reports

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

During the short period of elite competition, the Olympic and Paralympic Games will captivate most of us – and for some who want to emulate their Olympic heroes, encourage them to start being active. All of us expect a surge of participation immediately after this large-scale event, whether that's joining a sports club, running outdoors or going to the gym. But the difficulty lies in maintaining this enthusiasm. The solution: to create a sporting habit for life.

To initiate the process of hooking people in from an early age, the government has invested over £1bn of National Lottery and Exchequer funding into a new five-year youth sport strategy – a sporting legacy strategy to increase participation levels among 14- to 25-year-olds.

a sporting legacy

Our sector is vital to the engagement of young people in physical activity and quite frankly, in the context of the sporting legacy – they need us!

Once school sports facilities – sports halls, artificial pitches and swimming pools – are opened to the public, our operators and exercise professionals have the expertise to exponentially increase participation rates by replicating their business plan within these facilities.

We can also tie in to the new school community sport clubs, as well as helping to tackle the drop-off in participation that can happen when young people leave school, by offering an alternative to traditional sport – energetic, on-trend exercise classes such as Zumba, for example.

However it is our involvement with two particular areas, highlighted by Lord Coe for their importance, that resonate with me and prove how our sector will support the delivery of the sporting legacy.

private partnership

Lord Coe emphasised that one of the great legacies already from the Games has been the involvement of the private sector, buying into the vision set out by the bid in Singapore and taking it into a practical landscape, such as Sainsbury's sponsorship of the School Games.

Our recent Legacy Ready Summit reiterated the need for partnerships across all sectors to capitalise on a nation united by the 2012 Games. This is seen as a way to grow levels of participation in physical activity by linking consumer awareness of big brands, and their resources, with the know-how and drive of the health and fitness industry.

The FIA has already been facilitating such partnerships – through the Responsibility Deal and the Physical Activity Network – to gain scale and shared expertise and bring the business community into the funding and delivery process of physical activity.

More private funding and partnerships could help boost youth sport

We need to work with the people who have the capacity, competency and motivation to grow participation, rather than working solely on the basis of archaic structures which have not produced an increase in participation levels and which the fitness sector has now outgrown.

Our recent partnership between Sky and Shift into Sports is a prime example of corporate involvement to increase participation. Through the programme, Sky offers its shift workers opportunities to enjoy low-cost physical activities at a time that fits with their shift pattern, and the sector sees an increase in footfall during traditionally off-peak hours.

let's get digital

Lord Coe acknowledged that it's getting tougher all the time to engage and excite young people in sport. The Olympics and Paralympics offer a good opportunity to do this through great British performances, but crucially the need to engage the next generation is through new media – digital, social media, which is the way young people consume and create information and content. We need to use new media to make sure that sport sits centrestage within their lives.

Data taken from Ofcom's *Internet Use and Attitudes Report* 2011 states that, within the 16- to 24-year-old age group, 90 per cent claim to use the internet regularly, 87 per cent have a social networking profile and 68 per cent visit a social networking site every day. As young children are increasingly made familiar with more aspects of the internet from an early age, they will become more confident internet users in the future, using it for both work and leisure-related function.

We need to accept that sport is in the dark ages when it comes to technology. We currently invest tens of millions of pounds every year in buildings and volunteers, but have no technology strategy to bring sport into the 21st century. All this is scheduled to change as the FIA starts to work with Sport England on new technology platforms and digital prospects to deliver part of the health legacy for the nation.

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25 MARCH 12

sainsbury's sport relief mile

Hundreds of Sainsbury's Sport Relief Mile events will be held across the country on Sunday 25 March. People can choose from 1, 3 and 6 miles and can take part as a family team, with friends, individually or up against the clock. Entry is £6 for adults and £3 for children, or £15 for a family of four. Or why not organise your own event? Money raised will be spent by Comic Relief to help people living incredibly tough lives in the UK and across the world's poorest countries.
Details: www.sportrelief.com

Various celebrities will be joining in the mile events across the country

PHOTO: BEN GOLD

Davina McCall fronted the 2011 event

18–22 JULY 12

london to paris bike ride

Children's charity Action Medical Research is offering a new women-only London to Paris bike route in 2012. Recognising the popularity of women's cycling in the UK, the charity launched its first female-only 100-mile cycle event – fronted by Davina McCall – last year. The new 325-mile, four-day route is part of the charity's established London to Paris tour, which has been running for 10 years and which sees cyclists following four different courses before all meeting in Paris to finish the route together. Registration is £99 and minimum sponsorship is £1,400. Monies will help fund vital medical research into conditions affecting babies and children.
Details: www.action.org.uk

5–10 MARCH 13

pyrenees snow shoe challenge

There's just over a year to train and raise funds (£295 deposit and £1,995 minimum sponsorship) for this new event by Charity Challenge. A relatively unknown activity, snow-shoeing is the ideal way to explore the winter landscapes of the Pyrenees. Participants will walk between six and eight hours a day in the mountain range that crosses from France to Spain and the Aiguestortes National Park.
Details: www.charitychallenge.com

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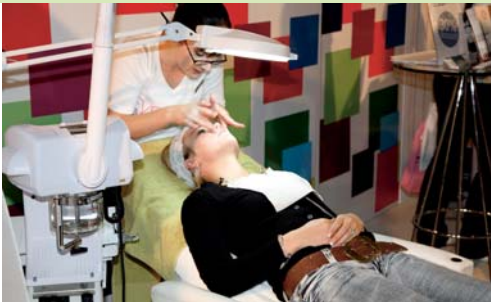

The Professional Beauty event at London's ExCel attracts over 400 brands

FEBRUARY

16–19 | SPATEC Asia

Venue Shangri-La Rasa Ria Resort, Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia
Summary
One-to-one meetings between corporate spa owners and directors with design/management companies and leading spa suppliers and vendors.
Web www.mcleaneventsinternational.com

16–19 | IDEA Personal Trainer Institute

Venue Alexandria, Virginia, US
Summary
This conference is aimed at personal trainers and has sold out for the past three years. The event includes four days of lectures and workshops..
Web www.ideafit.com/ptrainer

23–25 | FORUMCLUB

Venue Bologna, Italy
Summary
International congress and expo for fitness, wellness and aquatic clubs. Includes FORUMPISCINE.
Web www.ncforum.com

MARCH

1 | Quest & NBS Conference

Venue Holywell Park, Loughborough, Leicestershire, UK
Summary
Quest – the UK quality scheme for sport and leisure – will join with the National Benchmarking Service (NBS) for its annual conference. Speakers will include Darren Campbell and Miles Templeman. Winners of the first Quest and NBS awards will also be announced.
Web www.questnbs.org

4–5 | Professional Beauty and European Spa Convention

Venue ExCeL, London, UK
Summary
The UK's largest beauty event attracted more than 400 brands in 2011. It also includes the European Spa Convention for national and international spa and wellness professionals (see p80).
Web www.professionalbeauty.co.uk

8–11 | ECA World Fitness Conference / OBOW Show

Venue New York City, US
Summary
ECA World Fitness is an international organisation representing the wellness and fitness community. Its theatrical One Body One World New York show features a strong dance programme.
Web www.ecaworldfitness.com

14–17 | SPATEC Spring, North America

Venue Ritz-Carlton Orlando, Florida, US
Summary
A three-day forum for corporate spa owners and directors to meet one-to-one with design/management companies and leading spa suppliers and vendors.
Web www.mcleaneventsinternational.com

14–17 | IHRSA 2012 Annual International Convention & Trade Show

Venue LA Convention Center, Los Angeles, California, US
Summary
The 31st IHRSA Convention & Trade Show is going to Hollywood. The annual event draws thousands of industry professionals for four days of education and networking opportunities..
Web www.ihrsa.org/convention

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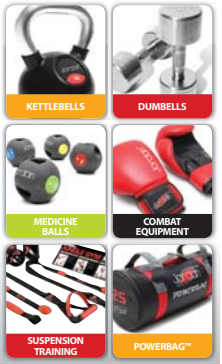

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clean clubs

It's not the most glamorous of subjects or jobs, but it is vitally important for customer satisfaction. So, how do you make sure your club stays on top of cleaning?

Nothing is more of a turn-off to exercisers than hair, old plasters or dirt from shoes, mixed with water, on changing room floors. But unfortunately, in my experience, this isn't unusual. Neither is chewing gum stuck on doors, dirty toilets, and sweaty gym equipment.

According to Leisure-net Solutions, cleanliness consistently ranks as one of the top three most important customer service attributes, alongside the equipment/facilities and friendliness of staff. It's especially important in facilities with pools and spas, and in these facilities it is, unfortunately, quite often seen as a relative weakness. "Levels of cleanliness are what we call a basic or given, which means that members don't really think about them while they're in place," says Leisure-net MD Mike Hill. "However, if you don't deliver them, it will quickly cause high levels of dissatisfaction."

Hill says cleanliness is one of the three Cs, which between them generate 90 per cent of complaints in a typical club or leisure centre: cleanliness, catering and car parking.

Unfortunately cleaning is boring, occasionally unpleasant and requires constant attention. So how can clubs make sure they keep on top of it?

Peter Barratt, technical manager at Initial Washroom Solutions, says washrooms need to be checked constantly – not every few hours – and the appropriate waste disposal units need to be used so there is no excuse for leaving litter. The FIA recommends providing antiseptic sprays and wipes and actively encouraging members to take pride in keeping the club clean.

The club design can make cleaning easier, but most importantly a culture of cleaning needs to be created. But how is this done? Should all staff be given cleaning responsibilities? Should cleanliness be a KPI for all operators? We ask the experts...

DO YOU HAVE ANY TIPS FOR MAINTAINING A PRISTINE CLUB? EMAIL US: HEALTHCLUB@LEISUREMEDIA.COM

piers slater

h2 club • founder

"For H2 Clubs, cleaning is the top priority and where I get most involved. I recently discovered the cleaners hadn't cleaned the fan in the bike shed, so I got up there and did it myself. Cleaning is so easy to get right, but so easy to let slip – and if it does you are cursed with that reputation.

At many health clubs, people skip the showers, but as part of our concept all of our members use them: we can have 300 people an hour using our 39 showers. They were therefore designed with maintenance in mind – we wanted them to stay looking shiny and clean. The showers have a drain in the middle and no curves, so they can be jet-washed. Meanwhile, our lockers are intentionally white so they look fresh – but they have to be cleaned daily. There are also curves everywhere to avoid dirt collecting in corners, and we used a composite floor rather than tiles because it's easy to clean.

Cleaning is by far our biggest bill. Currently we outsource it, although this is frequently reviewed. Although it's a straightforward job, it's easy to cut corners, so we try to make the cleaners feel part of the team: we encourage them to use the facilities and hope this helps them take pride in their work."

stavros theodoulou

zynk • managing director

"The key to keeping clubs clean is to get the space plan correct at the design stage. Ensuring wet and dry crossover of traffic is reduced, or eliminated, is crucial. Locating WC facilities at the entrance to the changing rooms reduces the through traffic, as does locating the showers at the rear.

For the dry changing area, the changing space should have an anti-slip tile for wet barefoot traffic. However, if the texture of this tile is too abrasive it will collect dirt, so the correct specification is crucial. The showers can have a high slip rating, with a more textured tile. Vinyl flooring can be used in the rest of the shower area, but has less of a quality feel. These floors are generally cleaned by a machine which needs access, so avoid steps and tight corners. Showers also need a significant fall to a gulley to allow water to drain quickly.

Eliminate any nooks and crannies, as hidden spaces and shelves can be a dumping ground for litter. Wall finishes are important: use an eggshell or diamond paint finish that is easy to wipe down. Tiles are good for high traffic areas. Good ventilation is crucial to keep the space fresh. And, finally, the location of the cleaners' stores will aid maintenance."

Cleaning services can represent a huge investment for health clubs, but the reward is greater member satisfaction

john treharne

the gym group • chief executive

"Cleaning is hugely important for The Gym Group: it sits up there along with high quality maintenance as a top priority. Apart from personal training, we don't have other services and products to promote, so providing great gyms that are very clean and well maintained is part of our ethos.

Both cleaning and maintenance represent huge investment for us. The clubs are professionally cleaned by external companies twice a day, but everyone from the manager down has to partake in cleaning routines. It's the company culture and we expect everyone to do their bit – it's even built into the bonus structure. We think it's positive for members to witness cleaning: if you go into one of our clubs on a Friday morning, you will find the manager and assistant manager cleaning the gym equipment.

Developing so many clubs in a short space of time, we've learned how to design to aid maintenance: we use materials and finishes that are durable and easy to clean, even if they cost more. We seek sites that are high-ceilinged and have natural light, and we paint them white so they feel clean and fresh. We also build in lots of power points to make cleaning easy."

stuart burden

health club partners • operations director

"Keeping clubs clean is hugely important: it's all about making the customers feel as comfortable as possible, so they keep coming.

It's important to develop a culture of cleaning, so gym staff take responsibility for keeping the club clean rather than waiting for the cleaning personnel to deal with a dirty surface or messy floor. This extends to members too: provide anti-bacterial cleaning wipes so it becomes a habit to wipe down equipment after use. Twenty seconds that a member spends cleaning is 20 seconds less labour a club has to pay a cleaner.

Having the methods of cleaning, and cleaners, visible helps to reassure members that their club is well cared for, and that hygiene is a priority. Have a thorough checklist of cleaning duties and rotate them between staff.

There are many products available to make cleaning easier. One of our current best-sellers is the USOL anti-microbial wet area protector, which allows showers to be quickly hosed clean rather than scrubbed. Crucially, the product forms an invisible, protective barrier to help prevent future bacteria build-up, keeping clubs' wet areas cleaner for longer."

