

David Lloyd

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BMF
Launches Mission Active
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It costs 9x as much to acquire a new member as it does to retain an existing one? And increasing customer retention rates by 5% increases profits by 25-95%?
- Harvard Business Review



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Time for a consumer focus

We need new initiatives around creating regular consumer insight to inform investment and operational decisions across the fitness industry, along with a culture change to bring a customer focus to the heart of our approach

As clubs reopen around the world, operators and investors are hungry for information about how trading is likely to look going forward, meaning there's a new and urgent need for accurate, segmented consumer data and analysis.

Grappling with consumer insight is a new departure for many in an industry which has been more focused on researching and reporting on investment metrics, such as the number of clubs opening, the number of members, the revenues earned and the profit margins achieved.

It's fair to say that, as a sector, we have not been overly focused on developing deep insights into the needs and behaviours of our customers or in customising our services.

But suddenly, it's an urgent priority and it's been heartening to see large parts of the industry collaborating to produce insight to inform reopening decisions, with Leisure-net (page 50) and 4global/ukactive (page 89) in the UK producing studies based on huge consumer data samples and Club Intel in the US tackling a similar challenge with its just-published research, *What members say matters* [see a full report in July HCM].

We must build on this work and keep regular consumer insight coming into the sector to inform decision-making.

From the numbers we have so far, it seems consumer response will be largely generational, with different age groups behaving in different ways across varying geographies.

In the UK, Leisure-net found younger people say they'll use their clubs and centres more, with 45 per cent of 15-24 year-olds agreeing, compared to 14 per cent of 65+ to 74-year-olds.

Younger people will also value their clubs more when they return, with 71 per cent of 15-24 year-olds saying they'll value them more, compared with 45 per cent of 55-64-year-olds.

The picture in the US is different, with a fall-off by age. Club Intel found 74 per cent of people 56 and over (Baby Boomers) saying they're very/fairly likely to return, compared to 61 per cent of Millennials (26-40) and 59 per cent of Gen Z (under 25).

Regional variances like this reflect health care systems and cultural differences, but one common thread emerging is the economic impact of the pandemic on some younger people.

Leisure-net found a percentage saying they'll spend less, with 14 per cent of 15-to-24-year-olds stating this, compared with 7 per cent of 55-64-year-olds. Fortunately, these are relatively low numbers, however, they show the greater impact.



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/DAVID REBRAS

We need a deeper understanding of our customers

“It's clear every member will be more precious than before – gone are the days of churning members and thinking of them as a number”

Younger people may want to return, but may not have the economic means to do so and – given Millennials and Gen Z have traditionally been a major driver of the sector – this is something we need to act on in offering urgent support.

It's clear that every member will be more precious now than before – gone are the days of lazily churning members and thinking of them as a number, we need to be better not only at understanding consumer needs, but also at responding to them in terms of the customised offerings we create, and the way in which we authentically support them through their lives as we all work to recover from this devastating pandemic.

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Uniting the world of fitness

JUNE 2020 No 279



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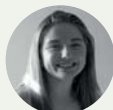
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©Cybertrek Ltd 2020 ISSN 1361-3510 (print) / 2397-2351 (online)

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HCM (Health Club Management) is published 11 times a year by The Leisure Media Company Ltd, Portmill House, Portmill Lane, Hitchin, Herts SG5 1DJ, UK. The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the publisher.

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To subscribe to Health Club Management, log on to www.leisuresubs.com, email subs@leisuremedia.com or call +44 (0)1462 471930. Annual subscription rates are UK £45, Europe £57, rest of world £80, students (UK) £22.



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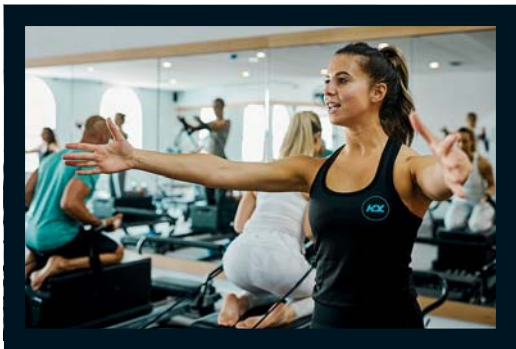
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We're not just a fitness studio. We change lives through changing bodies and changing minds

Aaron Smith founded KX Pilates in Melbourne, Australia after experiencing dynamic pilates in London

PHOTO: JULIAN KENYHA



'KX' stands for 'the Kaizen Experience', which means 'change for the better' in Japanese. It's a philosophy that focuses on continuous improvement. We're always seeking to improve, not only as a company but as individuals

AARON SMITH

FOUNDER, KX PILATES

Tell us about your background?

I've always been passionate about health and fitness and graduated from university with a science degree with a double major in physiology and pharmacology. In my early twenties I also studied to become a personal trainer as I was passionate about helping people change their lives and reach their full potential.

A few years into my PT career I realised that the industry in Australia was saturated and I wanted more, so I headed to the USA where I was not disappointed.

As an avid snowboarder I ended up in the Vail Valley, Colorado, working as a personal trainer and snowshoe instructor at the illustrious Beaver Creek Ski Resort, before travelling around the USA and the UK, where I tried out as many different fitness offerings as I could in search of something new and exciting.

How did you come up with the concept for KX Pilates?

While I was in London I came across a style of dynamic pilates and immediately fell in love with the high performance element of this method.

I was familiar with pilates, but at that stage in the Australian market it was being bolted on to every physio clinic as a rehab pilates offering. But this pilates studio was different, and this method of training was different, so eventually I decided that I wanted to bring my own version back to Australia.

I returned to Australia in 2009 with a great idea but sadly, \$20,000 in debt. I put together a business plan and pitched it to my father. Thankfully, he saw my passion and drive to succeed and agreed to be guarantor on a AU\$120,000 bank loan. I opened my first studio in Melbourne in February 2010.

Tell us about the KX Pilates concept

KX is a fast-paced, high-intensity, body-toning workout in just 50 minutes, fusing elements of traditional reformer pilates with a cardio and endurance workout. We see ourselves as being in the boutique fitness industry and are Australia's largest pilates franchise group.

We offer small group sessions with a maximum of 12 to 14

people per class and run up to 70 classes a week in each studio.

Our personalised, boutique fitness experience helps people feel as though they belong to a community and feel connected with their fellow 'KXers'.

The KX Pilates method minimises box and spring changes to optimise time and performance. If the box is placed on the reformer bed, it will usually stay there for at least half the class. KX Pilates is big on compound muscle groups, not isolation exercises, and being fast-paced, doubles as a cardio workout.

We're not just a fitness studio. We change lives through changing bodies and changing minds.

How did you decide on the name KX?

KX stands for 'the Kaizen experience'. Kaizen means 'change for the better' in Japanese, and the Kaizen experience is a philosophy that focuses on 'continuous improvement'. Kaizen was not only a philosophy that defined who we were perfectly, it also defined who I was personally and



KX is a fast-paced, high-intensity, body-toning workout taking 50 minutes

still am today. We are always seeking to improve, not only as a company, but as individuals in everyday life.

How did customers take to the concept when you first launched?

I was so excited in the lead up to the launch of the studio that I totally forgot about one of the most important things in business – marketing! I had a great looking studio and I was all ready to go but then no one turned up.

I hadn't given any thought as to how to build awareness and acquire customers. That was a big wake-up call: knowing fitness and having an idea was one thing, but actually understanding marketing and selling was another. I quickly found a brand expert who helped me truly define what the KX brand stood for and how to translate that into an experience.

Revenue was slow to build, and for the first 12 to 18 months, I paid myself AU\$200 a week, working from dawn until late at night every day. I was still living at home with my parents and driving my dad's car. The first twelve months were very hard. The entrepreneurial journey can be very lonely, especially when you're starting out and all your friends are going

out and socialising and you're working day and night to make your dream a reality.

Mum was helping me wash the towels and Dad stayed up to meet me when I got home, to be there for me when I wanted to quit.

How has the brand evolved and grown since you started?

We opened six studios in our first three years before I started franchising in 2013 and we've scaled from there.

There are now more than 65 studios across Australia and one in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Today KX Pilates has a dedicated, fully accredited KX Academy, which is a seven-week training course, only provided to trainers who will work for our company. It holds our IP internally in the company, which is a main point of difference.

Why did you decide to go down the franchise route?

For me, it was and still is a way to share the KX experience all around Australia and beyond. If I hadn't franchised KX, I may have stopped at 10 studios. Financially, it would've been a quicker

way to make money, but for me it was about exposing the KX experience to as many people as possible around Australia – and now beyond.

Franchising also works really well for our business. Trainers and clients grow to love KX so much that ultimately, they want a KX studio of their own. Our boutique fitness studios have a low financial barrier to entry compared to other franchised businesses, so it just made business sense to assist people to join our brand and become bigger and more successful together, instead of pushing them away and ultimately turning them into competition.

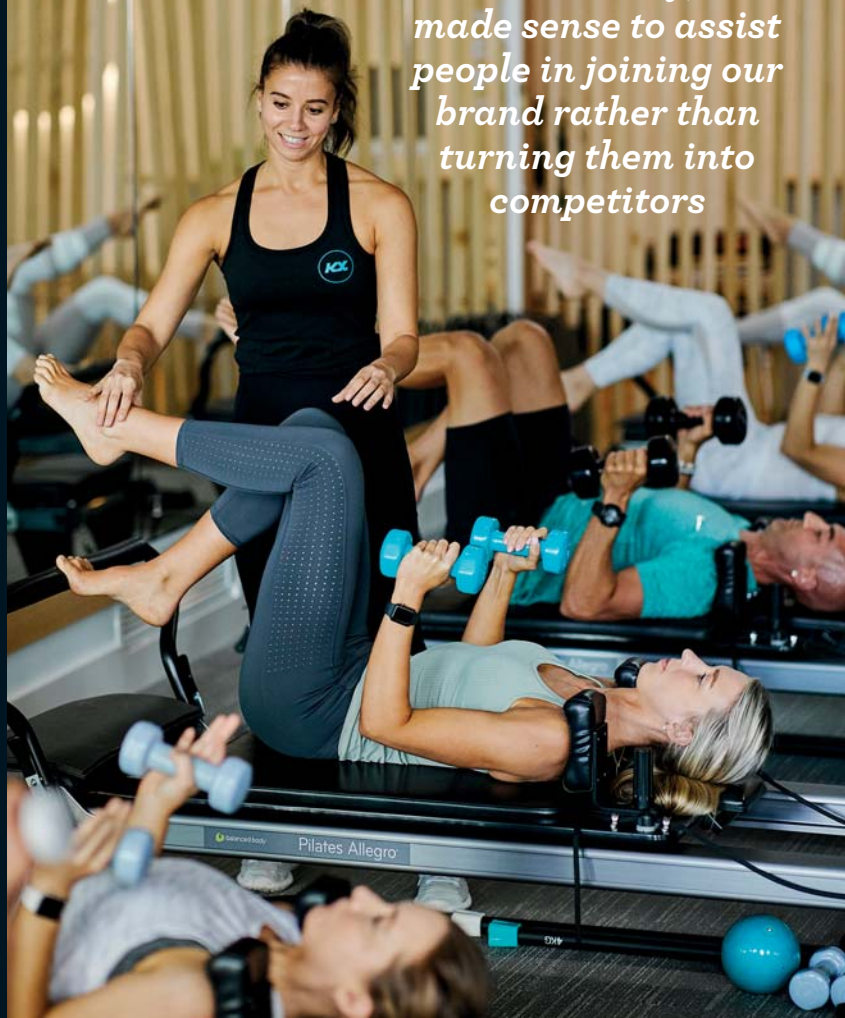
Trainers are amazing ambassadors for the brand and we can teach them everything they need to know about running and starting a business.

Tell us about your expansion overseas

The whole intention of KX Pilates' growth plan is to cultivate our philosophy of small and ongoing improvement. We've been careful not to saturate the market so we can maintain the brand's exclusivity and boutique nature, as well as keeping quality and consistency intact.



Our studios have a low barrier to entry, so it made sense to assist people in joining our brand rather than turning them into competitors





During the COVID-19 lockdowns, KX has been renting out its reformer beds

International growth has begun with the first studio opening its doors in Jakarta, Indonesia in 2018. We're currently working on a China joint venture deal and other markets are set to come into play once we gain traction in China.

Singapore, New Zealand and the USA are all on the radar and it'll only be a matter of time until we look beyond.

You stepped down as CEO at the end of 2018. What is your involvement now?

My goal was to take the business to 50 studios, and we reached that milestone in 2018. We were growing quite substantially and I just needed to press pause. The business needed someone who could manage and grow the current network to 150 studios in Australia.

With Selina Bridge, our new CEO, I just knew that she was the perfect candidate to lead our company into the next stage of growth and beyond. Coming from a declining franchise brand, she had a lot of experience with tough conversations and uncomfortable situations – and still people stuck by her. Give her a growing brand and the potential is endless.

I've got a classic entrepreneur's mindset. I'm still passionate about

the company and the founder's role. I travel to every state each year, spreading the founder's 'fairy dust'.

My focus is now on community, innovation within the KX businesses and focusing on the grassroots.

There's a lot of competition in fitness and pilates, so we have to be constantly asking ourselves what experience we are delivering, what we can offer that no other brand is offering, and what we can do to strengthen our IP.

What are the goals for KX?

We're launching between 10 and 12 KX studios every year in Australia. As well as Indonesia, we're also looking to expand into other markets, as mentioned.

Before the pandemic, I spent a lot of my time travelling to find out more about these markets, so that when we make the decision to expand, we do it knowing that we've done our homework and have confidence in its ability to succeed.

Are you working on any other projects?

Along with starting to plan for international growth, we've also spent over a year working on creating our own customised KX pilates machines and a range of other fitness equipment.

I believe this will not only help us to stay competitive, but also help us with continued revenue growth.

How is KX Pilates dealing with the COVID-19 situation?

We had to close all 67 studios across the country and quickly pivot in order to support our franchisees and keep the business going.

We provided free access and premium access, which includes at-home workouts, training and education videos for AU\$20 per week through our app.

We were also renting out our proprietary machines through the studio owners to help them cover costs while the studios were closed and in addition, offering training for studio owners through our app.

The mental wellbeing of our studio owners and trainers is paramount. We have an emotion coach on hand to conduct regular sessions and our business advisor has posted training videos for our studio owners to help guide them through these uncertain times. We set up a KX Champions page on Facebook where our trainers keep each other entertained with fitness challenges, recipes and other fun things that can be done at home.



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We saw the opportunity to initiate new partnerships with the Oldham Foodbank to help local residents during the COVID-19 crisis.

We can't serve our community in the way we would usually do, so we've moved resources to help where people need us most

JO SMALLWOOD

GENERAL MANAGER, OLDHAM LEISURE CENTRE

What's your background?

I've been in leisure in all my working life, as sport and fitness is an essential part of keeping fit and healthy.

I started in 1995 on a youth trainee scheme and have progressed to becoming the General Manager of Oldham Leisure Centre.

We've all been forced to adapt due to COVID-19. How have you changed the way you serve the community?

The world is a very different place right now and everyone is affected. Obviously, our centres are all currently closed. But we're a huge part of the people of

Oldham's lives and we knew, as a leisure trust, we had to continue to help local people who need us most. Initially we donated all the stock from our vending machines to the Oldham Food Bank, but as need has developed, so has the situation – Oldham Leisure Centre is now the local foodbank operations hub.

Smallwood and her team have adapted from running leisure services to supporting the foodbank





The Oldham team has a powerful connection with people in the local community



Alongside our community development and partnership manager, Kelly Tattersall, and foodbank founder, Father Tom Davis, we've transformed the sports hall. All deliveries from external businesses come here, our staff and volunteers make up food parcels and we distribute them to local families.

How has the situation evolved?

Initially my team and I just helped to pick up and deliver emergency food parcels, but the need was so huge it soon became apparent the sports hall needed more space and resources. Pre-coronavirus, the Oldham Foodbank supplied about 100 food parcels to families in need per week. Now it's up to 280 a week, and there are more people going hungry in each family, because people are self-isolating together, so the parcels are much larger. Incomes have plummeted and it's taking a huge toll.

Who else is involved?

This is a real Oldham approach to COVID-19 – a true partnership to tackle community challenges and ensure emergency essentials are delivered. Voluntary, faith, statutory and private

We're a lifeline for the community during normal times so now, more than ever, they need our support

organisations across Oldham have been working together in partnership.

What other plans do you have?

We run services for Oldham's most vulnerable residents – from newborns to the elderly. We're a lifeline for the community during normal times, so they need our support now, more than ever.

Our older members and exercise referral clients are especially at risk, they're self-isolating and many are lonely. We're their social network; for some we're the only people they talk to all week.

We're making regular phone calls, supplying exercise guides to keep people moving at home and just having a chat. We've released some online, chair-based exercise videos they can safely follow, too – the internet is awash with online exercise content but none of it is suitable for older or more vulnerable people.

Our Friday Club, which uses physical activity to reduce levels of social isolation within the community, is still taking place via Zoom. Overcoming isolation and loneliness has always been our goal, and in these troubling times it's even more important to keep connected and to keep active.

Praise from Father Tom Davis

Father Davis founded the foodbank in 2012. He says: "OCL and the volunteers have been absolutely outstanding. Using the centres not only allows us to make sure volunteers can socially distance, but it also gives us the space to pack up what are becoming very large parcels.

When you consider OCL's staff have gone from things like teaching swimming to making and delivering food parcels; it's such a team effort. We've thrown a diverse mix of people together with a common goal – to care for the vulnerable."



Ben Lucas is
the founder of
Flow Athletic in
Sydney, Australia



We advise our Flow Athletes to complete classes at a ratio of one yoga class to one strength class to one cardio class. This combination has very positive effects

BEN LUCAS

FOUNDER, FLOW ATHLETIC, SYDNEY

What is Flow Athletic?

On a high level we're a yoga and fitness community. What that looks like on the ground level is a 1,000sqm facility in Paddington, in Sydney, Australia, that has group exercise rooms for yoga, spin, strength and reformer Pilates, plus a personal training studio.

We hold 140 classes a week and have 1,000 active members that come an average of three times a week. We do over 400 PT sessions a week and hold world-class events such as 'Flow after dark', yoga silent disco and 'night club spin' all over the country.

Our run club does things like take large groups of 50 plus people to run in overseas event, such as the New York Marathon. So, we are lots of things.

How did the idea for Flow Athletic come about?

I owned PT studios in 2010. I was training for an ultramarathon and started doing yoga at a local studio in Bondi to assist my running – I found it really helped me in my athletic pursuits.


I became friends with the awesome yoga teacher Kate Kendall, and she started personal training with me. She found the strength and fitness really helped her yoga and we thought there might be a future in combining yoga, strength and fitness under one roof.

How did you turn the idea into reality?

We spent years refining the business model. We travelled overseas to learn



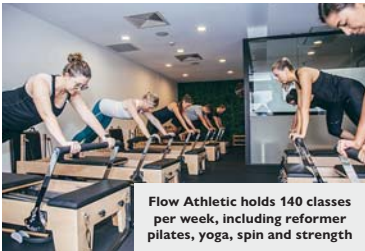
OWN HERO



Members are encouraged to alternate between strength, cardio and yoga classes



Yoga teacher Kate Kendall inspired Lucas



Flow Athletic holds 140 classes per week, including reformer pilates, yoga, spin and strength

- from existing businesses and met and brainstormed with mentors to solidify our values and bring our vision to life.

What's the Flow Philosophy of 1:1:1?

We advise our Flow Athletes – the name we give to our members – to complete classes at Flow in a ratio of one yoga to one strength to one cardio class. We believe this ratio and combination of classes has a number of very positive effects on their body and mind and provides longevity in their training.

How is Flow helping change perceptions of yoga?

In the late 90s to early 2000s yoga was quite 'herbal' in Australia and it was hard to find places to practice.

Today there are many yoga and

meditation studios. There's widespread knowledge now of the physical benefits and yoga tends to be done by a lot more men and also by athletes.

Flow has always tried to get more men to try yoga and when they realise the benefits it has: better sleep, focus, helping with strength training, recovery, balance and on and on, they become hooked.

Tell us about your events

We run world-class events, such as Flow after dark yoga, silent disco and night club spin all over the country – when we're not under the grip of coronavirus!

We know a lot more people would like to go to Flow Athletic, but because we have only one physical location it's hard to get to. So we run these large-scale events so people all over Australia get to feel the flow magic.

They're profitable and we get great PR from them, but we mainly do them because they're fun for our team to execute and the incredible feedback we get. Our next event is in Bali in October.

How are you dealing with COVID-19?

We started an online streaming business with 65 classes per week across four channels – yoga, strength, cycle and pilates – and thanks to this we've managed to keep the majority of our members on at an adjusted rate.

All our personal training has moved to Facetime and Zoom and all our weekly staff meetings are done using Zoom.

We're in a great position – all our full time staff are still employed on full wage.

We're overcoming this challenging situation and will power out of the dip with the backing of our loyal community. ●

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Going bust? Thousands of UK gyms face 'rent timebomb'

Thousands of UK gyms could go out of business if they're forced to pay full rent payments, which are due at the end of June.

In April, industry body ukactive successfully lobbied the government to amend

the Coronavirus Act to restrict tactics being adopted by landlords who were insisting gyms and leisure centres pay rent that had been withheld as a result of COVID-19.

However, these protective measures will soon expire.

This means gym operators will be liable for rent payments they potentially cannot afford – forcing many into administration as they're threatened with legal action through statutory demand notices and winding-up orders.

ukactive is calling on the government to extend its protection for tenants who will be asked to pay the rent for the next quarter on 24 June.

A consultation, involving the UK's leading fitness operators,



Many gyms have said they cannot afford rent payments

revealed that many are facing financial meltdown if nothing changes in the coming days.

"We're all looking forward to the day when we can reopen our clubs and start trading, but the government must recognise that as a sector we

have been and will remain closed for longer than almost every other sector – with zero income," said Martin Long, CEO of DW Fitness First – one of the UK's largest gym operators.

More: http://lei.sr/Q5V3k_H



The government must recognise that, as a sector, we will be closed for longer than most

Martin Long

Gyms set to benefit from a surge in memberships post-lockdown

A survey by Savanta

ComRes, in partnership with Sport England, has studied the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on attitudes and behaviours towards physical activity.

Findings included the fact that 27 per cent of people who are not currently members of a gym saying they're likely to join.

The figure is partly credited to people discovering workouts during lockdown and intending to continue the habit.

Encouragingly for the fitness sector, 87 per cent of current gym members also said they are likely to resume their membership when facilities reopen.



More than a quarter of people questioned are looking to join

The survey – based on interviews with a representative sample of more than 2,000 adults – also showed that people miss the gym (14 per cent of all those

questioned) more than any other physical activity, with swimming (13 per cent), football (5 per cent) and cycling (2 per cent) among other popular activities.

"This shows that people are really looking forward to returning to their gyms," said Huw Edwards, CEO of ukactive.

More: http://lei.sr/y9A5Q_H



This shows that people are really looking forward to returning to their gyms

Huw Edwards

Campaign to convince public it's safe to return to the gym

An industry-wide campaign will provide fitness operators with the practical resources needed to ensure a safe and successful return to business for the UK's gyms and leisure facilities.

Called Fit Together, the campaign is led by ukactive and will offer practical tools, advice and guidance based on the sector's recommended framework for reopening. The campaign has been developed by ukactive, shaped through consultation with operators and approved by independent scientific advisors.

The focus will be on convincing the public that



More than two thirds of our members said they'd return if correct safety measures were in place

Duncan Bannatyne

returning to gyms and leisure facilities will be safe.

At the heart of the campaign is a Fit Together toolkit, which provides fitness operators of all sizes with the tools they need to align with the framework.



The campaign will offer practical tools for gym operators

Operators that sign up to the Fit Together commitment statement will be able to display an approved stamp of compliance to provide assurance to customers.

The toolkit will include signage – covering the framework's core measures – to be displayed at relevant points and areas within facilities.

Duncan Bannatyne, chair of The Bannatyne Group, said: "We recently asked our members if they would be confident to return to their local health club in June or July if the correct safety measures are in place, and more than two-thirds agreed they would."

More: http://lei.sr/p2N3b_H

Basic-Fit valued at €1.334bn following €135m share issue

Basic-Fit has launched a new share issue as it restarts its growth plans for the European fitness market.

The Netherlands-based budget chain is using an accelerated bookbuild offering to issue up to 5.33 million new ordinary shares in the business.



CEO Rene Moos is taking on €5m worth of new shares

At its current share price of €25 (June 2020), this will amount to a raise of around €135m – or 9.8 per cent of market cap, valuing the company at around €1.334bn (market capitalisation).

Basic-Fit is looking to use the proceeds from the shares to strengthen its balance sheet and to provide it with the financial flexibility to allow both organic growth and acquisitions.

CEO Rene Moos, who owns 16 per cent of the company, is subscribing to €5m worth of shares and diluting his stake to 15.2 per cent.

More: http://lei.sr/R7V7D_H



Basic Fit is the largest fitness operator in Europe

Pure Gym reveals trial of global franchise model

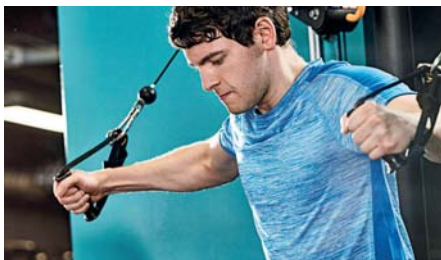
Budget operator, Pure Gym, has revealed it's trialling a franchise offering to grow the brand globally.

Speaking at the Fit Summit in Singapore, Pure's chief strategy officer, Francine Davis, said the company is looking for master franchise partners in countries such as China, India, and Japan. She said Pure was testing the model and the first couple of deals had already been agreed.

Davis explained the move is part of Pure Gym's larger expansion strategy, saying: "We could see many areas across the world that are underserved by good quality, low-cost fitness with no contract models."

"We think Pure Gym has a successful model we can transport into other areas of the world and this has led us to create this franchise offering."

More: http://lei.sr/G8v3N_H



Pure Gym is working on a global franchise offering



We see many areas across the world that are underserved

Francine Davis



Planning permission granted for £150m subterranean health and wellbeing hub in London

Westminster City Council

has approved developer Reef Group's plans to invest over £150m in Cavendish Square, transforming the space into a subterranean mixed-use destination, with a focus on healthcare and wellbeing.

Claimed to be London's first subterranean health and wellbeing destination, the 280,000sq ft (26,000sq m) destination will deliver specialist facilities for London's private healthcare sector.

Currently an underground car park, the existing structure will be reused and adapted.

Wellbeing and sustainability were key in influencing the design, with glazed lanterns at street level, internal atria, lightwells and a 200m (656ft) pavement light drawing

natural light into all levels of the new development.

Below ground, spaces range from 5,000sq ft (465sq m) to 250,000sq ft (23,225sq m) and, although no tenants have yet been announced, renderings envisage a clinical, spa, fitness and bathing facilities, as well as restaurants, bars and retail space.

Stewart Deering, joint chief executive of Reef Group said: "Reef Group has worked closely with Westminster City Council to design an iconic destination for London and we're delighted to have secured planning consent for the scheme."

"We'll develop a vibrant place with a core focus on health and wellbeing."

More: http://lei.sr/a4e4B_H



Developer Reef Group plans to invest over £150m in the project

CrossFit CEO resigns as George Floyd tweet rocks the company

CrossFit founder and CEO, Greg Glassman, has resigned following a backlash over his controversial tweet relating to the murder of George Floyd.



Glassmann: Floyd-19 tweet

On 6 June, Glassman responded to a tweet by the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation which read: "Racism and discrimination are critical public health issues that demand an urgent response." Glassman referenced the COVID-19 pandemic, replying with: "It's Floyd-19."

There has since been public outcry over the tweet equating the death with a disease – which has been deleted from Glassman's account



CrossFit launched in 2000 and has 14,000 gyms worldwide

Multiple franchised CrossFit gyms have announced they're dropping their affiliation with the company.

Retail giant, Reebok, has confirmed it's ending its

partnership with CrossFit – which was in the process of being extended – at the end of 2020.

More: http://lei.sr/w5b9C_H

Samsung adds wellness platform to 2020 range of smart TVs

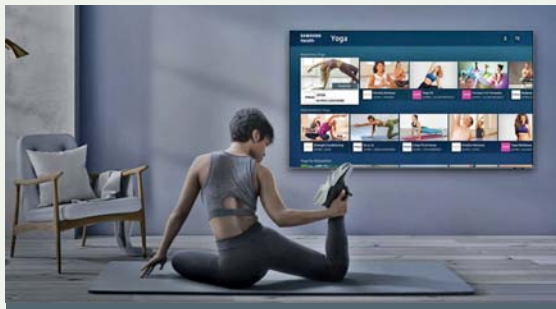


The whole intention of Samsung Health is to motivate people to live healthier lives

Won-jin Lee

Samsung Electronics is making its digital fitness platform available for free on its entire 2020 range of smart TV models.

The Samsung Health platform boasts more than 5,000 hours of free wellness activities – ranging from yoga, mindfulness, strength training and stretching to



Adding Samsung Health to TVs was inspired by the increase in people doing exercise at home

barre, pilates, dance and cardio workouts. It enables consumers to connect to premium content, a personalised performance dashboard, goal-based challenges, and intelligent features designed to keep them motivated

and focused on achieving their wellness goals.

Premium brands featured on the platform include Calm, obé fitness, barre3, Echelon, Fitplan, and Jillian Michaels Fitness.

"The whole intention of Samsung Health is to

motivate our consumers to live healthier lives by meeting them wherever they are, across Samsung platforms," said Won-jin Lee, executive VP of Samsung's service business.

More: http://lei.sr/r9f7Z_H

Government's changes to furlough 'guarantee of redundancies'

Ukactive has questioned the government's decision to make all employers start paying towards the wages of their furloughed staff.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced changes to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), which will let businesses bring back staff part-time from July – but introduce a taper requiring firms to contribute to costs from 1 August.

Gyms, health clubs and leisure centres have been closed since 20 March and, as it stands, there is no confirmed date for the fitness industry to return to business.

“
With gyms receiving no income since March, it's imperative the government continues to support the sector
”

Huw Edwards

Responding to the chancellor's announcement, Huw Edwards, ukactive CEO said: "Asking businesses who have had no income for five months to contribute to staff costs via the furlough scheme is a guarantee of redundancies.

"If facilities are not allowed to reopen before having to make contributions on



The CJRS will let businesses bring back staff part-time from July

1 August, tens of thousands of jobs will be lost, with the potential for thousands of facilities to go out of business.

"With gym and leisure centres receiving no income

since 20 March, it is imperative the government continues to support the sector, or the jobs retained since then will be lost."

More: http://lei.sr/q6P3r_H

Sport England and Crowdfunder offer emergency grants

Community activity groups hit by the COVID-19 lockdown will be able to benefit from emergency funding up to £20,000, thanks to a match-funding initiative by Sport England.

The grassroots body has teamed up with online

platform Crowdfunder and has pledged to match crowdfunds of up to £10,000, raised by clubs and organisations in England hit by the coronavirus crisis.

In total, Sport England has earmarked £1m for the Active Together scheme, which is

in addition to the £210m coronavirus support package announced earlier this year.