WORLD FOCUS

BEN MIDGLEY

The president of Crunch Franchise believes the low-cost model is eminently sustainable. He talks to Kate Cracknell about added value in the budget sector and the importance of supporting your franchisees

Ben Midgley, the president of Crunch Franchise, is a contented man. "I couldn't think of a better job," he says. "Maybe if you're a movie star or something like that, but really I couldn't be happier."

He continues: "I work with people I trust without question and the work I do is very rewarding. When you franchise, it brings in all kinds of different aspects: you're not just confined within the four walls of the club. You have to know everything about the process, from finding real estate to getting someone financed to doing budgeting and marketing. You have to know the whole thing, because you have to teach people every day. It's fun to bring people through that process."

As you might expect from someone who's responsible for guiding new franchisees into the industry, Midgley has been in fitness his entire working life. "I love the industry," he enthuses. "I grew up in it." Starting off at Gold's Gym while a student, cleaning equipment and helping out around the club, Midgley then progressed through the ranks. In 1995 he won IHRSA's Salesperson of the Year award which, he says, put him on the radar. He was recruited by 24 Hour Fitness, where he worked as senior director of corporate sales and where he first met Mark Mastrov (see *HCM* Jan 11, p32). Around nine years later he became executive vice president of Planet Fitness in the US, before taking a six-month career break: "I think I went about two years without taking a day off, and my third child was going to be born. I was getting a little burnt out and decided to step away from the business."

The break recharged his batteries and his enthusiasm: "I re-engaged with Mark [Mastrov] and Jim [Rowley, CEO of Crunch] in 2009 – in my opinion they're the finest business people in the fitness industry and I was thrilled to work with them. They'd just bought Crunch and had decided they wanted to do a franchise venture, which I came onboard to head up. We launched about a year and a half ago."

"WE'VE TAKEN THE COOLNESS OF THE CRUNCH BRAND AND ITS ADVERTISING, BUT WE'VE TONED IT DOWN A BIT"

Franchise companies' best opportunity is to make their franchisees as successful as possible, says Midgley (above)

brand adaptation

The 23 Crunch clubs owned by Mastrov and Rowley's company, New Evolution Ventures (NeV), are high end, with a strong brand renowned for its creativity and innovative group classes. How does the franchise offering compare?

"We've taken the coolness and the fun of the Crunch brand, but we've toned down the offerings a bit because we're a low-priced offering. We're in the US$19.95 a month space, whereas the Crunch-owned clubs charge an average of US$69 a month.

"Also, Crunch is fairly edgy. They grab the attention and get a lot of PR – pole dancing classes and so on… things that are at the cutting edge of group fitness. That gives it a strong brand presence and as a result everyone thinks the company is much, much bigger than it is.

"That edginess works in the big cities, which is fine because Crunch focuses on metropolitan areas, but we designed the franchise model so we could put it anywhere in the country. We take the coolness of the brand and the cleverness

of the advertising, but tone it down a bit to ensure we resonate with audiences outside of the big cities. We need to connect with a broader demographic than the standard Crunch clubs.

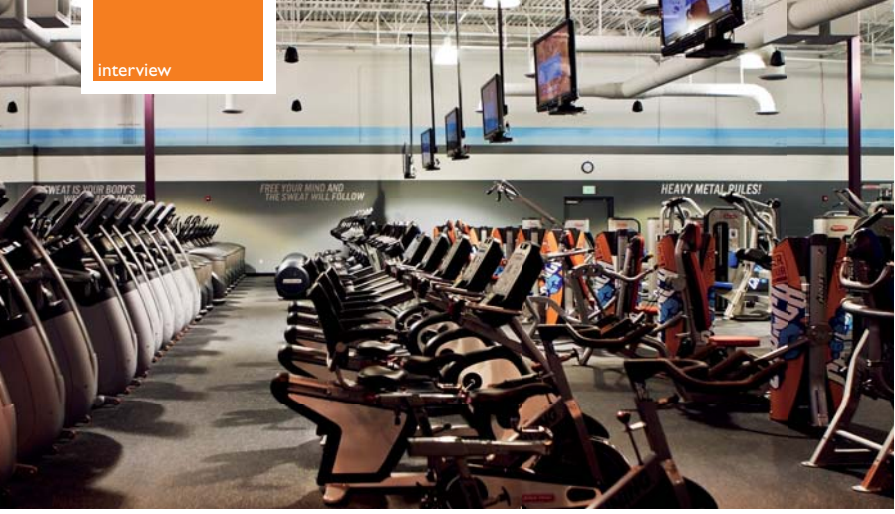
"Also at Crunch, group fitness is really the heart and soul of the offering – those clubs can have over 100 different classes a week. We're a low overhead model, so we have fewer classes: about eight different types of classes running across 40 to 50 sessions a week."

Nevertheless, given that many low-cost UK operations don't offer classes at all – and among those that do, some charge extra – 40+ sessions a week is a significant offering. "Nobody was doing it in the US either," says Midgley, "but we decided to make it work."

He continues: "The risk with the low-cost market is that consumers stop being amazed by the price and start expecting more and more for their money. We stuck our neck out a bit by adding group fitness, and it's allowed us to compete very strongly even in areas where there are other budget clubs. It's meant it hasn't mattered that we weren't first to market. Maybe at some point someone will add even more for the money. I don't see how they could, but you never know. In the meantime, offering group fitness has allowed us to draw a lot of people to our clubs.

Crunch Franchise has 12 sites open – 10 in the US and two in Australia – with a target to reach 300 clubs over five years

"We help franchisees recruit and train the instructors, and Crunch has designed some fantastic proprietary classes which we've been able to put ►



into the franchise clubs too. It's been amazingly popular – we started off with a small group fitness room and pretty soon 80 people were trying to get into that class. The challenge was just getting the scheduling right."

low-cost success

Although Crunch had filed for bankruptcy prior to its acquisition by NeV, since coming under new ownership it has been very successful. So why isn't the franchise offering more in-line with the owned model – particularly given that some believe the budget model to be unsustainable?

"First of all, I think low-cost is completely sustainable. A lot of people seem to be caught up in the notion that the health and fitness industry runs in one way, but it clearly doesn't. Look at all the fringe companies popping up – the yoga studios, the CrossFit clubs… There are a hundred ways to do fitness.

"And trying to launch a franchise in this particular economy, really it had to be low-cost. In any case, the low-price model can be extremely lucrative. Different operators have approached it differently and had varying degrees of success because it is a tricky model, but it's actually a very intelligent way to approach the business. You have to have a certain amount of discipline, and of course there are limitations – you wouldn't put a low-price club in a location where you're paying US$50 a square foot for the space, for example, although given the economy now you can in any case get great real estate deals. However, I would say that the margins in these clubs are the same or better than any other. You just have to be smart about it."

expansion plans

At the time of writing, Crunch Franchise had 12 operational sites – 10 in the US and two in Australia – with deals agreed for a further 100 units in those markets. "If someone were to buy a 50-club territory, they would be required to open five stores a year over 10 years. So a portion of those 100 units will open this year, a portion the year after and so forth," explains Midgley.

So how does that map out against expectations? "I don't know of any other fitness franchise in our space that's ever sold that many units in their first year. Companies with smaller footprint clubs – Anytime and Snap, for example – may have sold much more, I don't know. But each of our 1,580-1,670sq m (17,000-18,000sq ft) clubs requires an investment of over US$1m. Just to get finance for that in the US nowadays, you have to be financially solid. So I think for our space we've done exceptionally well. I'd always like to see us do better, of course, but we'll get there.

Measuring between 17,000 and 18,000sq ft, each of Crunch Franchise's new clubs requires an investment of US$1m

"In the long run we'll look at further international expansion, but you have to go into new markets at the right time, and most importantly with the right operator. It's not about selling as fast as you can. At a young stage for a franchise, if you get the wrong operators and they do a terrible job, you're going to hurt yourself a lot more than the benefit you got from selling the additional units.

"So yes, we're certainly working on other international markets – I'm not going to talk about which ones at this point – but at the moment we're really concentrating on growth in the US. We're getting a lot more interest in the model now, and as the business matures that interest is getting more sophisticated. For example, someone who owns one of the largest Dunkin Donut territories in the country has now come over and bought into our brand. That's exactly what we're looking for – people seeing us as a strong investment opportunity, even in this young stage of our development.

"Part of that is of course down to the brand, but I also have to credit our

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team in the franchise business – there's a lot of relationship building that goes on, creating trust with the potential franchisee and making good on that. "

franchisee support

Delivering on promises and supporting franchisees is clearly all-important to Midgley. "What I love really about the business is the sort of personal relationships you end up building with the franchisee. That's really important to me. I have a very strong belief in terms of doing the right thing for the people you sell to, whether it's a health club membership or a franchise.

"Most franchisees currently buy closer to five units, but we do have people who buy just one, and in a lot of cases they will invest a significant portion of their personal assets to get the business up and running. You learn about these people through your conversations with them – about their family, their dreams… It becomes a very good relationship, and very rewarding to help them become successful in their own business.

"Next step up the ladder are the people who buy two or three clubs – maybe they're already a health club operator with higher priced clubs, and they want to buy some of their own low-cost clubs to protect their brand.

"Then you get up into area developers, which is generally a more sophisticated group with deeper financial resources, infrastructure, real estate acumen – they can roll out clubs a little quicker.

"So there are many different levels of relationships, with different dynamics, but each is equally important and fun. And it's vital to focus on those relationships, because as a franchise company, your best opportunity is to help make your franchisees as successful as possible."

Although Crunch provides extensive support to its franchisees throughout the relationship, with clear guidance from above, at the same time it is open to receiving feedback and suggestions. "We take the philosophy that we're 80 per cent rigid, 20 per cent flexible," says Midgley. "A lot of franchisors say 'do it our way: that's the only way', but there are lots of great ideas out there. I think a franchise has to be open to learning and allowing a bit of flexibility, letting people test things out to see if it can make improvements across the network.

"Because the fitness industry is evolving – it's always going to evolve – and you have to be able to evolve with it. There are different ways to programme, different ways to interact, different things to do with technology, different ways of integrating with the community. We want to make sure we have open ears the whole time. If as a businessperson you get to the point in your career where you think you have all the answers, I believe you've already missed the broader picture."

The Crunch Franchise model is described as "80 per cent rigid, 20 per cent flexible", offering scope for franchisee feedback

an open mind

Looking at the industry as a whole, what does Midgley see as its strengths, weaknesses, challenges, opportunities?

"I think what's good about the industry is that it's always trying something new, trying to find different ways to get people involved. But it's an uphill battle to get people off the couch and taking their health seriously, and we need to be more open to changing in different ways – not just evolving our offering in our clubs to try and get more people in, but actually looking beyond our four walls. We have to go out and promote ways just to get people to do some sort of activity, and in the end we'll all benefit.

"I believe we need to rethink the way we approach politicians too. Rather than being too prescriptive in our recommendations and requests to them, we just need to focus on getting them engaged in exercise. If that happens, and start to appreciate its value, I believe they'll work out a way to get it into legislation."

And how about the opportunities for Crunch Franchise? "Mark [Mastrov] has set a target of 300 clubs in five years, which would be great. But I'm not one to put big numbers out there. My day-to-day is about looking after our franchisees. If we do that well, really who knows what the number could be."

kate cracknell
healthclub@leisuremedia.com

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Last month saw the first guidance document produced by the FIA to help clarify safety and ethical issues relating to children's activities within a health club or gym environment. Dawn Tuckwell takes a look at how to get the 11- to 15-year-old age group effectively and appropriately engaged with gym-based exercise

catering for kids

Adolescents are a notoriously difficult group to engage in organised activities outside of compulsory school sports and physical education. However, successful provision of fitness products to this age group could contribute a great deal to the ongoing health of the population – as well as building relationships that lead to committed, happy members for life. Little surprise, then, that adolescent fitness has been identified as a key trend for 2012.

David Stalker, FIA CEO, says: "Over the last few years, the FIA has received more and more enquiries requesting information on allowing children into gyms. Therefore, working in partnership with other experts, we have launched a set of guidelines for our members who would like children to take part in their gym-based activities." (See information box opposite.)

"The FIA guidelines will be a great help for forward-looking gyms and leisure providers wanting to put policies in place to run appropriate, safe activity programmes for children," says Craig Jones, operations director at Fit For Sport, who was among the experts consulted by the FIA. "Developing sessions that deliver real value to young people and keep them coming back requires specialist physiological knowledge, instructional skill and sensitive activity design that allows social interaction – and lets young people be themselves."

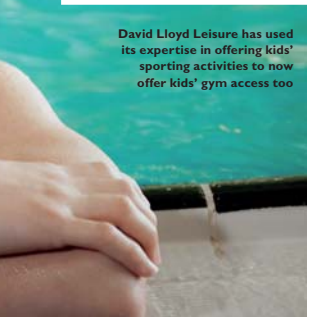
Ben Gittus, standards manager at SkillsActive, adds: "The National Standards and Qualifications have been in place for a long time, so it's great to see that the industry is going further to assist fitness operators in investing in the right training."

Operator SLM has recently dropped its minimum age of 16 to also open up sessions for the 11+ age group

getting qualified

A number of UK operators already run successful schemes that offer examples of how to adapt 16+ activities to include a new 11- to 15-year old demographic –

Freedom Leisure's Friday Night Project stages activities for up to 150 kids



David Lloyd Leisure has used its expertise in offering kids' sporting activities to now offer kids' gym access too

NEW FIA GUIDELINES

The guidelines focus on requirements for offering gym use and group exercise to children (defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday) such as appropriate insurance, risk assessment and policies to ensure the necessary permissions, pre-screening and safeguarding measures. Meanwhile, appropriate marketing for the age group is specified by the Chartered Institute of Marketing's advice on marketing to children. The document also suggests supervision ratios of 1:4 when using free weights and 1:20 for group exercise, as well as giving advice on selecting appropriate equipment.