"The partnership with Crowdfunder is one of several ways we're helping organisations survive during the pandemic and start to plan for the future," said Charles Johnston, Sport England's executive director of property.

"We're supporting projects new to crowdfunding, so they can develop successful fundraising campaigns by engaging their local communities."

The Crowdfunder platform is scrapping all fees for the Active Together programme and is covering transaction charges to ensure all



“
We're supporting projects new to crowdfunding, so they can develop campaigns
”

Charles Johnston

the money raised will be received by organisations.

Crowdfunder is also providing a series of webinars offering advice and examples of successful previous Crowdfunder projects involving physical activity.

More: http://lei.sr/j7U4K_H



Physical activity groups can receive funding up to £20,000

SHA introduces programmes co-developed by NASA and Harvard

Integrative medi-wellness facility, SHA Wellness Clinic, will be welcoming guests from 22 July 2020 with new fitness programmes and treatments co-developed with NASA and Harvard.

The clinic, in Alicante, Spain, will launch an immune-boosting regime to be conducted during its signature seven-day Rebalance programme, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through a combination of medical treatments and natural therapies, SHA's booster is designed to restore and stimulate the body's natural immunity, with the goal of enabling the body to be in the best condition for defeating threats to health and well-being.

The immune course will begin with an immunotherapy consultation, viral profile and energetic health consultation.



“We've implemented these changes to ensure that our guests are always kept healthy

Alejandro Bataller



SHA developed the COVID-19 programme during lockdown

Alejandro Bataller, SHA VP, told HCM: "We've implemented these changes with the help of our medical team and multidisciplinary experts. It's an ambitious

plan to ensure that our beloved guests and staff are always kept healthy and safe in our facilities."

More: http://lei.sr/C3C78_H

Fitness United launches to support gym operators

A new industry support association Fitness United, has launched to bring suppliers and operators more closely together.

Fitness United is a collaboration of suppliers supporting fitness facility

operators through the provision of innovative new services and discounts on existing services to improve the trading environment for operators as the fitness industry bounces back post-lockdown.

The campaign has been developed as a collaboration between seven founder suppliers. These include Huddle, Technogym, HCM, Core Health & Fitness, Wexer, Love Recruitment and Learn Direct.

"Since the announcement of the campaign, dozens of other suppliers have added their support, including Service Sport, ClubRight, TRP, Precor, Jordan, 4Leisure, Proinsight, Cap2 and many other amazing and generous companies," said founder, Neil Harmsworth.

"The list continues to grow daily and it's humbling to witness the unprecedented level of collaboration we're



“It's humbling to witness the unprecedented level of collaboration we're now seeing

Neil Harmsworth

now seeing between suppliers for a specific cause.

"I strongly believe fitness facilities will remain the heartbeat of the industry post-COVID."

More: http://lei.sr/K2E9x_H



Could a simple blood test show how physically fit a person is?

A study on how exercise changes the body at a molecular level has suggested that a simple blood test could be used to determine how physically fit a person is.

Researchers at the Stanford University School of Medicine undertook a study based on hundreds of thousands of molecular measurements from a group of 36 individuals before and after exercising.

After studying the results, the team deduced that the participants who were most physically fit shared similar molecular signatures in the resting blood samples captured before exercise.

The team also noticed consistencies in the baseline measurements of the participants who performed better on a VO2 max test.

In these individuals, the researchers saw a strong



The researchers took blood samples from participants



“
The findings mean we’re able to develop a test to predict someone’s level of fitness

Michael Snyder

correlation between a set of molecules and an individual’s level of aerobic fitness.

“The findings gave us the idea that we would be able to develop a test to

predict someone’s level of fitness,” said Michael Snyder, PhD, professor and chair of genetics at Stanford.

More: http://lei.sr/T8p7g_H

Study: exercise ‘cleans-up’ muscles – removes worn out proteins

Physical activity has been found to prompt a clean-up of muscles by increasing the activity of the protein Ubiquitin.

It’s universally accepted that maintaining muscular function is essential and a big part of

the human body’s ability to do so depends on proteins – the building blocks of muscles.

The proteins do, however, degrade when worn-out. While extensive knowledge has been accumulated about how

muscles regulate the build-up of new proteins during physical training, much less is known about how muscle contractions and exercise serve to clean-up the worn-out proteins.

Now, researchers at the University of Copenhagen have demonstrated that a single, intense, 10-minute bicycle ride results in a significant increase in the activity of Ubiquitin, the ‘death marker protein’ and a subsequent intensification of the targeting and removal of worn-out proteins within the muscles.

Professor Jørgen Wojtaszewski, one of the researchers, says the findings serve to strengthen the entire foundation for the effect of physical activity.



“
The results explain part of the reason why physical activity is healthy

Jørgen Wojtaszewski

“Basically, it explains part of the reason why physical activity is healthy,” he said. “Muscle use, in and of itself, is what initiates the processes that keep muscles ‘up to date’, healthy and functional.”

More: http://lei.sr/n5r8p_H



Exercise prompts a big increase in Ubiquitin activity



the national governing body for group exercise

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Ward says GO fit's overarching mission is to serve 100 per cent of the population



I want us to make sure we're still the go-to sector with the greatest power to improve health and wellbeing in society. We absolutely must not abdicate that opportunity

Steve Ward

One year into the role and GO fit's chief transformation officer finds himself balancing long-term goals against the immediate impact of COVID-19. He talks to Kate Cracknell

COVID-19 is still dominating the headlines. What has been its impact on GO fit?

Huge credit and respect to GO fit president Gabriel Saez, because there wasn't a playbook on how to handle this situation. Even before his hand was forced, he took the call that we were going to shut all 19 of our clubs across Spain and Portugal for the safety of staff and customers.

We told everyone we would only reopen when it was safe and that we wouldn't charge customers while we were closed physically.

We reassured everyone we'd be with them throughout the crisis in fundamental ways. For staff, that meant protecting their jobs and topping up their salaries – fronting up the contributions before any sort of help came from the state. We also placed a big focus on the constant development of the team.

For members, it primarily meant a digital response to lockdown: we went into this crisis as a leading facility operator; our vision is to end it as one of the best digital wellbeing providers, as well.

Three days after lockdown, we already had our own studio creating video content on-demand, which soon turned into live streaming, constant contact and engagement with customers.

We've also set up a tele-support centre, enabling people to contact us for 1:1 plans, nutritional support or just a chat. We've been building the plane while we've been flying it, but it's worked well. The studio is creating some great content – I believe it's as good as anything out there – and our customers absolutely

love it. We've had nearly 3m views now, a 400 per cent growth in follower numbers on social media, and our customer satisfaction metrics are really very strong.

This challenge has given our organisation a chance – in a very testing time – to show how seriously we believe in our mission and our purpose. When we've been tested the most, we've stuck true to our principles and our values.

Once clubs open, will you charge for digital content?

I wouldn't want to be a digital-only operator at this time, having to think about how I'm going to monetise my offer post-lockdown when the world is flooded with content.

For us, first and foremost, digital is about serving, supporting, engaging and adding value for existing customers. We're not really bothered about whether we monetise it today. For the energy and level of investment we put into it, and the value it's bringing back, it's sustainable – without charging for it – as part of the overwhelming value proposition we want to provide.

Beyond that, it's also a new vehicle to help us move towards our company mission: to get to a proposition that could serve 100 per cent of the population.

To illustrate that point, just as an example, we have one club in Madrid with 27,500 customers and 20,000 people on a waiting list that takes two years. We can't even serve 100 per cent of the people in the catchment of the club who already want to use our service. Digital is therefore a critical part of expanding our capabilities to fulfil our mission as an organisation.

And the crisis has delivered some fantastic new opportunities in this respect. We're now working with Madrid, Seville and Malaga City Councils, as well as many others, all of whom have been integrating our digital response into the support they've been offering the residents of their cities during the crisis. These new digital partnerships complement our existing relationships with them as facility operator.

Can you tell us more about your digital plans moving forward?

This moment of crisis accelerated the opportunity to reach into people's homes, and our response has already brought great energy to the brand and put us in the window for everyone. There will be no going back. This will just be the norm, something we do – and we'll be doing even more of it, at even higher quality.

We have a lot of plans, most of which are under wraps, but one thing I can already talk about is the continued evolution of our work using technology to better understand our customers at a holistic level, and then personalise our service around their needs.

We use validated, academically tested surveys and questions to assess individuals physiologically, psychologically and emotionally. This culminates in a GO fit Happiness Score, which is an evidence-based way of understanding where our customers are now. Off the back of this, we aim to automate the personalisation of evidence-based exercise and lifestyle programmes, based on specific outcomes.

We want to be able to personalise the experience for each member in an evidence-based way, so this is a system we're continuing to grow and develop. It's a job that will never be complete – there's always more to do, further to go.

GO fit clubs now have air filtration systems that are on a par with those in intensive care units



“

Our COVID-19 measures make our clubs significantly safer than any other public space

What are your plans as clubs begin to emerge from lockdown?

The first thing to say is that we don't define the end of this crisis as being when clubs start to re-open. The timeframe we've set ourselves isn't about dealing with the crisis over the next few months. It's about the role we play in society through to the other side of having a vaccine, however long that may take to develop.

We're sticking to our "not a second too soon" principle and have been very careful in assessing our readiness to re-open, which may be during June in some areas of Spain. It certainly hasn't been a case of trying to find the minimum level protocol to persuade regulators to let us open and begin trading.

We set about identifying absolutely everything we could do to create the safest possible environment for our customers – one in which they feel genuinely safe and comfortable in this moment of great anxiety and stress.

There hasn't been a single measure that's been rejected because of cost. We've done what we felt we had to do to fulfil our responsibility to customers and staff. Some people will look at what we've done and think we've gone over the top: we've worked with epidemiologists, academic experts, we've installed air filtration systems on a par with those in intensive care units and we totally recycle the air out of our buildings eight times an hour.

We're putting in automatic temperature scanning, disinfectant pads for shoes on the way in, personalised areas in the changing rooms, all the technology needed to book workout slots.

There's not one measure we've shied away from and every single touchpoint has been scored out of eight – eight being as safe as if there were no virus. Our certified, aggregated score across all of the areas of measures we've put in place is 7.4/8, making our clubs significantly safer than any other public service.

We've also tried to figure out what more we can do to help across the whole customer journey. We're changing the timetable to focus on activities that strengthen rather than degrade immune systems and resilience. We're putting in programmes specifically around mental health and wellbeing, recovering muscle loss, strengthening immune systems, supporting weight loss. We're trying to help people feel better after a very tough period of lockdown.

But in spite of all this, we understand that there's still a lot of fear and concern out there, and we're supporting our members through this. Even when we've re-opened our clubs, we won't charge our members until they feel ready to come back. In the meantime, they can continue to use all the great digital content we're producing on a daily basis. We're still there for them as a central part of their lives.

What is the likely long-term impact of COVID-19 on the GO fit business?

I believe there's a long way to go in this crisis – a lot of twists and turns to come – and we're by no means complacent about any of that. It's going to be tough.

But I feel we've had a 'good crisis' so far, in terms of how we've reacted. As yet, there isn't anything we've put on



We see ourselves as a truly European player. We're analysing France, Germany, Italy and the UK for development

hold or frozen. If anything, some of the big projects we were doing – team development, strategy development, technology systems migration – have accelerated during lockdown because we had the space to do them.

And we're a long-term minded organisation: we enter into very long-term partnerships with the landlords, local authorities, community groups and so on that we work with. If this is a 12-, 18- or 24-month situation, we're alright with that. Our company was born in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis; our team knows what it's like to operate in a crisis.

Our goal is to ride this turbulence and be in the same position on 1 June 2021 as we were on 1 March 2020. That said, we are in no doubt that, if we do it well, there are significant opportunities to strengthen and grow during this time as well.

What are your growth plans?

Moving forward, we see ourselves as a truly European player. We're analysing France, Germany, Italy and the UK for development and we definitely think the model has huge potential in all of those areas.

We do something that's genuinely world-class and different from what's out there currently. PwC produces an annual audit for us which shows €170m social value

produced as a result of our activities in Spain alone – and uniquely for a public service, we bring 100 per cent of the capital and take 100 per cent of the risk. I don't for a second think we will be short of opportunity elsewhere.

But we aren't in a rush as an organisation. We will study and wait for the right time, the right places, the right partners. If better opportunities arise in Spain first, that's fine. We feel no pressure to be in certain markets by a certain point.

What's your advice to other operators?

As an industry, we have to show a new level of commitment to addressing the current situation. We're putting out a message of reassurance about our commitment to public health and safety, but the reality is we can't afford to pay lip service to it. We have a responsibility to actually deliver, on the ground.

When the time comes for clubs to re-open, we'll be in the spotlight. We will not be out of the woods – the virus is still going to be around and we won't yet have a vaccine. Let's not be the sector that contributes to this situation getting worse again.

I want us to make sure we're still the go-to sector with the greatest power to improve health and wellbeing in society. We absolutely must not abdicate that opportunity.

PwC produces an annual audit which shows €170m of social value from GOfit's activities in Spain





“The level of tension in the business around continually pushing things on to another level again is energising, and sometimes exhausting. That tallies with me. I don't like to sit back

■ A BESPOKE JOB ROLE

“I'd been at ukactive for 14 years and while I was in no hurry to leave – I loved the team and it was the most stimulating role you could imagine – I had the urge to do something new,” explains Ward.

“I already knew GO fit's chief research and innovation officer, professor Alfonso Jiménez, as we had set up the ukactive Research Institute together, and over the space of two years I got to know the GO fit team and what the business stood for.

“I knew it would be a challenging move – different language, different culture – but it was a challenge I was keen to take on, because there was a real meeting of values and beliefs around how things can be done.

“GO fit's is a business model that proves you don't have to choose to be either socially responsible or commercially successful. You can be both at the same time. The company delivers an incredible amount of commercial value and success – look at its metrics around performance, quality, customer satisfaction and so on and it's among the best in the world – but at the same time it's totally dedicated to having an impact on society in a meaningful, evidence-based and measurable way.

“My role – which has the daunting title of chief transformation officer – was created for me by the company's president, Gabriel Saez. It's a unique position that involves looking at the trends in the market and how they might impact us, as well as what we can do to shape them.

“As a company, we have a mission to get to a proposition that could serve 100 per cent of the population. I'm there to help speed up our progress towards that goal. That means connecting with the outside world, bringing in learnings that can help us move faster towards our mission. It means acting as a bridge between our operational and R&D teams, working with them to shape our innovation and find new ways to impact day-to-day business performance. Beyond that, it means working with Gabriel and the executive team, thinking about the very long-term picture: to 2030 and beyond. Where could we go, what could we be doing?

“This is the kind of role – taking on a big social issue as an innovative business that can be commercially successful, while having a positive impact on society – I'd love to work in for the rest of my career. I absolutely see this as a long-term move: I can see myself being here for the next decade – as long as they'll have me!”



We have one club in Madrid with 27,500 customers and 20,000 people on a two year waiting list

■ THE GO FIT PHILOSOPHY

"I describe GO fit as an overwhelming value proposition," says Ward. "It's not about trying to find the lowest price point that people are prepared to pay. It's a true value proposition: up to 1,200 hours of group-based activities a month on the timetable, two hours of kids' activities for free every day per customer, world-class facilities, a proper customer-focused way to serve members in a modern, efficient way."

"I've visited all 19 clubs in Spain and Portugal – the 20th will open as soon as lockdown is eased – and as I've walked around, I've tried to keep a list of the cool stuff that has stood out to me. But the thing is, there are just so many tiny details that compound and compound. It's very hard to pinpoint exactly what's special in the product itself, because it's everything and it's the way it's all brought together."