The guidelines also look at qualifications and training. All gym instructors and personal trainers who hold a QCF-recognised qualification post-2009 are qualified to adapt mainstream sessions to accommodate the occasional 14- to 17-year old in a gym as part of public or adult sessions. This includes all Level 2 Gym Instructor and Level 3 Personal Trainer qualifications. Anyone not meeting this requirement should undertake the REPS special population upskilling CPD.

To instruct an 11- to 14-year old age group, a specific QCF qualification or SkillsActive-endorsed CPD training course in gym-based exercise for children or adolescents should be held, along with the 14–17 qualification requirement. The guidelines also recommend a QCF Level 2 certificate in Fitness Instructing – Exercise and Physical Activity for Children.

The guideline document was informed by several representatives from organisations such as REPS, SkillsActive, Fit For Sport, SLM, IMSPA and SHOKK, who lent expertise based on their wealth of experience in youth activity.

schemes that focus on fitness value, social enjoyment and fun.

Everyone Active has already implemented a training policy that offers a good example of the FIA's qualification requirements in practice. Fit For Sport's SkillsActive-endorsed course – Adapting Gym Sessions for Adolescents – was delivered to trainers and instructors at all 75 centres, with staff already at a minimum of REPS Level 2. "It's great to see that the new guidelines focus on qualifications specifically for the 11+ age group, ensuring that instructors have the tools they need to deliver age-appropriate training," says Michelle Bletso, group fitness development manager at Everyone Active.

SLM (trading as Everyone Active) has recently opened up its gym use and group exercise, moving from a minimum age of 16 to offering sessions for those aged 11+. These sessions are booked in advance within daily two-hour time slots when there are instructors dedicated to supervising the activity. Participants are also required to complete a specialist induction course, giving appropriate exercises for their age and size.

Group exercise classes have been adapted to remove heavy weight-bearing moves and encourage social and team aspects. Bike Active, Dance Active, Punch Active and Teen Circuits were all designed to give similar health and fitness benefits to their adult equivalents, but with an added fun factor for the kids. Kids over the age of 14 can also enter selected mainstream group exercise offerings, where they learn to adapt to exercise in a more mature environment.

"We've found that introducing more team elements to the classes, such as circuit training relays, is integral to engagement and retention with this group," says Bletso. "When the kids get involved, learn about proper exercise and meet new friends, they come back.

"Focusing on correct technique is also extremely important to help prevent problems down the line as bad habits form, so class sizes are restricted to 15 participants to ensure each child gets personal attention from the instructor."

inclusive activities

David Lloyd Leisure's Fitness Into Teens (FIT) programme has drawn on the operator's existing experience in children's sporting provision to now extend gym use and exercise classes to kids aged 14+, as well as offering adapted sessions to those aged 11+. This is a good example of how the new qualification guidelines segment age groups, allowing the older age group to be incorporated more into adult sessions while acknowledging that younger children require more specialised training.

Gym use has been opened up to two new age groups at DLL sites, with structured, supervised sessions for ►

Fit for Sport's scheme trains instructors in kids' fitness (above left); and K2's Friday Night Project (above right)

11- to 13-year-olds to introduce kids to gym-based exercise, and the 'Start Up' programme for 14- to 17-year-olds. Three induction sessions teach the kids appropriate exercises on appropriate equipment, as well as covering gym etiquette to ensure that satisfaction is not compromised for adult members.

This inclusive message is also apparent in the DLL FIT group exercise timetable. As well as having specially adapted classes just for young people – such as dance, Zumba and conditioning – any other classes that do not include heavy weights or other inappropriate movements have been opened up to families who want to work out with their children.

"Parents often want to co-ordinate their kids' activities with their own workouts," observes SLM's Bletso. "A well thought-out kids' programme can add value to an adult membership and give people more flexibility when fitting exercise into their busy schedules."

Sarah Hobbs, head of sports, health and fitness at DLL, adds: "It's really important for kids to grow up with the right techniques to exercise safely and effectively, and these guidelines are a sign that the industry is heading in the right direction. Although it's not appropriate for children to participate in all the adult exercise activities on offer, we have learnt not to patronise or dumb anything down in terms of activity content or marketing."

safety checks

Freedom Leisure is surpassing the safeguarding standard set out in the guidelines by having fully CRB-checked activity staff and bringing in qualified youth workers to support its Friday Night Project at K2 Crawley.

Richard Bagwell, group sports development manager at Freedom Leisure, says: "It's paramount to guarantee a safe and age-appropriate environment at all times, so the new guidelines will be a welcome aid to operators developing programmes for children. Freedom Leisure has had suitable policies in place for a long time, and we are proud to go above and beyond the industry recommendations."

The Friday Night Project is a weekly session at the Freedom Leisure-operated K2 Crawley, partnering with local sports clubs and other organisations that run kids' activities. Created in conjunction with Crawley Borough Council and the Sussex Police Authority, it allows kids to try up to five different activities, including trampolining, basketball and street dance. There is also a specially adapted small group exercise class with a professional DJ. Activities change from week to week, working with groups such as the Sussex Cricket Board's Street20 Cricket.

> **With child obesity rife, we would encourage operators to promote a healthy lifestyle to this age group**

The kids get to choose which activities they want to do and there is a team of eight activity staff (three of whom are youth workers) to run the sessions. The Project runs for two hours each Friday, attracting up to 150 young people (average attendance is around 80).

operator opportunities

Providing the right activity programmes for 11- to 15-year-olds can access a target market that is currently under-provisioned. And done well, sharing facilities between different demographics need not mean marginalising one group in favour of the other – rather it can help operators become more inclusive and add value for existing customers. By assisting with parents' child management options, for example, people are more likely to use the facilities as they need not worry about childcare. This could market your club to parents who had ruled out gym membership due to family commitments.

With a range of successful schemes already in operation, accredited training courses and qualifications available – as well as the new official FIA guidelines – there has never been a better time for operators to grow an 11- to 15-year-old user base and pursue opportunities for more customers.

"It's ultimately up to an individual gym or leisure centre to decide if they allow members of the public who are under the age of 18 to use their facility," says Stalker. "However, at a time when child obesity is rife, we would encourage them to promote a healthy lifestyle to this age group by opening their doors to children and using the new guidelines to ensure that a safe and healthy environment is provided."

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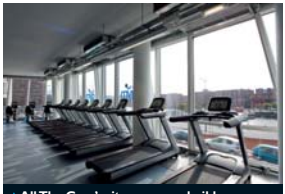
GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Health club chain The Gym may be short on frills but it's rich in opportunities for ambitious, entrepreneurial managers looking for an exciting career move. John Treharne explains why you should apply

A former accountant and England squash player, John Treharne made his name in the health and fitness industry 21 years ago when he founded the Dragons health club chain. The business was floated on the stock market in 1997, before being sold to Crown Sports four years later. Following a short stint as sports director at Esporta, Treharne has channelled his energy into developing the UK's first budget health club concept: The Gym. The group currently has 23 sites open or under construction and is planning to open a further 80 over the next four years.

You launched The Gym Group in 2007. What inspired you?

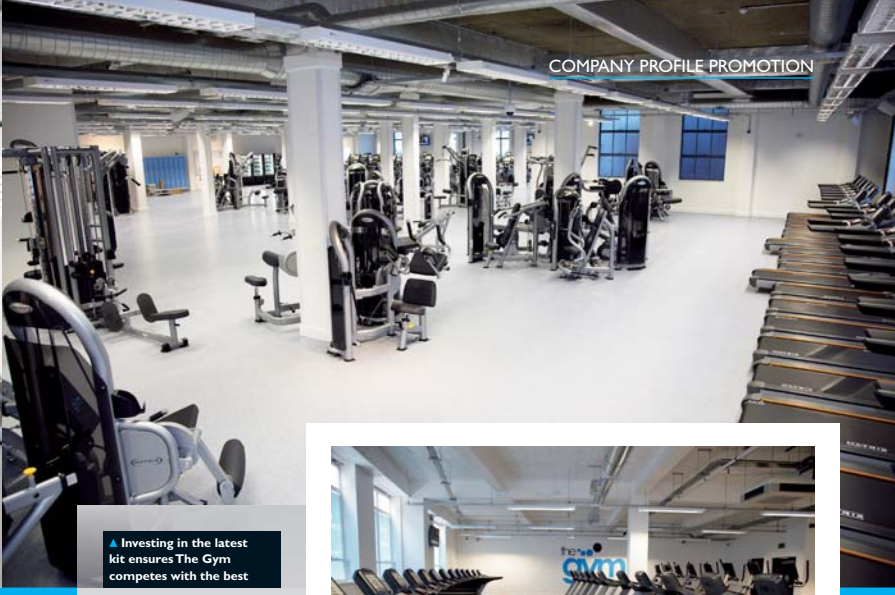
I looked at low-cost models such as Planet Fitness in the US and McFit in Germany, and saw a very definite demand for budget operations. The UK, at that time, was the most expensive health club market in the world, which created a perfect opportunity to launch a similar offering here. However, none of the operations I'd seen abroad had really embraced modern technology. To my mind, budget businesses – from hotels to airlines – really lend themselves to a web-based environment, so right from the start we put a lot of emphasis on developing innovative IT processes, such as our online joining system and streamlined reporting structure. This still sets us apart today.



▲ All The Gym's sites are new-build, with open, airy design and ambience

How would you sum up your offering?

For £15.99 a month, with no contract, we offer extremely clean, safe, well-maintained gyms with more than 200 pieces of quality equipment, open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Every facility has a reception area and changing rooms, but we don't do frills – there are no fluffy towels, saunas or steamrooms, swimming pools or bars. In the current climate, we believe people want both quality and value for money, so our focus is on giving our members a great gym and cutting out the expensive,



▲ Investing in the latest kit ensures The Gym competes with the best

▼ CEO John Treharne is seeking high achievers to work in his business

► The company plans to open 80 more clubs over the next four years

potentially loss-making facilities that many people don't use anyway.

What about group exercise?
All our sites offer 40-50 group activities a week, from running clubs to circuits. We've also recently introduced a virtual group cycling concept called MyRide in a dedicated area of the gym. We're now trialling a separate yoga and pilates studio in four of our sites, using virtual technology to stream in hourly classes from some of the world's top teachers.

What are some of the biggest myths about low-cost gyms?
Because we have a low price point, people are sometimes surprised by the high calibre of our facilities. Another misconception is that our members don't get much personal attention, which simply isn't true – our gyms typically have 180 hours a week of floor cover, which is something few of the premium brands could claim. Our pared-back model, combined with our IT capability, means our staff don't have to spend hours writing reports, stocking bars or doing pool maintenance, so they can spend more time with our members.

What about suggestions that low-cost gyms aren't safe?
That's nonsense. Our gyms are staffed from 8am-8pm Monday to Friday and from 10am-5pm at weekends. In addition, they're closely monitored at all times via extensive CCTV coverage with direct links to emergency services.

How are you funding your rollout strategy?
With a mixture of debt from HSBC and equity from venture capital firm Bridges Ventures – we're fully funded to open 20 clubs a year for the next four years.

How would you describe your membership base?
Our price point and no-contract policy makes our offering accessible to people who traditionally wouldn't have been able to afford the fee at the local leisure centre, let alone a private health club. This means we attract members from ►

> **Our general managers are responsible for turnovers in excess of £1m a year**

▶ The Gym Group creates high quality, no-frills environments

▶ right across the social spectrum – from well-off professionals to students and the unemployed. We currently have more than 100,000 members and 35 per cent have never been to a health club before. Also, because Bridges is a social investing firm, 50 per cent of our sites have to be in city regeneration areas. At present, 80 per cent of our sites meet the requirement, so we're significantly out-achieving that target.

What positions are you currently recruiting for?
We're expanding quickly, so we've currently got lots of opportunities for the appointment of high-calibre general managers and assistant general managers. We're also on the lookout for regional managers, who will be responsible for overseeing the financial operation, marketing and development of around 10 new health club sites as they open.

What do these roles involve?
We have a philosophy of allowing our managers to manage. Instead of having a huge central operation, we prefer to empower our management staff to make decisions and, within certain guidelines, to treat the facility as they would their own business. Each of our general managers is responsible for a turnover in excess of £1m a year, and people who like being told what to do every minute of the day will struggle with our culture. But those who are willing to step up and show initiative will be both recognised and rewarded.

▲ Each site offers 200 pieces of the latest fitness equipment

The Gym Group welcomes applications from talented managers at leisureopportunities.co.uk

What experience or qualities are you looking for?
A background in the fitness sector is an advantage, but it's not essential if the candidate is willing to do the necessary training: one of our best regional managers came from outside the sector and has achieved a REPs-accredited Level Three qualification while with us. The other thing we look for is an outgoing personality. We want managers who enjoy dealing with people. If you'd rather be in the office all day producing reports, this isn't the job for you.

What incentives do you offer?
In addition to their base salaries, which are very competitive, our managers can earn up to 20 per cent of their income via a performance-based bonus. And we don't make it impossible to achieve those bonuses – we work with our managers to decide on realistic targets for each business, and the vast majority meet them. The rate at which we're expanding also means we can offer a clearly defined career path to motivated individuals, from assistant manager to general manager to regional manager.

Are there any other benefits to working for The Gym Group?
It's an incredibly buoyant environment to work in. We won Budget Gym of the Year at the 2011 National Fitness Awards, which everyone was hugely pleased about, and in the last 18 months we've only lost one member out of our entire team. In an industry bedevilled with high staff attrition, I really think that speaks for itself and we welcome applications via the address below.

Apply to work at the Gym Group *at www.leisureopportunities.com*

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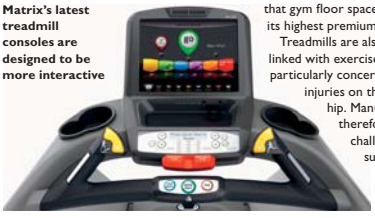
KEEPING PACE

Lauren Applegarth reports on the evolution of treadmills, and how manufacturers are trying to make their models stand out from the crowd

The Pink Treadmill from CYBEX can be used by gyms to run breast cancer charity exercise events

Synonymous with cardiovascular training since the development of early fitness models in the 1960s, treadmills are among a select list of equipment that's guaranteed to feature in almost any gym or health club. Seen by many as the fail-safe means to achieve indoor cardio exercise, innovation has meant that treadmills have become increasingly affordable, and therefore accessible to users of all ability levels.

However, out of all equipment categories, it is arguably treadmills that are seen to be the most generic and therefore the hardest to differentiate.



Matrix's latest treadmill consoles are designed to be more interactive

So how do manufacturers make their models stand out from the crowd, and what are the driving factors that have led to these innovations?

overcoming obstacles

Recent fitness industry trends have generated a number of challenges, not just to the treadmill as a piece of equipment but to the workout routine that the machine offers the user.

Group exercise classes have become increasingly popular across the spectrum of gym goers, while the recent shift towards functional fitness – including the introduction of expansive functional training zones – has meant that gym floor space now commands its highest premium yet.

Treadmills are also commonly linked with exercise-related injuries, particularly concerning impact injuries on the knee, foot and hip. Manufacturers are therefore posed with the challenge of minimising such risk, ensuring that the treadmill is as safe and user-friendly as possible. This has been heightened by the growth in popularity of ellipticals, which are marketed on their lower-impact, user-friendly features.

All of this, combined with direct competition from rival pieces of CV equipment, has meant that treadmill manufacturers have maintained ongoing product research and development to ensure that what was once the go-to piece of cardio equipment remains as integral to the user's workout programme as ever before.

meeting demands

Besides overcoming any challenges, it is important to understand what it is that a trainer requires and expects from the equipment: "The two key priorities for trainers and instructors are simple: to maximise benefits and outcomes, and to minimise the risk of injury," explains Ben Wilde, international training director for CYBEX International. "While this is not exclusive to treadmills, the ability to minimise the risk of injury is something that is of particular importance among treadmill designs."

The most common cause of injury on a treadmill can be attributed to ▸

Precor's Ground Effects Impact Control System absorbs high impact moves

the running deck. Regular users can experience muscular and joint problems if their treadmill does not support their running style effectively. Precor therefore offers a solution with its Ground Effects® Impact Control System. Designed to absorb high impact movements and reduce joint stress, this system provides more absorption in the front when the foot lands, which also progressively absorbs impact based on the runner's weight.

Similarly, extensive research carried out by the Institute for Exercise Science at CYBEX International led to the development of the IS3 Intelligent Suspension System. "Our goal in treadmill design is to create a running surface that delivers real benefits, while also limiting the stresses that present risks to the runner," says Paul Juris, executive director for the CYBEX Institute. "By evaluating the stresses imposed on the musculoskeletal system at different points during the running cycle, we were able to formulate a concept for treadmill deck design."

Featured across CYBEX's entire treadmill range, the IS3 system means that the running deck is soft at landing, firm in the middle and rigid at toe-off, precisely mirroring the body mechanics when running and safeguarding the runner from stresses and strains.

Likewise, SportsArt Fitness offers the MyFlex Plus™ deck cushioning system, which is designed to provide the perfect balance of shock absorption while maintaining product resiliency.

integrated entertainment

Meanwhile, audiovisual systems have become a customary feature among most treadmills and cardiovascular equipment, with each manufacturer tapping into the benefits of keeping the user mentally as well as physically engaged. Almost all manufacturers offer digital platforms with a combination of TV, internet, radio and mp3 player connections. In an extension to this, Technogym's new digital platform – Visioweb – also provides training programmes and video guides.

The patent pending Star Trac Coach™ features on embedded units and offers users a personalised treadmill workout led by a professional coach. "Our treadmills offer programmes that cater for all levels of fitness enthusiasts," comments Star Trac's Julian Taylor. "With over one million possible workouts using the Star Trac Coach, we ensure that the user's experience will be different every time."

And the Life Fitness Elevation Engage series of treadmills includes the latest ePublisher software, whereby users can read e-books, articles and play games while they are exercising. The machines can also be connected to the Life Fitness Virtual Trainer, a free online tool that provides exercisers with a way in which to create, track and share workouts.

going green

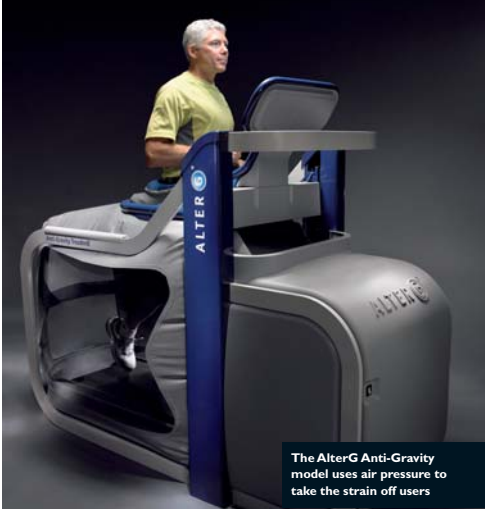
A number of treadmill manufacturers have invested in product innovation to reflect the heightened public awareness around carbon footprint and the need to be ever more environmentally aware.

As one of the first manufacturers of self-powered elliptical trainers and cycles, SportsArt Fitness then turned its attention to treadmills, resulting in the ECO-POWR™ motor system. "Using up to 32 per cent less

The Freemotion Incline Trainer is designed to boost leg and gluteal muscle activation

february 2012 © cybertrek 2012

The ECO-POWR motor system is said to use up to 32 per cent less electricity



The AlterG Anti-Gravity model uses air pressure to take the strain off users

electricity than industry standard AC & DC motors, ECO-POWR treadmills are proven to not only save money for health club owners, but can also support environmentally-conscious facilities while still delivering optimum performance levels," explains Mark Turner, managing director for SportsArt Fitness UK.

WOODWAY has taken this one step further by developing a series of non-motorised treadmills, which require zero electricity to function. The CURVE treadmill allows users to generate their own speed on a patented running surface and near-frictionless drive system. Users can, it is claimed, benefit from enhanced stamina and running technique, while the CURVE also provides club owners with a 'green' treadmill option.

something different

One of the most innovative developments outside of the conventional uses of a treadmill is the creation of the AlterG Anti-Gravity Treadmill. Devised from Differential Air Pressure technology, the AlterG is used predominantly for rehabilitation, treatment of neurological conditions and weight and aerobic training.

"Air in a pressure-controlled chamber gently lifts the user," explains chartered physiotherapist and clinical specialist for AlterG, John Hammond. "Studies have shown that our anti-gravity treadmill can help decrease ground reaction forces in walking and running, which encourages the restoration of normal gait mechanics – vital for optimal recovery."

A further development in treadmill design is seen in the FreeMotion Incline Trainer. While almost all treadmills will have an inbuilt capacity to alter the incline of the running deck, the Freemotion Incline Trainer can be programmed for a variation of between 3 per cent decline up to 30 per cent incline. Increasing muscular activity at slower speeds, the FreeMotion Incline Trainer is proven to activate 50 per cent more leg muscles and 100 per cent gluteal activation.

> **Treadmill manufacturers are posed with the challenge of minimising injury risk**

But innovation doesn't only come in the functional mechanics of a piece of kit. CYBEX International's Pink Treadmill campaign is an example of how the product can be used to achieve a wider objective. Health clubs and gyms can purchase a special pink treadmill from CYBEX, which then becomes part of its annual Pink Ribbon Run; money is donated to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation for every mile clocked on the treadmill in the month of October.

"Our Pink Ribbon Run campaign uses a professional quality treadmill that will withstand the most demanding environments and challenging workouts. Not only do the users get all of the benefits from exercising, but they also get the opportunity to do more with their workout time," comments Lisa Juris, vice president of marketing for CYBEX International.

so what's next?

Manufacturers will continue to transform their products in line with the latest fitness trends, technological developments and consumer demands.

Set to revolutionise the industry in 2012, WOODWAY is planning to launch a new range of treadmills that will allow users to actually generate power from their workout.

Meanwhile, Matrix's latest product innovation is a sign of what's to come across the board. Already featured in the Matrix 7 Series, Virtual Active™ programming incorporates real video footage of routes throughout varying terrains and locations, while the machine's incline alters accordingly. This is yet another example of the continually evolving technology that's engaging users in a heightened interactive experience, thereby encouraging longer and more regular workouts.

While the demand for treadmills will always exist, the challenge for manufacturers is to continue to develop and innovate, thus ensuring that treadmills maintain their core position in any exercise routine.

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HEALTH CLUB SPA

Researchers in Australia highlight the many benefits of massage in a new study based on 740 existing papers

Research released in November* proves that having a massage at your local health club can be so much more than just a nice treat – it can actually be used to treat a myriad of ailments safely and effectively.

In fact, it is suggested that health professionals such as GPs and nurses should be more active in including massages as part of treatment plans for illnesses ranging from back pain to stress and chronic conditions. Indeed, the report encourages clinicians to collaborate with professional massage practitioners.

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Massage can alleviate conditions such as nausea, anxiety and back pain

multiple benefits

The study, commissioned by the Australian Association of Massage Therapy (AAMT) and conducted by the country's RMIT University, is a review of 740 existing academic research papers focused on the therapeutic benefits of massage. The mix of Australian and international papers, published between 1978 and 2008, included systematic reviews, randomised controlled trials, comparative studies, case-series/studies and cross-sectional studies.

A number of massage disciplines were covered, including acupressure, Bowen therapy, lymphatic drainage, myofascial release, reflexology, rolfing, Swedish massage, sports massage, infant massage, tui na and trigger point therapies.

The review found that there was moderate to strong evidence to support massage therapy for six out of the 28 conditions investigated: nausea and vomiting, anxiety, chronic disease management – especially lower back pain – delayed onset muscle soreness and pulmonary function.

Indeed, six systematic reviews found strong evidence that acupressure was effective in managing nausea and vomiting in patient groups such as oncology and post-surgery, while seven studies suggested that massage could offer comparable benefits to spinal manipulative therapy for chronic lower back pain.

Lead researcher Dr Kenny Ng says massage was also particularly helpful in managing anxiety/stress and aiding relaxation among healthy adults and those in intensive care, as well as supporting "the wellbeing of patients with chronic and terminal diseases such as cancer".

what's next?

Tricia Hughes, chief executive of AAMT, says: "There is a growing body of research supporting massage therapy as being an evidence-based therapeutic modality. We certainly hope that this report leads the way for future research in the field of massage therapy.

"This groundwork provides remedial massage therapists, complementary and alternative medicine practitioners and the broader allied health community with a basis to pursue evidence-based practice."

The benefits of massage for infants and people with specific health conditions – depression, labour pain, fibromyalgia, osteoarthritis in the knee etc – were highlighted as areas to further explore through additional research.

* Dr Ng, K & Professor Cohen, M. The Effectiveness of Massage Therapy: A Summary of Evidence-Based Research. RMIT University Australia, November 2011

RAISING THE BAR

Donna Gregory reviews the brand new Holmes Place Health Club and Spa in Berlin

Germany's capital city Berlin is well known for its style, culture and architecture. And the new Holmes Place Health Club and Spa in the heart of the city – a development that's raised the bar in terms of health club and spa offering and design – very much fits in with this reputation.

As Sean Turner, sales and marketing director for Holmes Place Europe, explains, the aim is to deliver a complete holistic experience – mind, body and soul: "By combining the best of fitness, wellness and spa in one club, we can deliver the ultimate lifestyle club experience under one roof.

"Our clubs are predominantly located in the heart of cities, among the fast pace of modern urban living, as we identified an opportunity to meet the holistic needs of urbanites who are seeking an escape. This really is a five-star club from top to bottom."

THE OUTDOORS, INDOORS

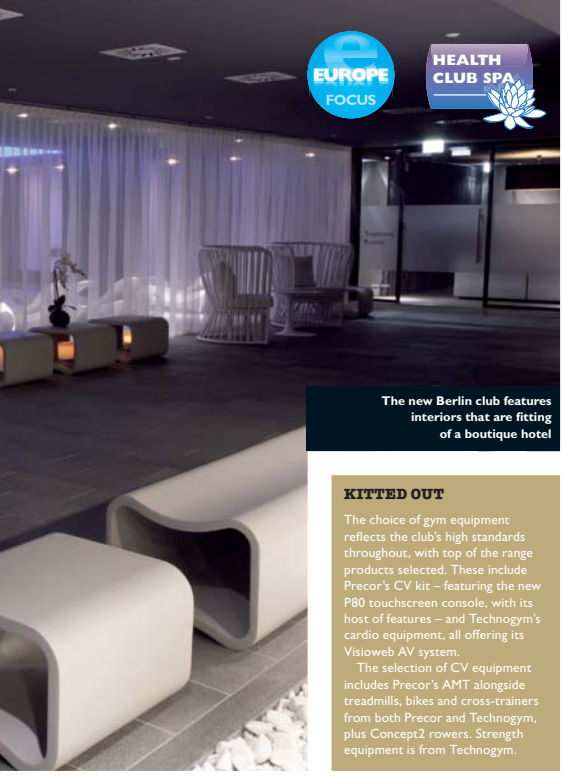
First-time visitors to Berlin's Holmes Place Health Club and Spa – located in the city's central Potzdamer Platz – could be forgiven for thinking they have stepped into a boutique hotel rather than a health club, as they enter a stylish lounge area with sofas and a fireplace.