"What I can say is that the whole business is focused on the wellbeing of individuals and of society in a credible, evidence-based way. It's then marketed and promoted very genuinely – we focus on the concept that 'happiness is trainable as well', with the main customer-focused message being 'live longer and better' – and it's dedicated to 100 per cent of the population. As a result, it attracts a much more diverse audience."

"We open new clubs with 15,000 people already having joined before we open the doors. We have one club in Madrid that has 27,500 members and a waiting list of



20,000. Another has 25,000 members and a four-month waiting list. People see the value proposition, they know who we are, they know what we bring, they get in line."

He continues: "You walk around at any time of day – other than lunchtime, when the Spanish are at lunch – and the clubs are always full. And I mean, full. I initially wondered if it was a Spanish thing, but it isn't. It's something particular to GO fit and the behaviours we draw out."

"And we keep working to make what we do even better. The level of tension in the business around continually pushing things on to another level again is energising, and sometimes exhausting, but there's a real relentlessness about it. The leadership here is incredible for that – it's a championship-winning team – but this mindset also runs throughout the whole organisation. That tallies with me. I don't like to sit back."



The GO fit model sees gyms always full, due to the behaviours the operator draws out, says Ward



Mass personalisation

Go fit has partnered with the Advanced Wellbeing Research Centre in Sheffield UK to develop its R&D capabilities.

"We've done a lot to increase our R&D and innovation capacity over the last year, including a significant partnership with the Advanced Wellbeing Research Centre (AWRC) in Sheffield, UK," says Ward.

"We have academic collaborations around the world, but we wanted to go a bit deeper with the AWRC. The collection of different disciplines it brings together under one roof is quite something: public health specialists, behavioural scientists, exercise scientists, computer scientists, robotics, AI..."

"We're not expecting a eureka! moment – it's a journey – but we know we want to help our customers in an outcomes-based way that's focused on their individual needs. With clubs the size of ours, a personalised approach will never be possible if we only work in the same ways we always have done. We need to be open to new solutions, new approaches, new ways of using technology.

"This is the focus of our R&D agenda, and where our AWRC partnership comes in: to evidence our impact, but also drive our future product development." ●

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You can manage capacity and social distancing and prepare for reopening by enabling customers to book training spots on the gym floor and in studios and group exercise classes, with Technogym's spot booking system.

The quick, easy way to communicate to your members that they can book their

gym floor training session, is by customising the home page of the Mywellness app.

You can choose the title, subtitle or image of the "Class Timetable" tile to remind members that the gym floor is an activity they can book – exactly as they used to with group classes.

Perfectly fits your day

With Mywellness you can check your staff rota and respond to messages on the way to work, using your phone.

You can also use your tablet for client interactions and build world-class content on the facility desktop – experience the flexibility of using the device that works best for you.

The three step member journey with the Mywellness app

1



BOOK

Members can easily book their preferred training spot at home or on the go via the Mywellness app with the guarantee of having a reserved spot

2



CHECK IN

Members quickly and safely enter the gym and the staff can easily check their reservation to ensure it's safe for them to enter

3



CHECK OUT

To facilitate members leaving, the Mywellness app tells them when it's time to end their workout and head home



The Mywellness app enables members to pre-book gym workouts

Experience smart user view

Get valuable user insights in one smart view, enabling you to instantly understand your members' preferences, goals, training behaviours and more.

Improve performance with powerful analytics

Get unique insights into all of your business KPIs and understand the lifestyle behaviours of your users. Boost staff performance and prevent membership cancellations.

Always evolving to support you, now and in the future

Over the coming weeks and months new functions and solutions will be released and launched to help you enhance your member experience further and offer services to generate revenue.



To discover more and for free digital consultancy, contact Technogym:
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Train your customers at home

Thanks to the Mywellness app, you can provide training services to your customers to keep them active and motivated



WORKOUT OF THE DAY

The app provides a choice of three new workouts every day for the users, to keep them active and engaged



TRAINING CONTENTS

You can deliver personalised programmes to individuals, to keep members engaged and on track with their fitness routine



REMOTE COACHING

The Mywellness app includes a 'chat to coach' option to keep in touch with users, anytime anywhere, keeping them motivated and active

Everyone's taking about The future of facilities

The fitness industry has shown incredible flexibility during lockdown, pivoting to digital to keep people active. But as lockdowns end, we ask what impact the pandemic will have on facility provision

Tara Dillon

CEO, CIMSPA



The effects of the pandemic will be most immediately seen in the number and type of sites that will reopen after lockdown. Understandably, operators want facilities up and running as soon as possible. To help them, CIMSPA, with ukactive, has developed national guidance for the UK on the safe operation of sites. However, a phased return is far from straightforward. For example, few operators have the space to run group exercise classes while maintaining social distancing, and team/contact sports will be all but impossible to host.

Some argue that a little revenue is better than none. But not many operators can shoulder the full costs of running a site, while generating only 20-30 per cent of the revenue. Staffing costs can represent 60-80 per cent of turnover and currently 80 per cent of that is being paid by government.

Some of the larger private sector operators will open; they've got reserves and can take the hit. The bigger budget chains have fewer staffing costs so they too will open. But smaller trusts and boutique gyms will struggle to operate and maintain social distancing. After years of cuts, the public sector has little to no reserves, so I believe they will need to have open conversations with their clients about mothballing many of their sites until a vaccine is found and social distancing measures are lifted.

The sector faces a challenging dilemma: if we do nothing, businesses



Public sector operators have little to no reserves, so will need to have conversations about mothballing sites until social distancing measures are lifted

will go bust. But if we rush to reopen, businesses will also go bust. There is a much bigger conversation to have with government here – they should force banks to lift the restrictive criteria in accessing business interruption loans. Swathes of our sector are unable to access these loans because the criteria is largely based on historical data and reserves that are not representative of how our sector manages its finances.

The initial stage of the pandemic highlighted key sectors such as the NHS. Given the emphasis placed on physical activity by government, I believe our sector should be included in the second wave and identified as a key sector, essentially giving us second phase key worker status. This gives us a valid case for requesting more government support, which will help more facilities to reopen to meet the nation's mental and physical wellbeing needs.



The pandemic and lockdown will lead to the biggest shakeup in facility provision the industry has ever experienced

Marianne Boyle

Head of infrastructure, ukactive

COVID-19 is an unprecedented challenge to the physical activity sector, not just until we find a vaccine but potentially far beyond that. While members of our facilities will return over time, we must not lose sight of those parts of society that will be hardest hit by this pandemic – in particular, older people and those with underlying health conditions who will fear most for their safety, and those in lower socio-economic groups who suffer most from the economic impact.

These groups were already identified as a large section of society that is not well represented within a leisure setting, and the pandemic is set to exacerbate that and marginalise them further.

More often than not, facility funding is aligned to addressing local health and social outcomes and inequalities, but more than ever we have a collective responsibility to ensure we are committed to addressing this widening gap in participation.

The funding framework for facility investment that ukactive will be developing in partnership with Sport England will reflect this. We'll prioritise the allocation of funding to projects that demonstrate innovation and have the most impact on driving up participation among the aforementioned groups.

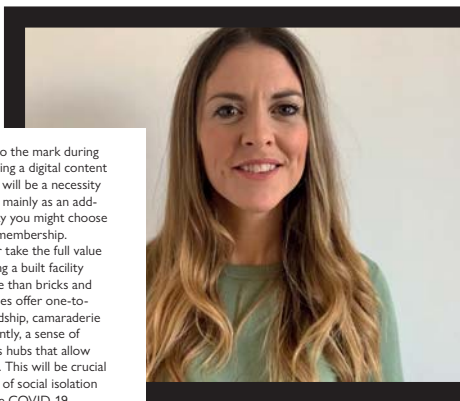
There's now an abundance of digital content available, as the sector has

really stepped up to the mark during the lockdown. Having a digital content offer for members will be a necessity going forward, but mainly as an add-on, in the same way you might choose peak- or off-peak membership.

Digital will never take the full value away from accessing a built facility – they are far more than bricks and mortar. Our facilities offer one-to-one support, friendship, camaraderie and, most importantly, a sense of belonging, acting as hubs that allow people to connect. This will be crucial to ease the impact of social isolation that was felt before COVID-19 and will be felt even more after.

The sector has really come together to navigate the challenges that COVID-19 has presented and it's imperative this support for each other continues.

As the focus shifts to re-opening, ukactive is working through its four-stage strategy that's been designed to ensure facilities are in the best possible position to re-open when the time comes. If implemented collectively by the whole sector, it will be a strong signal that demonstrates that the health and wellbeing of customers is at the heart of everything we do, as it always has been.



We have a collective responsibility to ensure we're addressing the widening gap in participation



We need to widen our perspective. This is our chance to become more than providers of gyms and group exercise for active 25- to 55-year-olds

Sarah Watts

CEO, Alliance Leisure

The pandemic presents the UK fitness industry with a unique window of opportunity. It gives us the chance to re-look at facilities and services we provide, how we engage with our communities and how we can meet the needs of those we have so far failed to attract to our sites.

For the sector to bounce back, we need to widen our perspective. Our venues tend to be homogeneous. This is our chance to become more than providers of gyms and group exercise for active 25- to 55-year-olds.

Lockdown has seen people working out at home and outdoors, exercising with their families and even taking up physical activity for the first time. We must capitalise on this by expanding and differentiating our offer to appeal to all users, however they want to exercise. For example, by activating outdoor spaces, creating fun and educational play spaces for younger children and developing challenging and interactive concepts for teenagers.

Our centres can be intimidating for significant swathes of the population, including older people and the deconditioned. This is why concepts like Shapemaster, which provides power-assisted exercise in a small, safe and supportive environment, are so popular with these markets.

As a sector, we consistently fail to attract people from the lowest socio-economic groups. The public sector has become increasingly commercial, with contracts going to the highest bidders. This results in monthly membership fees upwards of £40 – way beyond the means of those from the lowest socio-economic groups. If we want our public sector facilities to be truly accessible, we need to rethink the finances.

Our sector is best placed to support the nation during and after this pandemic, but we must ensure we have the right products to engage with all members of the population. We need to grab this opportunity.



One of the issues the pandemic has highlighted is the inequality gap when it comes to activity levels

Lisa Wainwright

CEO, Sport and Recreation Alliance

In the short-term, sport and recreation facilities have been forced to think about how they can effectively deliver their activity in a safe and clean environment.

This current climate has thrown up many logistical and planning issues that the sector has done brilliantly to collaborate on and start to overcome. With the timing of the return to pre-COVID-19 conditions unknown, this new method of delivery has to be made sustainable and future-proofed.

The impact on funding has been substantial and we will not know the true extent of this for some time to come. It's been extremely promising to see DCMS, Sport England and other funders step up so quickly to provide the support and financial safeguards that grassroots sport and recreation has so desperately required.

Flexibility will continue to be critical moving forwards. The sector has wonderfully embraced the enforced era of virtual delivery and it has certainly opened many eyes as to what can be achieved remotely and how sessions can continue to thrive away from facilities. This isn't to say that this will become the new normal, but there is certainly an argument to be had that this virtual provision could co-exist with the more traditional way of delivering activity.

One of the issues that the pandemic has highlighted and, as Sport England's latest figures indicate, strengthened is the inequality gap when it comes to activity levels. We firmly believe that one solution to greater inclusivity and accessibility would be to open school facilities for community use outside of school hours, when safe to do so. Providing physical activity opportunities with high-standard equipment on the doorstep of every individual will help to tackle the inequality we currently see.

With the ability to deliver training, classes and programmes in cost effective, user-friendly ways – we must collectively use this opportunity to make sure that we are open to every member of society and provide them with the chance to be healthier and happier thanks to physical activity.

How the sector adapts moving forward will be essential. We should embrace the opportunity to re-think and reset, to return as a stronger community. ●



David Lloyd Leisure has reopened 50 of its clubs for outdoor exercise



Great outdoors

David Lloyd Leisure has launched a raft of outdoor classes, including an enhanced role for its Battlebox concept, as Liz Terry reports

David Lloyd Leisure (DLL) has reopened 50 of its clubs for socially distanced outdoor exercise.

The creative move comes as the operator reveals the first iteration of its new blended offer, which combines club-based classes and activities with virtual content delivered via its DL@Home service.

DLL has also signalled its position in relation to its virtual offering by making DL@Home subject to a free 14-day trial, indicating it intends to begin charging across the board for digital. The time-limited free offer is also set to work as a lead generator for memberships.

The programme of new outdoor class offerings take advantage of DLL's extensive outdoor spaces, which

are being used for a wide range of activities, such as outdoor group exercise, including Blaze and HIIT workouts, and outdoor cycle and mind-body classes such as yoga and Pilates in spa garden and poolside areas.

Individual pre-bookable workout zones are allocated, so members can exercise in their own space, and classes are limited to five per session in England and nine in Ireland and Northern Ireland, while timetabling allows for deep cleaning between classes.

Members are paying half rate, restarting a revenue stream for the operator.

Outdoor cycling studios have been set up using DLL's Stages bikes. These are offering Stages Power, Rhythm and group cycling sessions in size-limited classes with bikes spaced at 2m apart or more.

Members are also being offered DLL's On-Demand Rhythm classes via their app as part of the cycling programme, as well as specialist Pilates and yoga sessions for cyclists.

The operator has used the lockdown to incubate an upgrade to its outdoor workout concept, Battlebox, which is now available at selected clubs. Battlebox combines full-body training, high energy challenges, teamwork and fresh air, in 45- and 55-minute classes suitable for "participants of all abilities and levels of fitness".

The instructor-led classes come in four flavours, 'Athletic' for speed, strength, power, agility and general cardio fitness; 'Strong' for power and muscle-building; 'Warrior' for a full-body workout and 'Play' for a family workout.





We're excited to be introducing a whole new range of dynamic and functional classes using the outdoor spaces in our clubs

Glenn Earlam, CEO of DLL

DLL is going hardcore with the weather and says all outdoor activities will continue regardless of conditions (so long as they're safe), saying: "We intend to run all classes regardless of the weather, with adaptations made to ensure members remain safe at all times. For example, cycling classes will take place beneath large 'jumbrellas', while yoga and Pilates classes will be made more dynamic to ensure members keep moving and stay warm."

Members are encouraged to bring suitable clothing "for whatever the weather throws at them."

Glenn Earlam, CEO of DLL told HCM: "Regardless of the lockdown we're excited

to be introducing a whole new range of dynamic and functional classes using the outdoor spaces in our clubs. We're confident members will love these new activities, and that they'll appeal to a very wide group of interests and abilities.

"None of these new activities is weather dependent, and we plan to continue running them into the future."

Outdoor exercise trend

In its *Fitness Trends 2020* report (HCMhandbook.com/trends), HCM tipped outdoor exercise as a major trend and Earlam confirmed its importance, saying, "More and more exercise is going outside and we firmly believe the 'new normal' in exercising will be all about embracing the 'great outdoors'."

"Our priority is to continue to provide high-quality, fun and challenging facilities and activities, as we move back to a more full and normal way of life, and beyond, in order to help us maintain and improve both physical and mental wellbeing."

DLL also reopened for tennis on 16 May and this option is still available to members with a racquets membership.

The operator has recently launched a virtual running club and is encouraging members to log their run and share it on social media.

DLL is engaging members in the run-up to reopening, which the UK fitness sector hopes will be in early July if talks between Public Health England and ukactive prove fruitful. ●

● Read our interview with DLL CEO, Glenn Earlam on desktop and mobile here: <http://lei.sr/E9X1u>



Outdoor exercise is set to become a major trend in 2020

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The fitness & leisure industries should seek out ways to become advocates for the health and wellbeing of older adults

Challenging ageism

The over-70s were treated as one homogenous group during the lockdown and advised to shield. Colin Milner, founder and CEO of the International Council on Active Aging says this is leading to an increase in ageism that the industry must fight to overcome

Is the pandemic increasing issues around ageism? If so, what can be done to prevent this?

Yes – what we see is all older adults being viewed as being most at risk. Why? Because of their age!

Ageism has been shown to reduce the ability of older people to gain employment, get medical treatment, or find products that meet their needs. This ambivalence towards this demographic comes with a price – lower quality of life. COVID-19 has taken this to new heights.

Headlines highlight the issue. In April the *Guardian* brought this home with an article entitled ‘Favouring young over old in COVID-19 treatment is justifiable, says ethicist.’

Not long after this article, the American Geriatric Society came out with a position statement that highlighted ‘Age should never be used as a means for categorically excluding someone from what is ordinarily the standard of care, nor should age ‘cut-offs’ be used in allocation strategies.’

This is just one example of how ageism is rearing its ugly head during the pandemic.



ICAA's Colin Milner:
“Do not take your responsibilities lightly”

There's a danger over 70s will be encouraged to stay at home, impacting on their fitness and mental health. How can the activity sector enable older people to exercise safely?

The simple answer is, understand the facts and not the fear and guard against putting all older people into the category of ‘vulnerable’.

The facts: most older adults impacted by COVID-19 live in care communities and some have a compromised immune system.

These individuals are not typical members of gyms. They are only five per cent of this cohort and when you remove them from the equation, the death rate from COVID-19 is the same for all age groups over 44.

The facts: As we age, our immune system diminishes. However, our lifestyle has a significant impact on this. If you're young but also inactive, you smoke, drink alcohol, have poor sleeping habits, are stressed, eat a poor diet, have health issues, don't exercise, and use drugs, your immune system will be more compromised than someone older and healthy.



Ernestine Shepherd
– born in 1936 – is a
PT and bodybuilder

How should the fitness industry respond?

The fitness and leisure industries should learn from the above. They should seek out ways to become advocates for the health and wellbeing of older adults.

Where people are genuinely vulnerable, we must ask what can be done by operators of gyms and fitness centres to enable them to exercise at home and still have social contact.

We've seen a massive uptick in online classes that range from exercise to cooking. This is an incredible opportunity to provide your services and more to those who are at risk. Hire specialists to offer fitness classes online to serve the interests of those in need.

As social isolation is such a key factor, you may seek to do this for small groups of the truly vulnerable to build their health and social network.

What other advice do you have for the fitness industry at this time?

Focus on capabilities, health, attitude, positive social connections and families, not age.

Older adults, who possess over 70 per cent of the disposable income in the UK, are starting to reach back into their wallets to find ways to reconnect and get fit again after being addicted to TV, food, alcohol, sweets and inactivity, during the lockdown.

Their strength, cardio capacity, balance, power, muscle mass and mental and emotional health has – as for many of the rest of us – been impacted. They want to regain control over their lives.

You as a facility owner or staff member can play a key role in this. As you can also play a key role in helping them maintain, build, or re-build their immune system, so do not take your responsibility lightly.

Do you have evidence of age-related issues arising in relation to wellbeing in the over 70s?

Most of the age-related issues we talk about are really lifestyle issues.

When someone is unable to achieve a physically active, engaged lifestyle filled with social connections this comes with a cost. An example of this can be found in a research paper published in *The Lancet* on 19 March 2020, entitled *COVID-19 and the consequences of isolating the elderly* (read more: <http://lei.srx7d2T>), which said: "Self-isolation will disproportionately affect elderly individuals whose only social contact is out of the home... [They] could be placed at additional risk, along with those who are already lonely, isolated, or secluded."

My fear is for the mental health of people moving forward. The fitness industry can play a vital role in creating a better future for older people. ●

World CHANGING

More than 65,000 people responded to a survey designed to gauge what members want and expect from the sector after lockdown, as Leisure-net's Dave Monkhouse reports

With the UK's gym sector closed for business, researchers at Leisure-net set out to establish the impact of the closures on consumers.

Working in partnership with Max Associates and 4Global's Databus, the Leisure-net team has produced *The National Post Lockdown Recovery Survey*, with insight from a sample of over 65,000 consumers, gathered through numerous channels.

The research has thrown up a number of key findings that will orientate operators as we head out of lockdown.

Background

The lockdown has been an unprecedented event for the leisure, health and fitness sectors, and presented major challenges financially and operationally.

The next stage in this fast moving situation is how and when centres and clubs reopen to a public cautious about what is safe and what isn't, and unsure about their next steps.

This research aims to help inform the sector as to how their customers are feeling. The results will help the

sector understand what customers were doing before lockdown, how their activity levels have changed and their desires and views for re-opening.

It also offers considerable insight to assist local authorities and industry organisations who are supporting the sector to reopen, as well as informing challenging decisions about services and provision going forward.

Activities undertaken

Of the 65,000 people surveyed, 44.1 per cent reported being gym or fitness users (27,915); 27.8 per cent said they favour group exercise (17,589), 21 per cent reported swimming (13,730), 1.375 per cent sports such as football and squash (1,375). The 'other' category was 4.2 per cent (2,647).

Activity levels during lockdown

When questioned, 21.6 per cent of members and customers reported being more active or significantly more active during lockdown and 26.5 per cent 'about the same', making a score on the positive side of 48.1 per cent.

In the other camp, 33 per cent said they had been less active and 19 per cent significantly less active, making a negative

Members ranked motivation provided by staff as the thing they miss the most about their clubs and centres

score of 52 per cent, and with this inactivity being weighted more towards gym users and swimmers.

In the 'more active' camp, most of the additional activity was undertaken by people in the 45-64 year old age groups.

Women have been more active than men with 24 per cent of them saying they've undertaken more activity compared to 18 per cent of men.

Attendance and expenditure

In a major headline figure for operators, 88 per cent of people said they will use facilities more or the same when they reopen, with only 8 per cent saying they will use them less and 4 per cent saying they will not return. It seems absence has made the heart grow fonder.

Given the likely state of the economy, responses to the question on spending show a solid 82.3 per cent are prepared ▶



People in younger age groups say they are four times more likely to use their centres and clubs more when they open

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/STOCK

The National Post Lockdown Recovery Survey

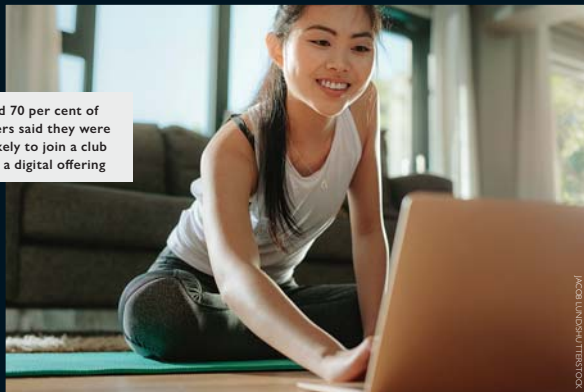
How much will they use clubs?

89% more
8% less

What they missed

45.8%
motivation
30.3%
socialising

Around 70 per cent of consumers said they were more likely to join a club if it had a digital offering



JACOB LUNDQVIST/ISTOCK

“

A solid 82.3% are prepared to spend the same on being active and 7.5% are prepared to spend more, making a total of 89.8%. Only 10.2% say they will spend less

to spend the same on being active and 7.5 per cent are prepared to spend more, making a total of 89.8 per cent. Only 10.2 per cent said they intend to spend less money. However, this may not mean a full cut of that goes to facility operators.

While men and women are very similar in terms of reporting, people in younger age groups are four times more likely to use centres and clubs more when they open, compared to the oldest age groups.

Changing behaviours

There are a number of other analyses to be gained from looking at the data. While 5.6 per cent of respondents say they are significantly more active now, 69 per cent of them state that they will use facilities the same or more upon their return.

However, 22 per cent of this group say they will spend less money on activity.

By contrast, although 19 per cent of respondents say they are significantly less active now, 92 per cent of these people say they will return to use centres at the same regularity or possibly more after lockdown is lifted.

It appears those that are more active now are finding alternative forms of exercise, by undertaking their own activity either indoors or outside and intending to continue this in the future, while those who have been less active are waiting for their leisure centres and clubs to re-open.

Lisa Forsyth, director of Max Associates, says: "In the period after reopening with social distancing, operators will have to consider how they facilitate this additional demand from members."

"Capacities are likely to be reduced, while operators are also working to 'regrow' income from those members that cancel."

"Local authorities that can activate their parks and green spaces and provide good routes for active transport may be able to entice the self-motivated outdoors, providing space for those who prefer motivation from instructors and social aspects of the gym and classes."


Responses by social groups

People from more deprived socio-economic groups report that they are going to value and use their leisure centres and clubs more than customers from higher socio-economic groups.

When comparing responses, they stated they're significantly likely to use their leisure centre or health club more when it reopens.

This is a real area of opportunity, as these groups are currently under-represented in most leisure centres and health clubs.

If we can turn this sentiment into action and keep these people motivated and using facilities, then something positive will have come out of this pandemic.

A man and a woman are jogging on a paved outdoor area. The man is wearing a blue tank top and light grey shorts, and the woman is wearing a black tank top and black leggings with green accents. They are both wearing white sneakers. The background is a light grey paved surface.

Operators can harness the outdoors by organising running clubs and outdoor workouts to increase capacity

What's important on returning?

31% cleanliness
25% social distancing
22% friendly staff
22% staff guidance

Activity levels in lockdown

52% less
48% same or more

Women in the 45-64 year old age group were the most physically active cohort during lockdown

The importance of staff

Staff guidance and support is going to be even more important going forward. This is particularly true for customers in older age groups, where 70 per cent stated this is 'very important'.

Combine this with the fact that 'motivation from staff' is the number one element that customers are missing while away from their centres and clubs and it shows that the sector really needs to focus on getting the customer experience spot on during the return and recovery period.

In fact the team is the biggest thing members and customers missed by quite some margin when you combine 'missing motivation from gym and class instructors' at 45.8 per cent with 'missing instruction from sports and swimming coaches' at 11.1 per cent, making a total of 59.6 per cent.

This number is followed by socialising at 33.3 per cent and competitive sport at 12.8 per cent.

Sex differences

Gender differences are very clear.

Women are much more cautious about coming back and particularly concerned about cleanliness. When they do come back they'll be looking for motivation, support and instruction, while for men the return to the gym is much more about the opportunity to socialise again.

Age differences

This lockdown and shutdown period seems to have strengthened differences between the attitudes and perceptions of younger and older age groups in relation to their clubs and centres – they have different feelings about coming back and



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Local data, sector
scenario models,
shared best practice
and informed
intelligence will help
us all to make smart
decisions for our sector

Chris Philips, Databub

including the social interaction and motivation provided is fundamental.

However, with a new focus on health, as well as physical activity, it's up to us now to deliver. Programming needs to reflect this changing environment and a combination of virtual, online, in person and wider community-based activities now need to be part of the total offer.

As Chris Philips from 4Global explained: "Data will be critical in the new physical activity sector we're gearing up to open.

"Local data, sector scenario models, shared best practice and informed intelligence will help us all to make smart, data driven-decisions for our sector."

One thing is clear, opening with the same offering we had before COVID-19 is not an option. We need to take this opportunity to re-think what we provide, and when and how we deliver it, to ensure we engage not only with our current customers, but also with a new and more diverse customer base going forward. ●

Get the report:

To get a free copy of the summary report or order a copy of the full report (£100 + VAT) – or to find out about Bounce Back services provided by Leisure-net and its partners, contact davidmonkhouse@leisure-net.org

whether they will value their centres/clubs more and use them more.

They're also worried about different things when coming back and looking for very different experiences. For example 93 per cent of 65-74-year-olds stated that cleanliness was 'very important' to them, compared to only 86 per cent of 15-24 year olds. This means our 'age-related' offerings need to be even more targeted.

Summary

There's no disputing the numbers. According to 76.1 per cent of respondents to *The National Post Lockdown Recovery Survey*, the value of facilities to communities,

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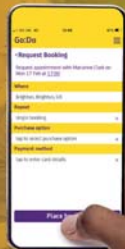
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“There’s been a lot of disruption and when everything stops, the winners will move into the space. You need to get ready for the next 24 months”

Radical disruption means you need to make a plan to refocus your business now and in the longer term



Ken Hughes, expert in consumer culture and human behaviour spoke as part of the Technogym Talks series of webinars about how operators can navigate the new consumer landscape

The coronavirus pandemic, lockdown and aftermath have given human behaviourists new insights into global consumer behaviour,” said Ken Hughes. “For fitness business owners, this is an important time in your working life because there’s been a lot of disruption and everything has changed quickly. “If you stand still, you’ll be moving backwards. When everything stops, the winners move into the space. You need to get ready for the next 24 months.”

Predict and prepare
“The captive economy, with consumers in lockdown, is unique,” he said. “It’s global and spans all ages, beliefs, languages and locations.

“You need to appreciate consumers’ concerns and anxieties. Data from YouGov shows only a proportion of people will feel comfortable with the idea of going back to the gym.

“Understand what they want, need, and expect during recovery, and you will thrive,” he said.

Action now
“Consumers are rethinking what is important,” said Hughes – “make sure you’re one of the things they need, rather than one they can do without. “Devise a strategy and start investing in key stages: the next six weeks, the next six months, and the next two years. “Understand the strong desire for human connection and you can grow the business more than you ever thought possible. 2021 could be a significant year for your business.”

Watch the Technogym webinar
from futurist Ken Hughes here:
www.HCMmag.com/KenHughes



NEW VALUES

#1 Attachment

- The current situation offers you a shortcut to building lifelong brand loyalty. When people are scared, sad, and lonely they naturally want to attach themselves to someone or something that offers stability and security.
- Make sure your business is the one they go to for help. That attachment will last far longer than the pandemic.

! ACTION POINT

Think about how you can be there for them as a positive influence, give them ways to attach to your brand emotionally as a way to soothe their worries about fitness, health, nutrition and wellness.

#2 Freedom

- Freedom is important to us and has suddenly been taken away for the foreseeable future.
- This overnight loss of freedom and choice has significant emotional and mental ramifications, leaving consumers in a cycle of grief. You need to understand which phase your customers are in.
- Customer experience will be more important than ever, so multiply your efforts by 10. Customers want their freedom back and your brand, business and team need to be that point of human connection, giving them solutions that reinstate freedom and choice.

! ACTION POINT

Give customers freedom to book, choose and access services in a way that puts them in control.

#3 Autonomy

- People feel safe when they know what's going to happen. The pandemic has removed this sense of autonomy. Your customers can't see what's coming, and don't know when it's going to end.
- Two of their main environments – home and work – have collided, and many are locked in.
- People desperately want to get a sense of control and autonomy back over key areas of life. One of these areas is fitness and health. This gives you a huge opportunity if you get the conversation right.

! ACTION POINT

Make customers feel involved, allow them to feel in control, make your services flexible so they can choose.

Give your customers
freedom to book, choose
and access services in a way
that puts them in control





SHUTTERSTOCK/GEORGE JOY

The gym is not your product.
Delivering on your customers' wellness is your 'product'

#4 Community

- Community has always been a key value for health and fitness brands. It's now time to leverage this to strengthen the retention of existing customers.
- Humans need connection. Your customers are missing people during shutdown. Your gym gave them one of their tribes to belong to.
- You need to reinforce the relationship between your business and your customers, and capture those moments of community and connection.
- During this challenging time, don't forget to build connections and emotional links.
- People need to feel that they are part of your community.

! ACTION POINT

Write a list of things you've done to make your community feel special – you urgently need to contribute to community connection and keep this going.