However, as lead architect Sean Hatcher – director of London-based architects ORMS – explains, this is all part of the club's design ethos: "The entrance hall has been designed to create a sense of a timeless members' club, with low-level lighting and an intimate feel, and a grand staircase leading up to the heart of the club."

The design also aims to surprise customers. Walking through the dark and intimate reception area into what Hatcher describes as the heart of the club, known as the Boulevard, is like going from night to day: bright light, natural birch trees, a water feature, a modern take on wooden decking and a clean style change the ambience and make you feel like you have stepped outdoors. This is what Hatcher, along with interior designer Virginia Azevedo from international firm Creativs, intended, with their brief to "create a journey from dark into the light".

Hatcher explains: "The interior of the club combines luxury and simple elegance, focusing on the fusion of nature and modern architecture. This is supported by a mix of materials and lighting that reflect all the elements of nature, creating a relaxing environment and bringing the outdoors indoors."

The Boulevard provides access to the club's facilities. The dressing rooms and gym are on the same level, while the spa is downstairs, accessed via an internal staircase. "The club is designed using a series of interlinking spaces to create a natural flow, seamlessly connecting the floors," explains Hatcher.



The new Berlin club features interiors that are fitting of a boutique hotel

Parts of the facility resemble a cosy members' club, while other areas bring the outdoors in

KITTED OUT

The choice of gym equipment reflects the club's high standards throughout, with top of the range products selected. These include Precor's CV kit – featuring the new P80 touchscreen console, with its host of features – and Technogym's cardio equipment, all offering its Visioweb AV system.

The selection of CV equipment includes Precor's AMT alongside treadmills, bikes and cross-trainers from both Precor and Technogym, plus Concept2 rowers. Strength equipment is from Technogym.

The journey so far has taken me from a dark, intimate members club to the great outdoors – so what's next? As I am learning, with this club you should be prepared for surprises and the changing rooms are no exception. From the 'gentleman's lounge' in the men's changing rooms to the dressing room in the women's, not to mention the leather finishings, customers are likely to feel pampered from the very beginning.

Once you leave the changing rooms, you access the gym on the same floor. Natural light and high-end fitness equipment in the 600sq m gym space combine to offer customers the perfect environment in which to work out.

The gym features an extensive range of equipment, including cardio equipment from Precor and both cardio and strength from Technogym, four rowing machines from Concept2, a group cycling room and two group exercise studios. The gym's PT zone features the Kinesis system, four Power Plates and a range of functional equipment from Escape Fitness.

There's also a personal training service which Doron Dickman, chief executive officer for Holmes Place Europe, thinks is one of the best in Europe. He puts this down to the rigorous training that staff receive – all personal trainers go through Holmes Place's own training academy – and the focus on continuous learning and engagement with the staff.

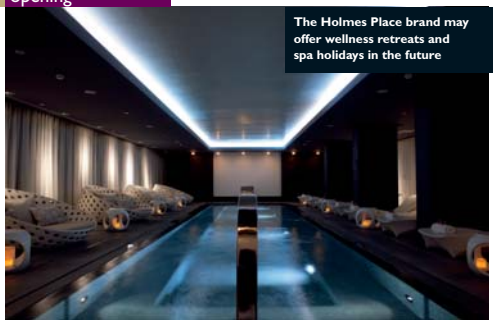
And with Holmes Place's philosophy of 'Eat well, Move well, Feel well' – which promotes a complete approach to health and wellness – it's not surprising that, as well as offering a bespoke nutritional advice programme, only healthy food is served in the club lounge.

> We identified an opportunity to meet the holistic needs of urbanites who are seeking an escape

ALPINE SPA

Although most Holmes Place clubs offer some element of spa, the Berlin club is Holmes Place's second fully-fledged spa club, following a successful launch of the concept in Zurich in September 2010. Dickman says: "The Zurich club is performing according to projections, from start-up year one into profitability in year two as we grow our presence in the market and establish ourselves as a spa and wellness brand.

"We aim to develop the Holmes Place spa brand to become synonymous ▸



The Holmes Place brand may offer wellness retreats and spa holidays in the future

with top quality, individualised service and cutting-edge design, much like our health clubs."

The team, adds Dickman, has adopted best practice from the spa businesses across the Holmes Place group, working with top trainers and spa developers to refine the Holmes Place spa offering.

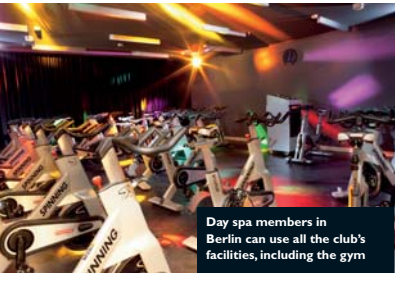
In any luxury spa you would expect high-end design, comfortable treatment rooms and a wide range of treatments using superior products. But as with the rest of the club, this spa also brings the unexpected, from the Himalayan Room – one of six treatment rooms in the spa – which is designed to recreate the feel of a chalet deck area in the Himalayan mountains, with views out over the surrounding area, to the Alpine hot pool and a room designated specifically for meditation. The spa also encourages couples to try treatments together, offering a double treatment room complete with steam bath. There's also a nail and foot bar.

Customers can choose from three saunas, including freshwood and lava, and – if they are brave enough – the chance to retire to the ice room for an ice rub-down between treatments. If the thought of that leaves them cold, they can opt instead for an experience shower, with the option to choose from drench, rain or pressure.

Therapists are trained in-house by Holmes Place, with treatments using Italian organic spa brand Comfort Zone. Alongside the massages, facials, beauty treatments and reflexology on offer, you can have a Hawaiian relaxation ritual known as a 'lomi lomi nui' – a massage which begins and ends with a Hawaiian prayer – or try one of the club's signature scrubs, designed by the spa manager. An hour-long massage costs €75, or try the 90-minute Hawaiian experience for €115.

The club expects all the members to access the spa facilities, use of which is included in membership, with around 10 per cent paying extra for treatments, for which they receive preferential rates. Meanwhile, day spa guests can use all of the club's facilities, including the gym.

One of the ways in which the club integrates the spa and health club is by using staff as ambassadors, giving them the opportunity to experience the facility from the customers' perspective so they are able to talk knowledgeably about the services on offer, regardless of the area in which they work.



Day spa members in Berlin can use all the club's facilities, including the gym

FUTURE MODELS

"We're traditionally known for fitness, so breaking into the spa and wellness market has taken time," says Dickman. "Members trust us for the traditional cornerstones of service and personal training, which does not necessarily translate into spa expertise. However, when they try us, they become instant advocates. We have taken what we know about our members and applied it to the spa and wellness business to ensure success."

He continues: "One day we envisage wellness retreats and spa holidays under the Holmes Place brand – all with the intention of improving the life and health of our members and guests."

With a second spa under its belt, what does Holmes Place see as the future for this model? "In future, as the population requires ever more individualisation and choice – and all under increasing time pressure – we believe the industry will need to adapt to a model closer to that of our spa clubs. People want to invest more in themselves, and the market is moving toward a dichotomy between the budget clubs and the premium end. For around €100 a month, we are offering incredible value," says Dickman.

And this value could be offered in other cities in future, as Holmes Place plans to roll out more spas. However, says Dickman, it will be done cautiously and responsibly: "It is to be understood that not all locations in which we build Holmes Place clubs in the future will be prime locations for wellness spas such as Zurich and Potsdamer Platz. We will roll out different models of club, according to location and demand."

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SPA TRENDS

Kate Cracknell takes a look at what's hot in the spa sector, and the opportunities for fitness operators wanting to implement these concepts in their own spas

Manicures take up little room and attract repeat custom

SITTING PRETTY

SPAS TURN TO BEAUTY

The beauty market represents US$679bn annually, according to SRI International's 2010 report *Spas & the Global Wellness Market*. Meanwhile, Coyle Hospitality figures show that 60 per cent of people visit a spa for hair, nail and waxing treatments, making them a core consumer driver. In 2012, with ongoing concerns over disposable income, customers will continue to opt for 'necessity' services over longer, more expensive 'luxury' therapies.

This trend will play into the hands of health club operators, who often have less space to play with: beauty services such as manicures, waxing and spray tanning typically take up much less room than treatment beds, as well as generally taking less time; more appointments can be squeezed into a day. Such treatments are able to attract a regular client base, and a more constant income stream. Health club spas might look to build on their existing beauty offering, developing a wider range of 'maintenance services' to keep people coming back regularly.

Also driving the beauty category in the spa sector is the emergence of non-invasive, machine-based services promising visible results instantly. More spa customers are bypassing pampering options such as facials for treatments that use technologies such as microdermabrasion, oxygen therapy, microcurrent, laser and ultrasound. Research by Diagonal Reports indicates that "significant numbers of consumers are migrating to [these] new beauty solutions". This could be another area for health club spas – a guaranteed revenue stream, as these treatments are usually sold in courses.

DRIVING LOYALTY

ENCOURAGING REGULAR VISITS

Many people still see spas as 'not for them', often due to a price tag they find hard to justify. However, as spas are a fixed-cost business, they constantly need to be selling services and boosting occupancy to ensure success. So how can regular attendance be encouraged? An enhanced beauty offering (above) is certainly one option, but are there others?

Spa membership is one strong contender: packages that commit the client to regular visits in exchange for great value treatments. Health club operators such as Holmes Place Iberia have long offered such deals – significant discounts on all treatments, plus special offers and priority booking, in return for an affordable monthly fee – proving that this model can work well in the fitness spa sector.

Lessons could also be taken from businesses such as US-based spa franchise Massage Envy, one of an emerging group of spas that – hot on the heels of the budget gym – are stripping back their offering and charging less for treatments. Massage Envy combines this simplified offering with spa membership deals to tackle the repeat business challenge from two sides. Its website tells prospective clients: "Even though periodic massages will enhance your wellbeing… like most therapeutic treatments, massage is most effective when performed on a regular basis. Massage Envy membership plans provide access to all of our clinic perks at a reduced rate, allowing you to unlock the true benefits of an ongoing massage therapy programme."

Multi-buy packages drive loyalty

PHOTOS: THIS PAGE WWW.SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

A new generation: Kids' spas should focus on fun as well as therapy

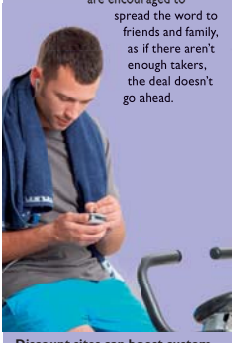
SPREADING THE WORD

DISCOUNTING FOR VOLUME

While some spas are already dropping prices to reach more clients, the phenomenon of online and mobile group deals will fuel this trend even more going forward.

Discounting for volume isn't suitable for all spas, especially high-end, luxury operators, but for health club spas it could offer a great way to encourage people to try their services – as well as bringing non-members to the club, who could be cross-sold gym membership. If operators get the ratio right between price and volume, and take into consideration the cost of consumables, it will be an effective yield management tool.

There are a number of options from which operators can choose. Group buying websites such as GroupOn have a significant online presence and consumer traction, with a large proportion of offers relating to spa and beauty. Businesses can create promotions and discounts for these deal sites to send their followers via email and text; shoppers are encouraged to spread the word to friends and family, as if there aren't enough takers, the deal doesn't go ahead.



Discount sites can boost custom

STARTING YOUNG

GETTING KIDS INTO THE SPA HABIT

With many of the full-service operators encompassing both spa and kids' fitness within their facilities, might the time have come to bring the two together? Spas have traditionally been seen as exclusively adult territory, but this needn't be the case: introducing children to the world of spas effectively educates the next generation of members, as well as creating a more genuinely family-focused offering.

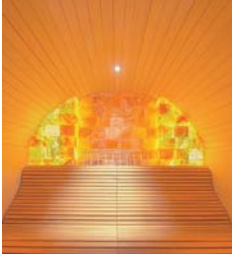
"We call the children's spa the health nanny," says Adrian Egger of heat experience manufacturer KLAFS, which has developed a children's spa concept for the Steigenberger Hotel Gstaad-Saanen in Switzerland, where a whole floor of the spa has been dedicated to kids. "Mum can go for a workout and the children are entertained in a healthy way. Also, children are the clients of the future. They are decision makers – they tell their parents where to go."

If clubs don't have the space or the resources to operate a kids-only spa area, they might consider following the lead of spa operator After the Rain, which offers kids' spas in most of its 40 facilities around the world. For one day a month, each spa is closed to adults and the whole atmosphere is changed in order to appeal to children. The focus is as much on fun as on therapy, although specially adapted treatments are available and steam rooms accessible at lower temperatures than normal. All therapists receive special training designed by a child psychologist.

Crucial to the success of both concepts is the 'kids only' atmosphere, but any fitness operator catering for children will already know how to create and supervise such an environment; there's no obvious reason why a health club/leisure centre operator couldn't replicate particularly the After the Rain model in its spa areas. ►

▼ **'Bite-sized' services could be a way to tempt non spa-goers into your facility**

Salt rooms and salt therapies are set to grow in popularity ▶



SPEEDING UP

INTRODUCING TASTER MENUS

Some spas are beginning to offer longer treatment times (at a higher rate) so they can offer a more thorough, full-treatment. However, possibly more appropriate for health clubs is another trend being witnessed in spas: towards express treatments and sample/bite-sized treatments.