#5 Digital

- Digital has always been a business advantage, and now it will be pure survival. Don't fear digital. Create a 'phygital' business, where the physical and the digital combine to offer consumers what they need.
- Consumers are getting used to having digital experiences. You need to digitise your business to thrive during the pandemic and beyond. The gym and your other physical assets are the core of your business. But have that as the hub, with digital strands.
- The gym is not your product. Customer wellness is and delivering on their wellness is your solution. You need to be active in every part of what they need.
- Digital has destroyed some direct-to-consumer industries. Don't let that happen to the physical activity sector. Make sure you're crucial, so consumers can't bypass you. Consider hiring equipment or sourcing it for customers to buy. Sell nutrition and supplements. Create a community. Give value. Link everything back to your facility.

! ACTION POINT

Reshape your business by adding digital assets. Use it to build a community, strong social media, virtual home workouts, personalised online assets and anything else your customers need.

#6 Health

- Health has always been an important value, but the pandemic has skyrocketed it to the top of many people's lists.
- Many are now interfacing with fitness for the first time, or returning to it because of this new drive. This creates a great opportunity for you to interact with 100 per cent of the population.
- Give advice, present solutions, show them what they need to do.
- When this is over, people will want more opportunities for health and fitness, but some fears and anxieties will remain. People will want to be healthy to protect themselves from illness.
- Start thinking of your business as part of a health solution, offering ways to keep people well and prevent illness. Use this health-based messaging in your communications and social media. People will want to attach themselves to health-focused businesses.

! ACTION POINT

Think about how to amplify positive health attitudes and consumers' need for health in fitness.

SUPER SOFT

As gyms reopen, restrictions on numbers are demanding more of their software. HCM asks the experts how their systems can enable gyms to cope with post lockdown requirements



People will be presented with an online medical questionnaire which can include questions about COVID-19

Leonie Wileman Premier Software

Software like Core by Premier Software will play a vital role in the enforcement of social distancing. To avoid an influx of people arriving at once, members should be asked to book classes or training sessions online.

Operators can control the number of slots available within the software to enforce social distancing.

For those who wish to avoid a group environment, one-to-one PT sessions may also be offered.

Core can also help operators with a range of other stumbling blocks that may occur upon



reopening. These include membership validity, cancelled memberships and keeping in touch.

Using Core's access control fast track system, operators can monitor membership validity on entry using contactless readers for cards and wristbands. Any clients who have cancelled their membership can easily sign back up online. During this process, they will be presented with a medical questionnaire which can be customised to include questions regarding COVID-19. Operators can also keep members in the loop of restrictions and changes using automated marketing.

Hugo Braam Virtuagym

Our group class schedule can already accommodate time slots to be planned by the club and booked by members. On top of that, we're launching a real-time attendance tracking feature that integrates with our check-in system. This feature will not only give club owners and staff members insights into on-site attendance, but can also automatically allow or deny access depending on the number of people currently in the gym.

Club members can be identified through manual, barcode or RFID check in, or through our new mobile in-app QR-code check-in.

A member simply opens the app and scans their QR.

We're also working on connecting our booking solution with the customer check-in system, meaning a member can only check in if they've booked a time slot at that specific time.

Our system allows target groups specific access. This means you could make certain times available for high-risk customers, such as the elderly or people with health conditions.

Our industry won't be the same after the pandemic, and many operators will keep investing in digital.

Our solution is perfectly positioned to support this new reality, with live streaming workout videos, virtual trainer workouts, online nutrition coaching, community and challenge features and native online coaching apps.



We're launching a real-time attendance tracking feature that integrates with our visitor registration

We can help operators implement new schedules to accommodate cleaning breaks

Hugo Audley-Miller **Xn Leisure**

At Xn, we can offer several options to limit numbers in gyms and leisure centres. Using counters on either our ePOS or self-service kiosks will help limit members going into gyms, and our online system, Leisure Hub, can help manage pre-bookable time slots.

Regular gym-goers can book these slots as well as their usual classes using the 'quick book' and 'rebook' functions. We anticipate the need for social distancing to continue, so to prevent any customer contact, staff can use tablet check-in for attendance and Staff Portal for gym users who aren't comfortable using online applications.

Some sites might want to go one step further and use our access control solution that only allows entrance to the gym if the headcount is below a



certain level. We can also help customers set up and implement new fitness class schedules to accommodate cleaning breaks.

Finally, we'll be putting together a series of help guides, remote training sessions, and webinars to go through the solutions that work best for each customer.

Rob Lander **Fisikal**

Our advanced online booking system allows every activity to be independently configured with maximum booking numbers, and optional automated alerts to inform when classes are full or nearing capacity.

Fisikal also enables the booking of resources, such as group exercise bikes and pilates reformers.

Unique 'room mapping' technology allows operators to create a 'map' of equipment positioned in a studio. This can be easily amended to reflect physical distancing recommendations

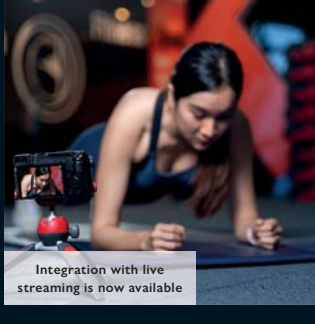


and means members can select and book the exact piece of equipment they wish to occupy.

If restricted access due to physical distancing requirements means some members are unable to use physical facilities, integrated live streaming means they can still enjoy their favourite classes with familiar instructors, remotely.

This functionality is complemented by an ability to host an unlimited library of on-demand classes and workout programmes.

**Room mapping
allows members
to select and book
the exact piece of
equipment they want**



Integration with live streaming is now available



Members will not be forced to leave if there is capacity for them to stay at the end of their session

David Waugh **Hedgehog Concept**

We're creating a flexible and easy-to-use booking system to allow members to book one-hour slots starting at any time of day, as long as the permitted occupancy levels are not breached.

Spare capacity can be sold to non-members if desired.

This will spread the entry and exit times throughout the day and avoid having large groups of people entering and leaving at the same time.

Check in and check out will make use of the fobs, cards, etc, that are normally used. Members will not be forced to leave if there is capacity for them to stay at the end of their session. There will be a staff-view 'Who's in the Club' display showing pics of members currently on-site, along with their check-in time and the end time of their booked slot.





We offer the ability to create custom entry rules - one workout per day or premium slots for premium members

Shez Namooza Ez Runner

Our software has the ability to manage capacity. As we work in multiple sectors within the leisure vertical, by default our solution has its very own 'crowd control'. You can tailor your capacity by the hour or minute.

We offer a wide scope to manage your member flow. We can also add restrictions on access control. For example will you offer one slot/entry per day? Offer premium slots for premium members? We offer the ability to create custom entry rules.

In addition, we have digital consultation forms that could be completed by the member prior to attending the site. It's all about reducing the potential risky touch points. We also allow a cashless environment, where customers can add 'credit' to their respective accounts online, prior to visiting their club or studio.



A 'fair use' booking function avoids disappointment or unnecessary travel

Christina Hamilton Legend

Legend's bookings and ticketing solutions allow for complete control of capacity and attendance, with options for cleaning slots or set-up time between sessions, activities and uses.

This can cover the widest range of resources from studios, gym area and zones, pools and swimming lanes and even individual pieces of equipment.

Operators can then use access control management to temporarily block access to anyone not booked into an activity slot.

For convenience, Legend's online portal and app allows members and customers to view availability or book a dedicated slot prior to travel. 'Fair use' functions ensure slots can be retained for anyone unable to access self-service.

This eliminates queues and uncertainty, avoiding disappointment or unnecessary travel and allows members to see that the club has implemented safe capacity management.

We can also help clients reopen by assisting with marketing campaigns to re-engage members and prospective members, and administering bulk changes for direct debit, access control management, advanced bookings rules or pricing.

Legend's facilities maintenance module, LegendFM, helps manage cleaning and hygiene using a tablet or phone. Any issue automatically alerts the relevant person to resolve it. The system manages compliance standards on anything from an empty hand sanitiser dispenser to unclean or damaged equipment. It also allows clubs to publish cleaning statistics to members, to demonstrate a diligent management of hygiene standards.

Claire Rollins Gladstone

With our system you can manage capacity in any area, facility or space; from classes to cardio, free weights or swimming, ensuring capacity with social distancing can be optimised.

Simple configuration enables operators to create bookable sessions with set maximum and minimum capacity that can be made available online and via the operators' branded mobile app.

Gladstone also enables simple check-in and check-out via several self-service options, ensuring accurate data capture and traceability on numbers within the facility whilst most importantly keeping your team safe. Seamless automations will mean that class and space availability is maximised; booking reminders, cancellations and availability alerts where a cancellation makes a space newly available are all configurable based on operator requirements.

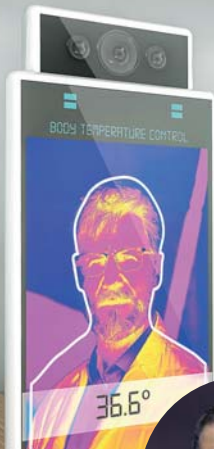
Self-service and cashless operations are at the forefront of Gladstone's offering, allowing us to quickly increase the options



We've fast-tracked tools to support live streaming, as well as enhanced tracing and cleaning

available in this space. We've also fast-tracked new initiatives, including facilities and staff management tools to support enhanced tracing and cleaning requirements and the tools required for live-streaming,

Some software companies are integrating with temperature scanning technology



Peter Croft Perfect Gym

We recommend the use of class bookings system to create an 'Open Gym' class to allow members to make scheduled visits. They can then manage access control settings so only members with a booking during that time slot can enter.

Staff can also rely on door or turnstile access controls for check-in and check-out, perform manual check-in and check-out with card readers at the front desk, or use a combination.

Members can view capacity in real-time on the app or in the members' portal, so if the club allows ad-hoc visits, they can attend during off-peak times. Staff can keep track of the current club member count on the POS screen.

Age limit restrictions are configurable for class settings if operators want to prioritise at-risk groups during certain times.

Getting members to leave on time can be an issue, however, we have a

**We're partnering
with thermal
scanning providers
so no one with
a high temperature
will be admitted**

push notification that can be triggered 45 minutes after the class start-time to remind members their session is about to end.

Perfect Gym is partnering with thermal scanning providers to integrate with access controls so staff and members can feel more comfortable knowing no one with a high temperature will be admitted to the club.

This can work in conjunction with time slot bookings so members must have normal temperatures and a booked time slot to be allowed entry.

Phil Moss BrightLime

Members can check in and out with the BrightLime mobile app by presenting the mobile device to the reader on entry, with no need to open the app or use a barcode/QR code that can be screenshared. This reduces the risk that touch points at entry and exit pose.

Using BrightLime's flexible booking module alongside its rule-based access control, clubs can manage total capacity or capacity in areas such as studios, courts and pools. Automated waiting lists can then be used for over-subscribed timeslots.

Members can book through their member portal or app while live club occupancy statistics will be available through the customer's website to provide full visibility to members and prevent unnecessary travel.

BrightLime has extended the self-service facility that provides members with services to freeze, cancel, reinstate and rejoin, so operators will now be able to specifically target the members who have cancelled their direct debits.

A single-click, tokenised, reinstatement link for live members without a valid direct debit will then be sent through the BrightLime Customer Comms solution.

The COVID toolkit also includes tools for crediting/debiting members with pro-rata payments for mid month opening/closing as well as end date extension tools for pre-paid memberships. ●

**Operators can
now specifically
target the members
who have cancelled
their direct debits**

Building trust

HCM is launching a COVIDhub to centralise details of companies supplying everything from social distancing tech to UV robots. We kick off with a sample of what's on offer. Add your company at www.HCMmag.com/COVIDadd

SPACE CONTROL

Siemens Enlighted

● www.enlightedinc.com

Cost: quotes on request

Siemens subsidiary Enlighted can track where people have been in a building, who they came into contact with and which areas they've used.

So if you have a member who subsequently becomes unwell, you know which areas of your club need to be deep cleaned.

The system can also be used to control social distancing by flagging if too many people gather in a space.

DISTANCING SOFTWARE

Landing AI

● www.landing.ai

Cost: quotes on request

Tech company Landing AI offers a monitoring tool that will alert you

if anyone is less than the desired distance from another person. A neural network picks out people in security camera footage, while an algorithm analyses the space between them.

TEMPERATURE SCANNING

AlphaPhenomics

● www.alphaphenomics.com

Cost: £3,900 per unit

ThermoCheck analyses a person to produce an individual biometric 3D thermogram in real-time, integrating data from sensors to estimate the quantity of oxygen in the blood, heart rate, and blood pressure to provide temperature and a 'health score'.

This takes into account biometric assessment of body weight and BMI.

ThermoCheck works within a standalone configuration or within a network, on ethernet or wifi.

In the event of an alarm, it can send messages, emails and generate alarms to lock or unlock access gates. It can also function as an RFID access control terminal.

PORTABLE AIR FILTRATION

Puritii Air Filters

● www.puritii.com/pippaturley

Cost: £1,750 inc VAT

The Puritii portable air purifier has 11 stages of filtration, removing up to 99.99 per cent of airborne pollutants, including viruses. It can capture all three types of pollutants – particulates, VOCs and bio-aerosols as small as PM0.1.

The Puritii system offers an effective clean air solution for gyms and studios wanting to give reassurance and a positive message to both staff and customers – especially those with no opening windows.

TEMPERATURE SCREENING

Fired Up Technologies

● www.fireduptech.co.uk

Cost: £1,195.00+VAT (handheld)

£3,635.00+VAT (Mounted)

The Thermographic Bullet camera is designed to detect elevated skin-surface temperature with high accuracy in real-time. It can be used for preliminary temperature screening in gyms to control entry. Fast scanning keeps the flow of people moving, as it can measure up to 30 people at once.

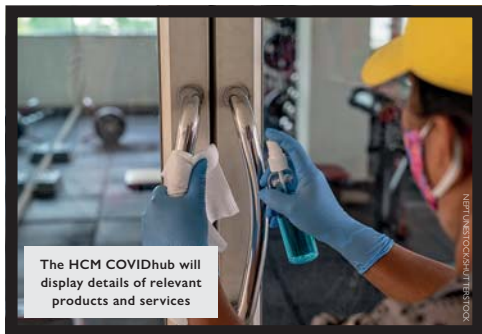
BRANDED PPE KITS

GATE8

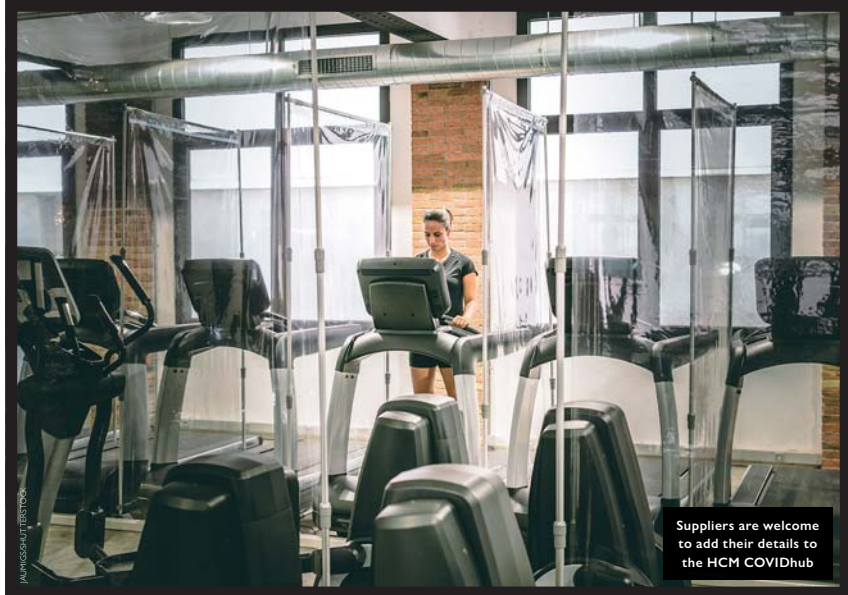
● www.gate8-luggage.co.uk

Cost: starts at £4 per kit

These hygiene kits – including a face mask, sanitising wipes and hand gel (both 70 per cent alcohol) and a pair of medical gloves, can be issued to gym members. Kits come branded with the gym logo.



The HCM COVIDhub will display details of relevant products and services



KIT RELOCATION

Gym Lifter

● www.gymlifter.com

Cost: quotes on request

Gym Lifter relocates, extracts and transports all makes and models of gym equipment on your behalf. Any size of work can be catered for, from the largest commercial project to just a single item. Warehouse storage is also available.

SCREENING AND CONTROL

Hutchison Technologies

● www.hutchison-t.com

Cost: quotes on request

The solutions Hutchison offers can screen for temperature levels and face mask usage, help control occupancy levels and enable members to be part of the solution, reducing the demand on staff.

HAND SANITISER DISPLAYS

Impact Digital Signage

● www.impactdigitalsignage.co.uk

Cost: £690 + VAT

Hand Sanitiser Displays can be installed in high footfall areas for members and staff to use where handwashing facilities are not available. The dispenser is automated to minimise contact and the unit has a large tank with a live level indicator.

The display provides digital signage, enabling operators to update safety messages and provide positive messages through images and video.

DISTANCING AND HEAT MAP APP

Holovis Crowd Solo

● www.crowd-solo.com

Cost: free of charge

The Crowd Solo, designed for theme parks, but relevant for gyms, is a social distancing app designed to help facilities reopen safely. It visualises the movements of people so operators can monitor how effectively their facility is working, especially around hot spots. Heatmap data is viewed in real time to help expand capacity, support staffing plans and manage safety.

SCREENS

Indigo Fitness

● www.indigofitness.com

Cost: £400 each

Gym screens are dividers that can be placed between cardio or strength equipment to define customer flow around the gym floor, manage space and create a physical barrier between fitness products and bring flexibility to gym floor management.

SAFETY PRODUCTS

Physical Company

● www.physicalcompany.co.uk

Cost: depends on spec

Physical Company offers numerous products to help gyms reopen safely, including gym wipes and hand sanitiser dispensers; flooring solutions for temporary gym spaces; commercial-grade floor transfers; outdoor-ready training equipment; easy-clean AIREX mats; and a range of masks – Ace Shield Face Visor, five-layer face mask and REAX.

REOPENING PRODUCTS

Xn Leisure

● www.xnleisure.com

Cost: Starts at £495 + VAT

Xn Leisure offers a range of products for reopening, designed to make sure that members and staff are protected from any further spread of the coronavirus. These include digital signage and auto dispense hand sanitiser, a temperature scanning kiosk and pole-mounted body temperature thermometer. Also available are a temperature screening thermographic camera, body temperature detection system, touch-free door release buttons and the trackiv8 health tracking app. ●

THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE CORONAVIRUS TUNNEL



Chinese boutique operator Life Turbo focused on maintaining strong links with its tribe during lockdown

China is still ahead of many parts of the world in the lifecycle of the pandemic, with clubs open again and some semblance of normality resuming. We gathered insights from both operator and supplier perspectives



After at least two months of closure, Chinese operators are now in a gradual reopening phase. This varies from province to province and all gyms are facing stringent measures to enforce social distancing and cleanliness.

Despite having to shut for two months, many Chinese clubs are reporting they were not only able to survive, but have thrived during lockdown, building a digital presence that is still transforming their businesses.

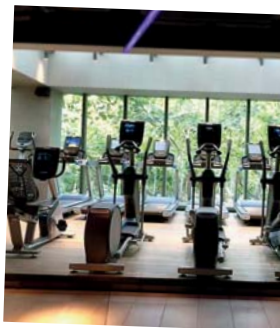


Will Wang

President and founder of Will's Gym

Will's Gym is a strongly established operator with more than 150 sites in China and over 600,000 members.

L.Catterton Asia invested in Will's Gym in 2018



When lockdown first commenced, we communicated details of closure to existing members via staff, to make it as personal as possible. We also put an official notice on the entrance to be sure people knew the closure was based on government health guidance, and that when we reopened would also be dictated by the government.

As all our memberships are annual pre-pay and some are multi-year, we committed to extending all memberships, free of charge, for the period of closure. It's testament to how committed our personal trainers are that **most of them posted home workout tips through their personal online video streaming apps.**

As a chain we also shared home workout tips plus food and nutrition advice online, to ensure we were connecting and interacting with members.

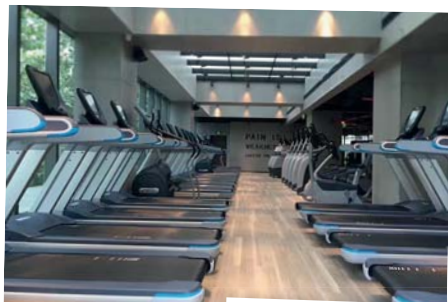
The way I saw it, our business was paused, not dead, so we needed to keep good staff on board to ensure we bounced back when lockdown lifted. We provided a basic salary and also some 1:1 support and reassurance from directors and managers.

We also conducted online staff training, focusing on the member welcome process, club cleaning, personal hygiene and personal health management. Our managers used the time to study government health updates, so we would be well prepared for reopening.

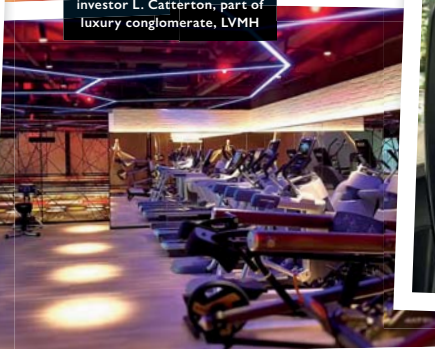
To ensure we stayed afloat financially, we cut marketing costs dramatically and negotiated with landlords to discount rental costs. Different landlords had different terms but **we were fortunate we could negotiate future longer-term partnerships to ensure landlords' support during the closure.** We also received support from the Chinese government – club operators could apply for a bank loan, delay payment and staff social benefits, and taxes can be paid up to six months later.

I learned many things during lockdown, but what stands out is that healthy cashflow is vitally important.

I also realised very quickly that although **online streaming cannot replace the real club experience**, it was truly important for improving member interaction and retention during lockdown, for keeping members engaged and encouraging them to return.



Will's Gym is backed by investor L. Catterton, part of luxury conglomerate, LVMH



We had to apply to local government and be inspected before being allowed to reopen. There are strict guidelines to adhere to.

When we knew lockdown was

being lifted we sent an official opening announcement to members, picturing the protections we'd put in place and demonstrating hygiene measures we'd employed to build confidence that a workout with us would be safe. **Assuming lots**

of our members would be financially struggling we offered discounts of up to 20 per cent.

"We've opened at less than 50 per cent our usual capacity and we complete routine cleaning using disinfectants every two to three hours. Our fitness areas are open but we have yet to restart all our classes or the spa and swimming pools. Showers are closed. Every member must make an online appointment before entering the gym. This makes it easier to restrict numbers. We also have an app that

We have an LED broadcaster in each club to reiterate the importance of keeping 1.5m apart

allows members to check in real time how busy their gym is.

We check each member's ID and temperature before they enter, ensure they use hand sanitiser and are wearing a mask, and have an LED broadcaster in every club reiterating the importance of wearing masks, hand washing and – most importantly – keeping 1.5m apart.

From our experience, **people gained weight and got stiff after**

two months at home. When the virus had been contained, we saw a surge in people looking for PT guidance; it was even more in demand than before, and usage picked up quickly – **our check-ins are at about 90 per cent of the level we were at before closures.**

Our new openings plan for 2020 has of course been delayed, and we will not open as many new sites as planned this year, but the return to our clubs has been positive and we will open at least 50 per cent in the second half of the year.



Lei Liang

Co-Founder and COO of small boutique, Life Turbo

Located in Chongqing, the brand – which first opened its doors in 2018 – launched a second site in May, as China came out of lockdown


During the prevention period of China's COVID-19 pandemic almost all gyms in China were closed. As a small boutique studio, we were lucky that our members are very 'sticky' – this is the big advantage of the boutique offering that we benefitted from throughout this time.

In order to maintain customer relationships, we worked out a home training plan. Each of our PTs took it in turns to create the daily plan, send it to each member and supervise their training by getting them to clock in online. I spent lockdown thinking about how to inspire members to join us in our new flagship site and how to expand diversified revenue when and if offline stagnation occurred. **For us, lockdown was all about finding our own core competitiveness, ready for what may be a crisis-prone future.**

I believe this epidemic is an opportunity. It will accelerate the reform of China's fitness industry.

Fitness and health have once again become national social topics – the pandemic is a strong motivator for being fit and healthy – and the same will happen in the UK. Home workouts have enabled millions of families to participate in fitness, even total beginners, with no intimidation factor. As a result, fitness will play a supporting role in the rebuilding of infrastructure following this crisis. I believe we will gain more members as a result of this in the next few months.

We returned to work a month ago and **data shows we've restored about 70 per cent of our members.** Online media was our link to customers during the epidemic and we are one of the few clubs in China that already offered an online training camp, **which has over eight million followers on social media.** In my opinion, the internet attribute of the global fitness industry is relatively weak compared with other industries. But there is a very strong sense that many operators will continue with online offerings,



Life Turbo has built an online training camp with eight million social media followers

We returned to work a month ago and we've already restored 70% of our members



even when their clubs reopen, to better connect with and understand their customers, and use the digital offering to better enhance their offline experiences.

But it can never replace real life training. **Nothing online can compare with the high-quality life experience members get from their fitness space** and from a certified professional coaching team. This is why they'll come back.



Thomas Ding

**Business director,
Precor Asia**

As a supplier, we focused on keeping in contact with our key accounts to understand their situation and maintain relationships. We also organised online training, to take advantage of the lockdown period to build our team's capabilities to prepare to strengthen our position for reopening.

We created some live streaming 'at home' workouts to deliver to customers of Precor's home range.

Clubs started to reopen on 15 March here in China and by the beginning of April, approximately 15-20 per cent had reopened their doors.

Visits are down 30 per cent compared with the same period last year, but in a survey by McKinsey – *China, Cautiously optimistic: Chinese consumer behavior post-COVID-19* – published at the end of March, 70 per cent of the 2,500 respondents said they'd strive to reinforce their immunity after lockdown by exercising more.

Schools also reopened in May in China and I believe this will have a positive impact on the industry, given that parents now have more time to go to the clubs.

Gyms here have learned that it helps to prepare a detailed process of club operations while in lockdown, to be sure members are well protected when you're allowed to reopen.

There should be temperature checks and antiviral hand sanitiser for every member and equipment will need to be cleaned and sterilised every two hours.

There should also be a limit to the number of members in the gym at any one time, they should wear masks and keep a minimum distance from each other.

Put these plans in place prior to reopening and your members will feel confident they are safe to return to your facility to start enjoying the benefits of exercise again. ●

Reopen with CONFIDENCE

As the health and fitness industry gears up for reopening, Caroline Constantine, MD of Right Directions, shares critical guidance about safe operating procedures

Less than a month from the rumoured reopening date and health clubs and leisure centres are planning ahead and strategising ways to recoup some of the losses they've suffered as a result of the pandemic. We're offering them our free COVID-19 Health and Safety Remobilisation Plan and Checklist which provides a framework to help businesses to reopen with confidence, based around the 'Four S's': spacing, sanitising, signage and smiling.

We'd recommend operators consider appointing a dedicated COVID-19 officer to oversee the writing of plans and risk assessments and ensure staff are appropriately trained and carrying out any changes to their roles effectively.



1 SPACING

● It's important to consider how you'll get people in, around and out of your buildings while ensuring social distancing is maintained. If we do nothing else, we need to keep people apart. It's the key control measure. Every building is different, and each one will have a bespoke approach; that might mean a barrier at the main door, a new exit route, one-way systems around a facility or dots on the floor.

● Walk the building as if you were a customer. Start at reception and walk the route to each activity area. Look at where there may be bottlenecks and consider how you can stop that happening. Ensure you do this with someone that doesn't know the building as well – they'll see things from a different perspective.

● The number of people in the building at any one time needs to be carefully managed, so ensure customers book online and limit the length of their session so there's adequate time between sessions. If you have a sports hall you can use for classes which involve more movement, such as circuits, make arrangements to expand into this space. Consider holding classes outside to enable more people to take part.

2 SANITISING

● Provide hand sanitiser or hand washing stations before significant touch points, for example activity areas and stairwells. If your members' hands are clean they won't be transferring any virus on to the equipment. Have someone at the door giving out hand sanitiser, explaining the new rules and reassuring members.

● Cleaning programmes should be reviewed to ensure touch point areas, such as lockers, door handles, handrails, benches, staffroom microwaves and kettles, are cleaned regularly and thoroughly. Don't worry so much about less frequented areas, there isn't a bottomless pit to pay for cleaning, so if your regime was to disinfect the bottom of the bins every week, just clean the top more often instead.



Have someone at the door dispensing hand sanitiser

“

What should staff do if they come across people coughing or not obeying the rules? What if their job has changed? For example, do first aiders know the COVID-19 changes to CPR rules?



- To boost customer confidence, consider bringing in additional staff from areas that won't be open straight away to help with touch point cleaning. Look at which staff would be good at cleaning – for instance the creche team, who have to be vigilant in their normal work with young children.
- Door handles are a hot spot for touching, so think about installing gadgets such as door pulls to enable doors to be opened with feet, to reduce this threat.

3 SIGNAGE

- Use clear, simple signage. There's nothing wrong with a sign on the toilet door that says 'now wash your hands'. But don't overcomplicate it with dozens of signs, or no one will read them.
- First impressions are key. The minute it goes wrong, social media comments will be circulating. From the car park to the activity, does your facility appear to be taking the virus seriously? Members will be more understanding if the odd individual is not obeying the rules if your facility as a whole is seen to be well prepared.
- Train your staff to look after themselves and your customers. Training can be done while they're furloughed. Make sure they know what they need to do if they, or anyone they live with, have symptoms.

What should they do if they come across people coughing or not obeying the rules? What if their job has changed? For example, do instructors need to put out kit before a class starts and do first aiders know the changes which have been made to the CPR rules as a result of COVID-19? What about staff taking on cleaning tasks? What do they need to do differently now?

4 SMILE

- This will be your customers' first time back into the centre that they may have missed – let's welcome them. They're probably apprehensive and possibly worried they may catch COVID-19 in your facility. If it's obvious you feel safe to be there, they probably will too.
- Let's also keep customers safe by staff being vigilant and supervising customers, with a smile, to ensure the new standards and rules are being adhered to.
- Now's the time to start doing walkabouts, writing risk assessments and action plans, to allow sufficient time for staff training and for any purchases, such as signs, stickers, door pulls and sanitiser station equipment.

Right Directions – here to support you

Right Directions is offering on-site risk assessments, in addition to an online support

Right Directions
quality and safety

system, pre- and post-opening inspection audits and procedure and insurance reviews, to ensure every aspect of the facility is in line with health and safety legislation and best practice guidance, with all its statutory inspections up to date – including those for lifts and fire extinguishers.

A series of 11 informative Fit For Business clinics, attended by more than 500 facility managers, is also available on Right Directions' YouTube channel.

To find out more, get a copy of Right Directions' re-mobilisation checklist or discuss reopening, email info@rightdirections.co.uk or call +44 (0)1582 840 098

On the frontline

As staff and members prepare to return to the gym,

Dr Dane Vishnubala gives advice to operators

on gearing up to offer them mental health support

Staff need to be trained to intervene if members seem to be punishing themselves



Gym staff didn't sign up to be frontline workers in a global pandemic, yet as clubs reopen, this is where they're finding themselves

Gym staff didn't sign up to be frontline workers in a global pandemic, yet as clubs reopen, this is where they're finding themselves.