In 2009, 75 per cent of spas in the US introduced "express treatments of 30 minutes or less", according to the ISPA *2010 Spa Industry Study*. And, with operators and suppliers reporting that most people simply cannot afford as much time to relax these days, shorter treatments are likely to dominate menus even more in 2012.

Meanwhile, 95 per cent of non spa-goers and 80 per cent of existing spa-goers could be tempted to try new, shorter, bite-sized treatments if these were offered by a facility, according to a 2010 survey by research specialists Holden Pearmain (conducted among 150 spa-goers and 150 non spa-goers). The Cliff House Resort & Spa in Maine, US, offers a good example of how this can work with its US$99 Spa Special Sampler. Offered only in specified time slots, the deal comprises three 15-minute mini treatments: a restorative head, neck and shoulder massage; a hot stone massage of hands and arms; and finally a peppermint tea tree lotion and a hot-towel massage for the lower legs and feet. Customers are then welcome to relax at the resort.

Both studies demonstrate that shorter sample services, with lower price points, could be the answer to attracting new audiences. Bite-sized treatments also offer an ideal upsell option and give spas the chance to offer something different to keep existing customers interested.

> **Shorter treatments are likely to dominate spa menus even more in 2012**

SPAFINDER PREDICTIONS

In December 2011, Susie Ellis of SpaFinder made her annual predictions regarding spa trends for the coming year, including several that health club and leisure centre spas could pick up on. Many are already detailed in this feature – discounting for volume and the appeal of shorter treatments, for example.

Another of her predictions elaborates on the beauty trend (see p54). Observing the advent of what she calls 'extreme beauty', Ellis notes how consumers are pushing the limits when it comes to beauty – from botox to fillers, injectables and other such technologies.

And while we've picked out the opportunities of introducing kids to spa, Ellis highlights the role of spas in catering for an ageing population – particularly relevant to more holistic or medical spas that are able to develop therapeutic offerings to address pain and rehabilitation.

Other Ellis predictions include:

The Science of Spa: As consumers become more informed, and more data is collected, there will be more scientific proof of which spa therapies provide measurable benefits and which don't. No doubt many of us feel the benefits, but documented proof will be the next step.

Salt rooms and salt caves: Just as hammam and water therapies have grown in popularity over the last few years, now we will see salt-infused environments with salt rooms, salt caves and grottoes at spas for offerings in halotherapy. Salt therapies will also be integrated into other service offerings, such as massage, meditation or even yoga.

Hyper-local spas: Spas will become extremely localised, offering services highly specific and indigenous to their surroundings. This will also be reflected in spa cuisine, which will increasingly use local ingredients.

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al corniche unveils new heat experiences zone

Al Corniche – a top-end, country club-style offering in Kuwait including spa, fitness, racquets, beach and swimming pools among its extensive offering – has launched a new Schletterer-designed heat experiences area in its male spa.

The spa – which is segregated by law, with separate male and female areas – offers treatment rooms on the first floor. These are also open to non-members: 10 rooms on the female side, eight on the male side, two treatment rooms for either male/female use, plus hydrotherapy pool, steam and sauna on each side which can be booked for individual sessions.

The ground floor is open to Premium members only, and it is here that the new Schletterer zone has been created. It offers a glass-fronted relaxation room with leather seating, sauna, steamroom and ice fountain. There are also sensor-activated aroma showers and foot baths that alternate hot-cold as you step through. This complements the existing lounge, changing area and indoor pool in the male spa.

The new heat experiences area, in the men-only spa, was designed by Schletterer

The women's spa also has a Premium area offering a similar range of services.

DLL LAUNCHES LARGEST AMIDA SPA

David Lloyd Leisure (DLL) launched the group's largest Amida Spa at its new £15m sports, health and fitness development in Farnham, Surrey, which opened in December.

Spanning more than 1,000sq m, the spa area features six treatment rooms, four relaxation rooms, a nail studio, a spa plunge pool and a spray tanning salon. Steam experience rooms are also on offer, while an outdoor area offers a hydro spa pool and sauna cabins. Products are supplied by Aromatherapy Associates, Rodial and Alpha-H.

"The feedback already from members is incredible, and my staff and I will do our utmost to make every visit to this excellent club a truly memorable one," says GM Linden Henson.

Other facilities at the club include a 25m swimming pool, separate kids' pool and a 1,337sq m (14,391sq ft) gym.

bannatyne group opens 33rd spa

The Bannatyne Group has opened its 33rd UK spa at its recently acquired health club in Fairfield, Bedfordshire.

The £200,000 development has created 10 new jobs. Located within the club but open to members and non-members, the spa offers six treatment rooms and a dual treatment room. Bannatyne's has also created a relaxation balcony furnished with mosaic heated loungers, a spray tan room and a specialist manicure and pedicure area.

Group spa director Justin Musgrove at the opening

The spa complements the health club's existing relaxation facilities, which are also available to spa guests and which include a steam room with fibre-optic ceiling, a 14-seat spa pool and a large relaxation area alongside a 16m indoor swimming pool.

Among the specialist therapies on offer at the spa are a range of Lava Shells treatments, which use naturally self-warming and eco-friendly Tiger Clam Shells from the South Pacific.

Beauty suppliers include ID Bare Escentuals, Gelish Semi Permanent Nailcare and Essie nailcare.

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GOOD VIBES

The Freestyle platform is both compact and portable

Effective for everyone, from people with disabilities to elite athletes, vibration training products are evolving to meet growing demand. Kath Hudson rounds up the latest innovations

There aren't many pieces of equipment that can offer benefits simply by standing – or even sitting or laying – on the product. And with that list of benefits including improved strength, speed, stamina, flexibility and mobility, as well as reduced fat/cellulite, it's no wonder that demand for these platforms is strong. We investigate the latest product developments in this area.

SMALL AND VERSATILE

Dynamic Activity has come up with a smaller, more affordable version of its vibration training platform: the bodycore Freestyle PT Functional Training Platform.

"We created this to allow for complete versatility," says Simon Wright, MD Europe of Dynamic Activity. "The Freestyle is more compact, costs less and is more mobile than other bodycore models. This means it's suitable for a wider range of environments, and is particularly suitable for the medical, physiotherapy and rehabilitation markets, where space is often limited."

Although it's smaller than other models, the Freestyle maintains all the key principles of the other bodycore functional training platforms: only vertical movement, an open design with no shaft, and 100 per cent safe frequencies of vibration. Users are not restricted on exercise time as the platforms never exceed 0.9g, the recommended maximum speed for vibration training.

The portability of the Freestyle also means it can be used in conjunction with other functional training machines and products – cable machines and TRX suspension trainers, for example. It can be incorporated into circuit classes, used with fixed equipment such as free weights, and can be stored away when not in use.

Dynamic Activity expects the Freestyle platform to help it move into new markets; indeed, this has already begun to happen, with the Royal Ballet choosing to install a Freestyle platform at its Jerwood Centre for rehabilitation in Birmingham, UK.

The TrueVibe is suitable for general fitness as well as for special populations

PERSONAL TRAINER

Expert fitness guidance is the direction Power Plate has moved in with its latest innovation, the my7 model. It uses an interactive, touchscreen video interface with access to more than 250 progressive full-body workouts, drawn from a library of more than 1,000 individual exercise videos.

According to Power Plate's manager of UK regional sales, Natalie Prescott, the my7 was launched to allow people to use the machine independently and gain better results. "The new machine eliminates the need to have a personal trainer on-hand to go through the training for new users," she says. "The feedback has been positive, as the machine gives people the step-by-step guidance previously only experienced by people with access to personal trainers."

SPECIAL POPULATIONS

The TrueVibe platform has already been used successfully with special populations, and manufacturer True Vibrations has now modified the product to cater even more specifically to their needs, with the addition of an ergonomic handle to aid spinal alignment. This also allows easier access to the platform for less able-bodied individuals and doubles as a support/rest bar.

"We are using all of our expertise to ensure people use the product in the most safe and effective way," says True Vibrations founder Kevin Barclay-Webb.

He continues: "At our independent vibration training studio, we have clients ranging from international athletes – England football captain John Terry, for example, and world champion boxer David Haye – to clients with neurological disorders like MS, Parkinson's disease and small children with cerebral palsy.

"We have used the knowledge gained from working with such a diverse client base to produce the TrueVibe – a third generation vibration training system."

A pre-set clock has also been added – useful for timing a session. A deluxe mat is a further addition, making it more comfortable for children to lie on the platform.

This mat also assists with specific exercises for people in wheelchairs, as it can be folded up and placed on top of the platform to bring it to wheelchair height. This allows wheelchair users to easily transfer out of their chair and onto the platform, sitting on the equipment for a vibration massage, or to lean out of their wheelchair to rest their arms on the platform, working their all-important arm muscles.

The my7 model by Power Plate offers exercisers over 250 workouts

The G-Plate by Powrx allows users to fine-tune the level of vibration

The my7 machine also features proMOTION technology, an embedded cable resistance system: the cables transfer vibrations to the arms, allowing for a wider range of dynamic exercises to be performed on and off the machine.

INDIVIDUAL REQUIREMENTS

Powrx launched the G-Plate to the UK market at the end of 2011 – a vibration training platform that aims to make the experience more comfortable, as well as allowing the individual to gear it exactly to their requirements.

"The G-Plate has an air suspension system that gives the user the option to adjust the degree of suspension: low, medium or high. With that the users can fine-tune the vibration to their personal requirements, tolerance and sensitivity," says Monika Akabusi, director of Powrx. "It also reduces overall running noise of the machine to almost zero."

It is hoped that this added comfort factor will encourage people to use the product more frequently and for longer periods of time. The G-Plate also has a built in personal trainer with 10 pre-set exercise programmes for varying levels of users, right up to a semi-professional sports level. All programmes are featured in text and image, with detailed movement description and Hz/timer suggestions.

This innovation is purely in response to customer feedback. "We take our customers comments on board and feed them back to the engineering team," says Akabusi. "Fine-tuning the vibration intensity means being able to fine-tune your training programme, which will lead to optimum results."

WAY OF THE FUTURE

So what's next for this market? As time-poor customers seek effective workouts in increasingly short periods of time, cardiovascular-focused vibration training products would seem an obvious opportunity. Indeed, in 2009, gym80 launched a vibrating bike – the enforbike – where the vibrations came up through the pedals. Power Plate then unveiled its own vibrating bike at LIW last year, offering a tough CV workout, with the whole bike vibrating and raising the heart rate. This product is still being refined, but we can expect the commercial launch this year. Other companies are sure to soon follow suit.

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SMOOTH OPERATOR

Abigail Harris takes a look at software that's transforming the way leisure facilities function, from reducing staffing costs to saving the environment

Automated services can help free up staff, who can then focus on customer relationships

Technology has become so ingrained in our everyday lives that we no longer marvel at its capabilities, and simply take for granted the software specialists who develop clever programmes that mean we can pause and rewind live TV, talk face-to-face with someone in Australia for free, and swipe through a health club reception without saying hello to a soul.

Nevertheless, the capacities that are coming through nowadays are fundamentally changing the way we do business. We take a look at some of the recent innovations.

Time's up, lights out

At Gladstone Health and Leisure, a team of 22 experts work in research and development to enable leisure operators to run their businesses more efficiently.

When sportscotland's National Centre Inverclyde began using Gladstone Health and Leisure's Energy Manager software 10 years ago, they were confident it would help with day-to-day energy saving. Little did they realise the true impact it would have on the business' bottom line.

The facility provides a centre of excellence for top sports people, national squads and governing bodies, as well as the general public. Its impressive set-up includes outdoor football and hockey pitches, tennis courts and golf, as well as an indoor gymnastics hall, badminton, basketball and squash courts, a fitness suite, studios, a sports injury clinic and a human performance lab.

Gladstone's Energy Manager works by integrating the bookings management system with the electrical supply to automatically switch on and off utilities such as lighting, heating and air conditioning before an activity is due to begin and when a booking ends, reducing energy consumption and minimising light pollution from outdoor facilities. At sportscotland's National Centre it's also used to control the sauna, which has relatively low usage. The sauna can be left switched off, saving money, without staff needing to remember to turn it on 30 minutes before each booking to warm up.

Gladstone's software links leisure bookings with energy supply to cut costs

As a result of implementing Gladstone's system, the National Centre reduced its lighting costs alone by 12 per cent – around 300 fewer hours of lighting every month. Helen Walker, admin and business development manager at the facility, says: "Our initial sign-up was all to do with energy saving, as so many people forgot to turn the lights off at night. Without a doubt the software has reduced wastage and costs and demonstrates our commitment to be an environmentally-friendly facility.

"But it wasn't until the software was installed that we realised that there would be other, far-reaching benefits." These include a significant fall in unpaid

use, a tangible saving of staff time and, perhaps more surprisingly, a drop in anti-social behaviour.

"The outdoor pitches are 500 yards away behind trees, and previously our staff had to spend time checking people left the pitches and courts when their allotted time was up," continues Walker. "People will continue to play all the time the lights are on, but now we can control the length of time they stay as five minutes after a booking ends, the lights automatically go off.

"The software programme also saves us from confrontation, particularly with youths who often used to hang around the pitches. Now, if there are no bookings, the facility is in darkness, so we don't have kids hanging out or people taking advantage of a game for free, where in the past we had to come out and ask them to pay."

Budget operator Fresh Fitness uses wrist bands (left) that allow for cashless payments in the clubs

Cashless clubs

With membership fees of just £15 a month, Fresh Fitness offers budget fitness facilities at six locations in Denmark and seven in Norway.

With typically just one member of staff manning each club, and none during off-peak hours, the innovative concept relies heavily on technology. Fresh Fitness members register and pay online, and member contracts are signed digitally at the club and put online.

In-club credit card terminals are integrated with eXerp's ClubLead, an IT platform specially designed for large fitness chain operators. Members receive a wrist band that gives them access to the club. This is also used to process and pay add-on charges at touchless readers for optional extras, such as entering manned classes and using the showers, as well as buying retail products at ClubLead integrated vending machines.

Prices are controlled by ClubLead software, which means that Black Label members – who pay an additional fee in order to bring a friend to the club for free whenever they want – can automatically enjoy a 20 per cent discount at vending machines. ►

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As a consequence, Fresh Fitness is a completely cash- and paper-free environment, with very few manual procedures. Self-service is efficient thanks to the operation of kiosks in the clubs, which allows staff to spend most of their time on member-facing activities. Secondary spend and retail margins are improved and leakages – stolen or mispriced items, for example – are effectively eliminated.

Rasmus Ingerslev, who founded Fresh Fitness Denmark in 2010 in partnership with SATS, says: "A comparable non-budget club would typically have two or three times our level of staff. Our model is largely made possible by technology, with non-staffed clubs during our off-peak times (earliest and latest opening hours), web sales, automated check-in, video-based group exercise and cycling classes, and also automated vending machine sales.

"In general, we have replaced all manual handling that has no real customer value with automated processes. The picture would be very different if we took away any one piece of our technology puzzle – the model would not be sustainable without it."

Cutting carbon footprints

Serco Leisure has reduced its carbon footprint by 29 per cent across its 70 leisure centres using Legend's VISION Server Energy Management Software Solution.

Since prototyping and installing the solution three years ago, Serco Leisure has been able to monitor, benchmark and actively manage its daily energy consumption, and is aiming for a further 5 per cent reduction during 2012.

Keith Thomas, MD of Serco Leisure, explains: "We are committed not just to the health of our customers but also to the environment. We aim to cost-effectively deliver high quality services to customers with minimum environmental impact."

Serco's leisure centres are faced with a number of variables that contribute to increased or reduced energy consumption each day, from visitor numbers and extreme weather conditions to equipment failure or the successful implementation of energy reduction initiatives. Serco therefore needed a system that could track and monitor the impact of these factors in real time, in an automated and user-friendly manner. The energy system also needed to offer real-time alerts of any unusual performance data to allow swift intervention.

Using VISION Server, integrated with the Legend Club Management CRM system, Serco Leisure has been able to draw data from multiple, disparate sources into a central carbon management database and provide real-time insight in to the causes of variations in energy consumption.

Serco uses the software to set benchmarks for facilities' utility consumption, tracking progress against goals and using automatic alarms that allow the company to respond immediately to potential issues, rather

Internet deal: DW Sports signed up with Ez-Runner to offer a five-minute online membership sign-up

> We've replaced all manual handling that has no real value with automated processes

Today's members tend to be more at ease dealing with technology, while clubs may see an improved bottom line

than discovering them months later in a review of utilities bills.

"The results we have achieved over the last few years speak for themselves," continues Thomas. "Through a combination of my team's focus, know-how and tireless commitment to reducing our carbon footprint and this powerful software solution, we have made a significant saving on our carbon footprint.

"We've also achieved annual cost savings of more than £1m by monitoring, tracking and benchmarking the way that our leisure centres function in this key area of business performance. That is a significant achievement in itself, but equally it enables us to be more environmentally accountable."

Online sign-up 24/7

With more than 62 per cent of the British public shopping online, DW Sports realised it could be missing a trick with its traditional member sign-up process. So in 2008, the chain partnered with Ez-Runner to create a virtual 24/7 sales team, offering an easy and effective five-minute online membership sign-up process, and now a massive 98 per cent of its memberships join online.

Ez-Runner's software allows the customer to sign a PAR-Q and agree to the terms and conditions online, as well as allowing the club to process a direct debit and take any other payments.

"We adapted our marketing strategy to the online service and are now in-line with all the other businesses cashing in on the online revolution, targeting prospects 24/7," says Andrew Forsyth, national membership services manager at DW Sports. "People really do sign up at 3am. We conducted analysis across different demographics that showed many parents work alternate shifts and unsociable hours.

"Our in-house sales team also uses the online sign-up process to make the whole in-club experience that much easier and quicker. We have a number of kiosks where the sales team can lead the prospect through the sign-up process, walk over to reception, take a photo, issue a membership card and take them straight into the gym."

DW Sports has also used online sign-up to successfully promote new site openings and conduct pre-sales – an impressive 80 per cent of the membership target signed up before the opening of the last site thanks to this online option.

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Bring **Power Cycling** to your Gym

Power Cycling is the revolutionary indoor cycling class that is perfect for engaging your members (and attracting new ones).

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Endorsed by
wattbike BRITISH CYCLING

MyRide console new from Matrix

Matrix Fitness Systems distributes the MyRide indoor cycling console. Developed by The Indoor Cycling Group, it allows users to choose a biking challenge, build a custom workout to achieve their fitness goals, or simply be entertained while listening to music or watching TV. Available either freestanding or wall-mounted, MyRide offers touch-screen operation.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
myride

A bestseller revamped: Keiser's M3+

Keiser, creator of the eddy current magnetic resistance exercise bike, has unveiled the M3+, a luxury version of its best-selling M3. Among the bike's features are fore-and-aft adjustable handlebars that lock into any position to a maximum 5¾ inches closer to the rider. The neck of the frame has also been reduced by two inches, which lowers the starting position of the handlebars.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
keiser

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Star Trac debuts the Spinner Blade

The Spinner Blade is the latest in a long line of Spinning bikes from Star Trac. The machine features an iconic aluminium frame design, which offers both a lower overall weight and superior rust resistance, while the handlebars and seat settings have vertical fore and aft adjustment. Dual oversized easy-access water bottle holders are integrated into the handlebar design, while a patent-pending taper-fit bottom bracket and pedal system increase the bike's strength and reliability.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORDS
star trac

Gold medal training from Wattbike

Power Cycling from Wattbike is an activity which is backed by the governing body for cycling, British Cycling, and offers gyms and their members a unique opportunity to train utilising the same training methods and equipment as Olympic gold medallists. Each indoor cycling class member trains at their own optimal level for maximum benefits, using a combination of heart rate and power, all in a group environment. Being able to show both live and archived fitness improvements via the Power Cycling software is great for individual motivation and member retention. Existing members can experience a whole new activity, while experienced cyclists may join the club for the indoor training possibilities.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
wattbike

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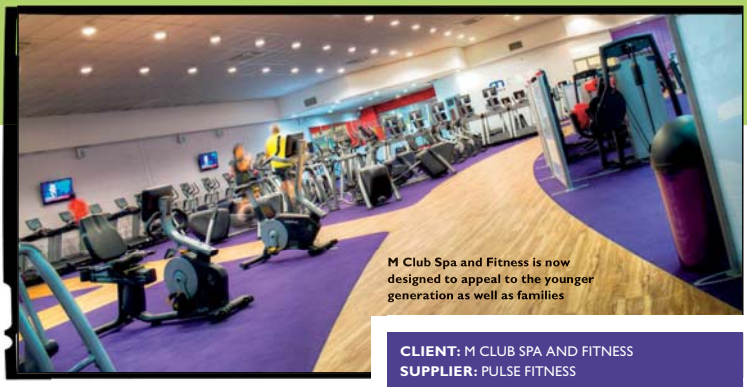
BREATH OF LIFE

It's not about how much space you have, but how you use it. Kath Hudson looks at some refurbishments that replaced under-used areas with what consumers really wanted



M Club Spa and Fitness is now designed to appeal to the younger generation as well as families

CLIENT: DEESIDE LEISURE CENTRE (FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL)
SUPPLIER: ALLIANCE LEISURE
INVESTMENT: £6m
DATE OF PROJECT: JANUARY 2012

Deeside Leisure Centre was in desperate need of repair: an ageing facility ill-suited to cope with community demand. A phased development project began in July 2010 and was completed in January 2012, creating an exciting portfolio of activities to attract a diverse range of residents.

The refurbishment transformed a redundant first floor nightclub into an 80-station family fitness suite, 12-station toning studio, group cycling studio and changing facilities. A day spa was also created with four treatment rooms and heat experiences, including a salt grotto and an igloo.

On the ground floor, there is now a children's play area, 'extreme arena' for skateboarders, skaters, BMX riders and scooters, and a high ropes course. The gym opened in August 2011 and the council is delighted with the results. Executive member for leisure, Dennis Hutchinson, says health membership rose from 350 to 1,100 in the first three months alone.

Nightclub to health club: Deeside now offers a gym, spa and 'extreme arena'

CLIENT: M CLUB SPA AND FITNESS
SUPPLIER: PULSE FITNESS
INVESTMENT: OVER £500,000
DATE OF PROJECT: OCTOBER 2011

Former mid-market M Club Spa and Fitness has been rebranded, refurbished and pitched to a high-end clientele, resulting in it beating off competition from two budget clubs less than three miles away, which opened at the same time.

The former Esporta site originally opened 15 years ago, but had received minimal investment since that time and was in need of attention. After a member campaign to save it, it was acquired by local entrepreneur and star of *The Secret Millionaire*, Mo Chaudry.

Pulse was appointed to modernise, rebrand and market the club, as well as provide the fitness equipment, management software and staff training. Chaudry's brief to Pulse was to create the number one club in North Staffordshire – a club that would be aspirational for a younger generation as well as being a family-orientated place.

The main area for development was the fitness suite, where the podium was removed, and the décor, branding, signage, lighting and flooring updated. Screens were added to zone the exercise areas and a new AV package was supplied, along with 120 Pulse fitness stations. A cocktail bar now provides a space for the busy new social calendar.

Chaudry says: "Within the same month of us opening, two budget clubs opened less than three miles away with a price point of under £15 a month. Our strategy was to appeal to high-end consumers with a monthly price of £50. Initially we lost some members, but since word-of-mouth has spread about high standards, many have returned."

►

CLIENT: HEALTHCLUB VEENENDAAL
SUPPLIER: ESC CREATIVE
INVESTMENT: €8,000 branding / flooring. €11,000 kit
DATE OF PROJECT: MAY 2011

Netherlands-based Healthclub Veenendaal is a successful, independently owned mid-market club which needed to differentiate in order to stay ahead of the competition from budget clubs in the area.

The club has produced a vibrant training area, turning an under-used squash court into a functional training area that offers a sprint track, boxing equipment, kettlebells and Bosu balls. No construction work was needed, but via the use of strong graphics, ESC Creative transformed the zone into a bright, vibrant training studio.

Membership is now at its highest level: before the installation, the club had 3,600 members and that level had remained stagnant since opening, but since the changes it has gained 300 members. Joint owner Sonja Van Essen says the new offering has made it easier to sell memberships: "Conversions from walk-ins went from 63 per cent to 81 per cent once we completed this installation."

Veenendaal has seen membership rise to record levels

The first two easyGym fit-outs required extensive refurbishment work

CLIENT: EASYGYM
SUPPLIER: PE CONTRACTS
INVESTMENT: £700,000
DATE OF PROJECTS: JUNE AND JULY

Last year, PE Contracts transformed two former Virgin Active gyms – in Slough and Wood Green – into the first two easyGym clubs. The brief was to deliver an outstanding, clean space, which fitted easyGym's philosophy of having great equipment and open spaces, as well as offering clients the choice of what they pay for.

At the Wood Green club, there were numerous mechanical and electrical issues surrounding old equipment, moving the changing rooms and converting the original changing space into a gym extension and studio. There were also tight access restrictions, with the club building actually being part of the shopping centre car park; over 30 tonnes of debris had to be removed by hand into vans and then transported around the block to the skip. Slough had a similar car park location. The schedule was also very tight, as the gyms had to open within seven weeks.

The project was, however, a success according to Dominic Evans, MD of PE Contracts: "At Wood Green, for example, there are thousands more members than when it was a Virgin Active site. It's more spacious, brighter and lighter. The finish is far superior thanks to the use of innovative and stylish products, such as Altro rubber flooring and Altro Whiterock wall cladding. Member feedback shows customer satisfaction is high."

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CLIENT: BRANDON LEISURE CENTRE (ANGLIA COMMUNITY LEISURE)
SUPPLIER: CREATEABILITY
INVESTMENT: £500,000
DATE OF PROJECT: NOVEMBER 2011

Run by Anglia Community Leisure, on behalf of Forest Heath District Council, Brandon Leisure Centre in Suffolk has recently been modernised, with the space being redeployed in order to be more commercial. The brief was to remodel the reception to create a multi-functional studio for group exercise, and to transform the changing rooms to bring them up-to-date.

The previous fitness suite was split over two floors. The new 40-station fitness suite, now located on just one floor, is twice the size thanks to the conversion of an under-used indoor bowls hall. Meanwhile, the old bar was converted into a versatile café/bar area, with a folding acoustic wall which can be opened up to create an events space for 150 people; the intention is to attract weddings and parties.

CEO of Anglia Community Leisure, Tony Bass, says: "The redevelopment has shifted our focus away from traditional sport to offering health and fitness.

"In addition, where we previously held about 30 events a year, the new facility offers both an improved environment and catering services for our local residents, so we expect a far bigger uptake."

An indoor bowls hall was converted to double the centre's gym area

The expanded gym includes some former office space

CLIENT: ENERGIA GYM, IMPERIAL COLLEGE LONDON
SUPPLIER: CONCEPT CORPORATE INTERIORS
INVESTMENT: £50,000
DATE OF PROJECT: AUGUST 2011

The Energia Gym at Imperial College will be used by athletes, including the Japanese Olympic team, in the run-up to the London Olympics; as the gym and equipment were getting tired, its management was keen to give it a facelift ahead of its adventure this year.

Matrix won the equipment contract and asked Concept Corporate Interiors (CCI) to design and refurbish the 280sq m (3,000sq ft) space. The two main objectives were to improve the layout in order to maximise the space and to create a vibrant, energised atmosphere. CCI used design elements to complement the Energia brand, incorporating the brand's existing red colour scheme. The gym now has a 76-station gym with five designated workout zones.

CCI MD David Kirby says: "This gym occupies quite a long, narrow space. We broke this up with a meandering hard wood floor. Striking colours were used on the walls and floor to make the space more vibrant and interesting."

Some mild demolition work also took place, to decrease office space in favour of more gym floorspace. The personal training room was also made smaller to encourage PTs to work in the gym more. Kirby says the main challenge was the tight timescale, as the refit took a little over a month. But the outcome was a success: sports centre manager Kelly McKenzie says the refit has ticked all the boxes and member feedback has been positive.

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Kettlebell competition

Competition Kettlebells are the latest addition to the range of performance equipment from Jordan Fitness. Designed with a larger base than other kettlebells, the Competition collection ensures greater levels of stability, allowing the user to carry out floor exercises such as press-ups and dips in a safer and more efficient way. The weights, ranging from 8kg–40kg, are colour-coded for easy identification.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORDS
jordan fitness

New Nautilus K2 Climber unveiled

Med-Fit Systems has announced the launch of a new Nautilus K2 Vertical Climber with an improved design. New features include a low step-up height, wide treads and a less aggressive step height with contrasting colour steps. It's available with either 7" or 10" iPod-compatible touch-screen monitors and, although it caters for new exercisers, also offers 500-watt peak resistance to challenge your fittest members.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
amazon

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Rotational power with the Rip Trainer

From the creators of the TRX Suspension Training method comes the TRX Rip Trainer, a product designed to develop rotational power, strength and core stability, all while getting an intense metabolic workout. It's a 40" training bar with an adjustable elastic resistance cord that can attach to either or both ends. The bar collapses for portability and comes with a door anchor, basic training DVD and guidebook. Weighing under 2kg, it's easy to set up and suits any level of fitness.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
trx

IFI recognition for Pulse's Fusion X-train

Pulse's new Fusion X-train has been awarded IFI stage 2 accreditation. The machine will join the company's 17-strong line-up of kit already so accredited. In addition to all the existing features of the Fusion range, the new IFI X-train – the first side-access or side-mounting elliptical cross trainer to be accredited to IFI stage 2 – will also offer special features for disabled users. These include fixed pedals with a position-locking system, audio feedback, raised iconography and neoprene handles, enabling users with limited mobility and other impairments to easily access and use the machine.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
pulse

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Supplier: Nouveau Solutions
Client: Charterhouse

Built by Charterhouse – one of the UK's leading independent schools – Charterhouse Club offers extensive and varied sporting facilities to satisfy the demands of its pupils as well as the wider community. Facilities include a 25 m six-lane pool, a fully-equipped fitness suite, aerobics studios, holistic therapies, crèche, crew rowing, six-lane all-weather track, indoor climbing wall, tennis courts and a retail outlet. The club currently has 2,500 members.

In 2011, having become disillusioned with its incumbent leisure management system, the club decided to look for an alternative system. "Our business was being held back and we were spending more time than we could afford trying to make our existing system work for us," says Tim Ostle, commercial director. "Furthermore, with a growing membership base, a proper Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform was becoming increasingly necessary to help us gain a complete understanding of our customer base and grow our business."

The management team wanted the new system to be based on a scaleable, up-to-date industry standard platform, to eliminate the risks – financial and future-proofing – of 'lock-in' to proprietary software. Secondly, it had to provide total flexibility to meet the operational needs of the business, not force the business to adapt to the way the software worked. Next, it had to incorporate a CRM platform to better manage the relationships with existing and prospective customers. Ease of use was a further key requirement. Finally, the system had to be robust, ensuring data was up-to-date and accurate.

The club offers varied leisure pursuits, including an indoor climbing wall

Charterhouse Club evaluated a number of leading systems and selected CRM 4 Leisure, a module from the Nouveau Solutions Sports & Leisure portfolio. "For us it was a relatively easy decision," says Ostler. "No other vendor offered such a flexible, user-friendly solution, nor based it on industry standard software that we can be assured will continue to be developed and kept up-to-date over the long-term."

CRM 4 Leisure was designed from scratch and is integrated into Microsoft Dynamics CRM, an industry-leading CRM platform. The system provides businesses with a 360-degree view of existing and prospect customers' relationships with the club, and brings with it an extensive range of marketing and management reporting tools as standard. The user experience is extremely intuitive and touch-screen POS terminals are standard.

Since its implementation, CRM 4 Leisure has had a major impact on the Charterhouse Club. Staff are now able to work far more efficiently, enabling them to concentrate on their core business. Management can see a complete picture of how the business is operating and react more quickly to trends and opportunities.

New memberships are growing, and retention rates have increased as a result of the system's marketing and analytics tools. Members' online user experience has improved too, with key booking and historical information provided within a mobile environment.

The next phase will be the expansion of fitness goals and results, and providing links to major fitness equipment suppliers. As Ostler puts it: "We now have total confidence in whatever we do today, and will do tomorrow."

The CRM system offers management a full understanding of the customer base

For more information: www.nslcrm.com

The Vale Resort offers new members a free PT session on an Xdream bike

ENHANCED EXPERIENCE

Supplier: Trixter
Client: The Vale Resort

The Vale Resort is one of the UK's top country clubs and a standalone centre of excellence for sport, based just north of Cardiff. It is home to both Championship football league and national rugby clubs, as well as hosting training camps for an established and growing list of national and elite level teams.

In addition to providing for elite sporting bodies, the Vale also supports a strong membership base, offering one of the industry's most up-to-date training facilities across the cardio floor, weights area and the studio timetable. It embraces all methods of training to achieve client results – from functional training, vibration training and virtual interactive training to offering technical advice and programmes at the Running Analysis School. The Vale succeeds in providing a performance venue for the outright beginner through to the seasoned pro.

Included within this offering are Trixter Xdream virtual interactive bikes on the gym floor, and Trixter X1000 studio bikes. "We use the Xdream bikes to entice prospective members into the Vale, offering a PT session on the Xdream as part of the sign-up," says Carl Lester, general manager. "Every month we also offer a different challenge. The Xdream has become an addictive tool for our members, which ensures the success of the race nights we run. This provides a great retention platform, as members keep coming back to complete the levels and take part in the team competitions that we run."

"It's fantastic to be part of such a unique offering within the Vale, adding to its existing member experience as well as helping to attract new prospective clients," adds Lyndon Wood, sales director for Trixter.

The Trixter Xdream and the X-Bike are designed, and proven, to offer a total body training effect. The Xdream simulates the terrain you ride through on the screen in front of you, totally engaging and immersing the user in the experience. It also allows you to compete with your colleagues side by side. Meanwhile, the X-Bikes offer a great evolution in studio cycling, bringing the upper body into the class and strengthening users' cores as they train.

The Xdream bikes can be addictive, and race nights help boost retention

"We decided to introduce the X-Bikes, to offer a different indoor cycling experience, almost three years ago now. Managing the change was key to success; with the continued support from Trixter, our classes have grown, with a real cross-section of members taking part," adds Lester.

"The Xdream is something else. Never before have we had members crowding round kit as colleagues race it out in the finals. The only thing we have to watch is the over-zealous comments as they overtake and knock each other off! It's a cracking piece of kit!"

For more information: www.trixter.net

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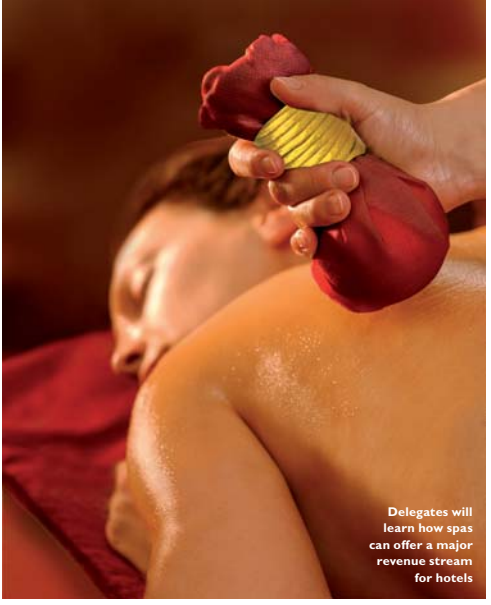

Delegates will learn how spas can offer a major revenue stream for hotels

Maximise your profits at this year's European Spa Convention, which takes place in March

european spa convention

The European Spa Convention takes place at London's ExCeL on 4–5 March. The convention runs alongside Professional Beauty 2012, the UK's largest show for the health and beauty professional, with a dedicated spa exhibition.

The European Spa Convention 2012 will unite the international spa and hotel industry, with speakers and delegates coming from successful spas across the UK, Europe, Asia, Middle East and North America.

The event will offer unparalleled networking opportunities for delegates to mingle and discuss hot topics with their peers, in addition to a wide range of educational sessions and seminars from industry leaders.

driving profits

Europe's leading strategy event for the spa and hotel industry, the European Spa Convention will focus on spas as a business and present solutions for spas to maximise their profits. The convention programme includes sessions looking at financial models and best practice financial management for spas. Delegates will learn how to measure their spa's KPIs and how to face the challenge of cost reduction to increase profitability but maintain quality.

Jeff Matthews, president and COO at Mandara Spa, Andrew Gibson, group director at Mandarin Oriental, and Starwood Hotels' Jeremy McCarthy will discuss the challenges of running large operations, as well as the opportunities for global enterprises in local markets.

Creating marketing strategies and how they can work as a customer retention tool will be covered by Anne Biging and Elisabeth Ixmeier from Healing Hotels of the World. Jeremy McCarthy will showcase how to use branding and positioning as a revenue driver.

Hear from Jane Scott, director of marketing and revenue at the Grand Jersey, on how hotel spas could work as a model for international brand expansion in terms of marketing and profitability. Meanwhile, insight into how spas can work for hotels as a serious revenue stream will be given by Hans-Peter Veit, from Brenner's Park Hotel.

other sessions

Medical spa tourism has been a big topic in the industry recently, and the convention will look at tourism as a driver for spas, and how the medical side may work for spas long term.

Meanwhile, building a well-designed and practical spa within budget is every spa owner's dream, and famous architect Heidar Sodeki will showcase ways in which to do this.

Understanding how to profit from specialisation, and how finding your target market can increase your market share, is also vital for owners and directors. The European Spa Convention will therefore offer delegates an exclusive new session on how tapping into the corporate market could benefit spas financially.

Go to http://spaconvention.com for more information and to book your place.

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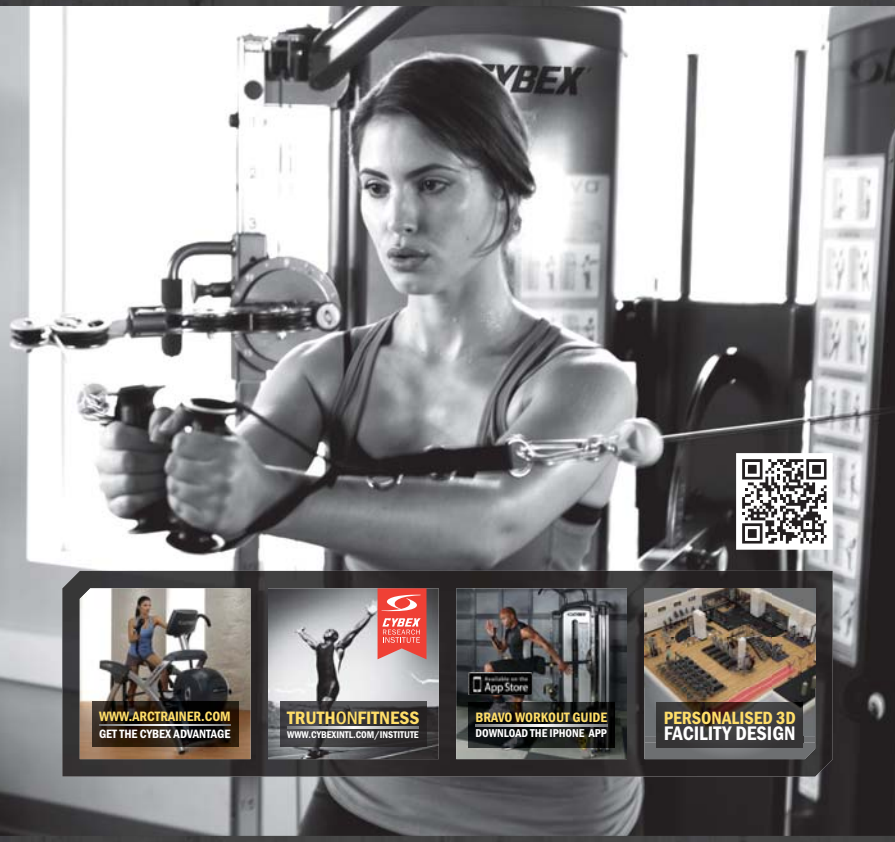

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