The way they're supported through the next six months to a year of trading will determine not only their health and the health of colleagues, but also potentially the health and wellbeing of members, so getting this right is a vital piece of the reopening jigsaw puzzle.

This care needs to extend beyond PPE to the mental health and wellbeing of staff – something rarely given attention.

Recent research by Leisure-net showed that nearly 60 per cent (59.6) of members are missing motivation by and interaction with gym staff, so our teams are clearly a major reason why many people pay for gym membership and their welfare is of the utmost importance to the business.

Background – mental health: state of the nation

In the UK, the Office For National Statistics (ONS) asks around 1,500 people how anxious and happy they are on a scale of one to 10 as part of its regular update on wellbeing. At the end of 2019 the proportion of people registering high levels of anxiety stood at 21 per cent, but between 20-30 March 2020, this had

increased to around half of the adult population (49.6 per cent), or more than 25 million people. Of those, 8.5 million were most concerned about their wellbeing, including boredom, loneliness and stress. Furthermore, the number of people reporting a low happiness score had more than doubled from 8.4 per cent in the final quarter of 2019 to 20.7 per cent in late March.

This rise in anxiety and stress will be reflected in both staff and members returning to the gym and operators must be alert to this.

Here, Dr Dane Vishnubala, GP, chief medical advisor at Active IQ and co-writer of its Mental Health Awareness award, shares insights to help operators mentally prepare staff for their return to work and welcoming back members.

Supporting staff

"No-one's sure how things will feel after a long break from the norm, but operators must be prepared for potentially increased levels of anxiety and concern among some staff and members as they take steps back to the gym," says Vishnubala. "Some staff in particular may be worried they're going to be working in the frontline while the pandemic remains a threat and also, bridging the gap between working remotely or having been on furlough will have its challenges when it comes to mental health and wellbeing."



No-one's sure how things will feel after a long break from the norm, but operators must be prepared for raised levels of anxiety and concern among staff and members

Prior to opening, operators are advised to review their mental health training and awareness policies and look to access online training or refresher courses – there are plenty to choose from, including those run by charities such as Mental Health First Aid England and Time to Change, and free resources from Active IQ, which include 11 CPD courses in relation to mental health awareness and first aid and a number specifically dealing with the COVID-19 situation.

"Mental ill-health among colleagues will be best spotted by colleagues who work closely together, so train a mixture of staff: with many resources online and free, there's no limit to how many can upskill," he says.

Mental Health Champions

"Implementation of mental health awareness and first aid is best through a team of Mental Health Champions," says Vishnubala. "These champions should be trained in mental health first aid so they can spot the signs and symptoms of mental ill health and provide help and signposting.

"The ideal mental health champion will be a good communicator, empathetic and respectful of confidentiality. They will also be well-respected and trusted by their peers.

"They need not be particularly senior but do need to be able to communicate feedback and suggestions clearly to management teams and other senior staff.

"I'd aim to have one mental health champion for each department on-site to ensure all colleagues have someone familiar to them in this role. Ideally have them trained before the doors open again, so they're

ready to speak to colleagues who have concerns. You can also consider offering a video link chat prior to people returning." Acknowledging that many employees could be affected by the impact of COVID-19, Vishnubala suggests running an online Staff Support Forum group for six to eight weeks after the site returns.

"This format can give a welcome outlet for staff to discuss their concerns and ask questions," he says. "Use familiar technology to limit any learning curve to access it – private Facebook groups can work well, or you may prefer to use Slack, which is nice and secure.


"I'd recommend a small team of Mental Health Champions manage the forum and post regular, thought-provoking content that engages the staff and makes them reflect. You may like to start with insight and tips learned from your training, post a comment around how they feel and invite others to share as well, to invite conversation. You could also share trusted links to helpful resources to engage people actively in the forum."

Supporting members

Returning members may also have concerns and worries. Weighing up their wish to return to exercise against their underlying fear that it may not be safe to do so could cause conflicting emotions. They may also have been personally affected by coronavirus among family and friends, as Vishnubala points out. "The impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown can manifest in different ways among different people. From those who have lost loved

Mental health resources

- **Active IQ Skills Hub**
<https://www.skillsHub@activeiq.co.uk>
- **Mental Health First Aid England**
<https://mhfaengland.org>
- **Time to change**
<https://www.time-to-change.org.uk>
- **Mood Gym – online self-help for anxiety and depression**
<https://moodgym.com.au>
- **NHS psychological services**
<https://www.nhs.uk/service-search>
- **NHS library of approved apps**
<https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health>



Train staff so they are confident to approach members who show signs of needing support

Many people will use the gym to release tension and cabin fever, but some may target a tough workout to punish themselves – trained staff should be alert to this and have the confidence to check in with them

ones and may be suffering survivor's guilt, to those who feel shallow because they're well but worrying while others have far greater problems, the range of emotions is vast.

Lifestyle changes including losing their job, being on furlough or struggling with life being on hold also cause anxiety.

"Many people will use the gym to release tension and cabin fever, but some may target a tough workout to punish themselves.

"Mental health awareness-trained staff should be alert to this and if they see any unusual behaviour among members must have the confidence to start a conversation to check in with them.

"If in doubt, start a conversation with members you're concerned about," advises Vishnubala. "With trained staff and mental health champions, operators are perfectly placed to lend initial support and signpost people on for additional support if necessary.

"As well as this direct approach, operators should create a positive environment to show mental health is valued. Posters explaining that help is available, mental health messages in your social media content and displaying local mental health charity materials will show members you are ready to listen and help.

"Be clear about the ways people can seek help confidentially – perhaps a dedicated email address or a discreetly placed help box where people can drop in a request for contact with a mental health champion." ●

Warning signs to look out for

- Sudden emotional outbursts
- Feeling anxious or unhappy all the time
- Lacking motivation or energy
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Sudden weight-loss or weight-gain
- Becoming unusually quiet or withdrawn
- Feeling guilty or worthless

Mission Active

BMF, the outdoor fitness franchise company co-owned by Bear Grylls, is launching a £1m initiative designed to offer financial support to PTs and exercise professionals in getting back to work after the lockdown

JAN SPATICCHIA

Vice chair, BMF

What is Mission Active?

COVID-19 has displaced millions of workers and in the fitness sector, self-employed personal trainers have been very badly hit by the closure of gyms – in many cases seeing the loss of their regular income. It's not possible to underestimate the negative impact of this on individuals and families who are seeing a very real threat to their livelihoods.

In every corner of the UK, when gyms do so with significant restrictions and we anticipate many PTs and fitness professionals will be facing

a long period of unemployment. This isn't something we want to see happen.

Mission Active is an initiative aimed at out of work fitness professionals who want to rebuild their businesses with the support of the UK's most established outdoor fitness franchise – BMF.

We recognise it will be challenging for some PTs and fitness professionals to reach the investment levels required for them to acquire a BMF franchise territory in the normal way. As a result, we've committed to creating a £1 million grant programme to support the first hundred PTs who sign up to launch an outdoor fitness territory with BMF. BMF will provide a £10,000 grant to each successful applicant – as part of the Mission Active

initiative – supporting them to acquire a BMF territory of their choice.

In this way, Mission Active will be empowering out of work applicants to become business owners within an industry they're truly passionate about.

Why should fitness professionals get involved?

PTs are passionate about fitness. Very often they have their own personal mission to empower people to transform their lives through fitness.

There's never been a more important time to create a national movement that supports the ukactive mission to get more people more active more often. It's time to provide real, tangible support to our wonderful NHS and work together to improve the health of the nation.

Mission Active is a movement dedicated to extending outdoor fitness opportunities to the hundreds of thousands of people who now need to take fitness more seriously.

BMF was founded more than 20 years ago. It has a clearly recognised brand, world-class programming, a network of professionals, and a raving fan base that – even in the period of the COVID-19 lockdown – achieved a Net Promoter Score of 77.

While other operators froze their memberships, BMF trusted in its tribe of passionate members and was rewarded when 82 per cent of members chose to keep paying their membership as we moved our operations online.

This tells us that BMF's exceptional customer service – with client satisfaction ratings on a par with



Bear Grylls: "For me, it's all about sharing the positivity of all those involved with BMF with as many people as I can"



Your mission - take action!

CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO



Mission Active will see £1m of subsidies from BMF enabling out-of-work PTs to take up their own franchise opportunity

Apple – is the key to retaining clients and building profitability in the future.

BMF brings all that brand value and support to every BMF franchise business. PTs and professionals will feel the value of the training, peer group support and professional advice very quickly and, more importantly, see the results in their bank balance.

What's the timescale of this offering?

We're committed to providing the first hundred personal trainers with the grant opportunity for as long as it takes. The reality is we don't expect these grants to be around for very long because we expect take-up to be high.

What commercial opportunities do you see for BMF?

BMF has dominated the outdoor fitness market since its inception. It will continue to do so and in

We believe many fitness professionals will be displaced by the pandemic and we aim to create an unprecedented, affordable franchise opportunity that will offer them an income and a means to sustain their passion

the next few years, will extend its footprint internationally.

We have a well developed online learning platform and our at-home programme is hugely popular with our client base.

We see significant commercial opportunity to build a blended outdoor and at-home offer in the years ahead. We're also working very closely with health professionals in the NHS.

The NHS believes that aiding patient recovery and helping people

boost their immune system must take greater priority in the post-COVID-19 period. This means there's significant commercial opportunity for innovative fitness operators to reach out to the 85 per cent of people who don't currently use a gym.

We believe outdoor exercise will rapidly increase in popularity when lockdown ends, as it can be socially distanced more easily and brings with it all the benefits of fresh air and community engagement.

TOMMY MATTHEWS

Business development director

Once people have bought a BMF franchise, what's the setup journey?

We start with our Enterprise phase, which successfully gets new franchisees into business. This phase includes training, business planning support, marketing set up and pre-sales support.

Once they're operating within the network, our franchisees benefit from regular training and conference events, along with the backing of a central support team that continues to provide the latest marketing campaigns and business support.

What are the key benefits of being a BMF franchisee?

BMF is the fastest growing outdoor fitness franchise in the UK and is now launching into various international markets. We're passionate about delivering the best outdoor workouts in the world.

From iconic urban areas to incredible green spaces, we train anywhere with everyone. With low capital investment

requirements and a quick to market set-up phase, our franchisees get into business and become profitable quickly.

Our franchisees come from a range of backgrounds – what binds them together is a passion for helping others on their fitness journey.

Our training systems and support provide everything needed to deliver a great customer experience – we also provide a recruitment service to match investors with operators and instructors.

What kind of people does BMF attract?

Our members come from all walks of life and all fitness backgrounds. What connects them all is the strength of our local communities, bound together by passionate instructors.

BMF may have military in its title but the programmes and workouts are designed for everyone. We're here to get members fit for life, just like the military train to be fit for action.

We use our military training strategies to get the best from people and help



maintain motivation. It's these unique strategies which set us apart in an industry where members struggle to find somewhere to belong.

Young, old, sedentary, or athletic we welcome all into the BMF family and they tend to stick around. Many of our members have been with us since day one, over 20 years ago.

What other insights would you like to share with potential franchisees?

We've already grown a brilliant network of franchisees stretching across the UK from Glasgow to the south of England. What's exciting about our business model is the number of locations available.

We're unrestrained by the need for bricks and mortar sites and operate in outdoor spaces in urban and rural environments. This means there are thousands of locations for our franchisees to operate from and the low number of members required to operate a profitable location means even the smallest of rural towns and villages can make a great BMF territory.



Bear Grylls, Tommy Matthews, Jan Spaticchia and Chris St George are taking BMF global

We have huge global ambitions. With Bear Grylls as co-owner we have exceptional reach into countries such as the USA, China and India to help drive this. We also have the most affordable franchise operation in the world



BMF has a loyal following of members who embrace outdoor workouts in all weathers



CHRIS ST GEORGE

Chair

What makes BMF exceptional?

We've been working with industry body, ukactive, to develop standards that meet government guidelines on outdoor exercise, as they get updated.

We know members will be keen to get back out into the parks to exercise safely soon, and our COVID-19 workout delivers all the social distancing and safety features required.

We believe the pandemic will spark a revolution in outdoor fitness. Doctors across the world are imploring people to get fitter in order to resist the impact of such viruses now and in the future.

There's something about working out in the fresh air, experiencing the seasons, embracing a discipline to work out in different climates and with different intensity. The rewards in terms of mental and physical fitness are exceptional. BMF members can train anywhere.



We expect to treble our outdoor workout locations across the UK by the end of next year.

What convinced you to invest in BMF?

I worked as an instructor with BMF 20 years ago and there was something very special about the relationship between me and the 300 members who regularly turned up in all weathers to work out together.

Local ownership with a passion for improving peoples' lives is at the heart of BMF's decision to build a global franchising operation.

The company is very well funded and we have the resources to build a brand that franchisees can be proud of.

We also want to do the right thing. Our decision to launch the Mission Active campaign, which will put £1m support into the hands of 100 personal trainers and fitness professionals, is extremely timely.

We believe many fitness professionals will be displaced by the impact of the pandemic and we aim to create an unprecedented,

affordable franchise opportunity that will offer them an income and a means to sustain their passion.

At the same time, Mission Active will take outdoor fitness to hundreds of communities across the UK.

What are your plans for growth?

We have huge global ambitions. I already have the experience of taking a small company and building it into a global brand, with 5,000 employees across 30 countries.

With Bear Grylls as a co-owner and partner we have exceptional reach into countries such as the USA, China and India to help drive this.

We know we have the most affordable franchise operation in the world – we also know that safe outdoor exercise will become increasingly popular globally.

It's not hard to get excited about taking a tried, tested and proven fitness formula into new locations – rapidly. After all, this expansion will improve health and will take pressure off overstretched health services across the world. ●

Email: fitness@bemilitaryfit.com

It's considered a fundamental part of our fitness routines by medical professionals, but many exercisers, particularly women, are still put off by strength training.

We asked leading suppliers what they're doing to champion strength

Precor's biceps curl machine: selectorised equipment provides a safe, controlled option for strength training



SINGLING OUT Strength

Late last year, the Chief Medical Officer's (CMO) guidelines for physical activity put strength firmly in the spotlight. The UK's NHS now recommends all adults undertake muscle strength exercises at least twice a week.

The CMO at the time, Professor Dame Sally Davies went so far as to describe strength training as 'fundamental to the ability to perform daily tasks' and positioned it equally alongside aerobic activity recommendations for the first time. She asked the UK fitness industry to make a greater effort to highlight the importance of strength training.

The science is clear: Resistance training builds muscle and helps boost resting metabolism, which in turn helps with weight loss. It slashes the risk of stroke and heart attacks by around 70 per cent (according to research by Iowa State University in 2018), cuts the chances of developing metabolic syndrome, and helps to preserve muscle mass and bone density to offer protection against osteoporosis.

Despite this, a recent survey by Sure Women suggested one in four women are intimidated by strength kit and half have felt negatively judged while working out in weights areas.

Dr Luke Turnock, a researcher at the University of Winchester in the UK, interviewed female gym-goers for a study and says: "One of the primary issues identified was a feeling of intimidation when using weights. Crossing the divide into the 'male space' felt daunting and the majority of women, even those who were comfortable in other areas of the gym, commented on this issue. Weight plates, dumbbells, bars, benches and racks can be scary when you don't know how to use them."

Selectorised kit provides a good alternative, not just for women but also for beginners and the elderly. Data from the Fitness Industry Supplier Association (FISA) shows that the demand for selectorised strength remains strong and has been growing at 9 per cent year on year.

Because movement is more limited, it can help exercisers focus on their form in a safe, controlled setting, especially at a time when more and more gyms are operating on a lower staffing model.

Selectorised machines can play a role in building confidence with weight training, requiring less experience and precision than free weights in terms of technique, weight selection and injury risk. We asked operators how they're ensuring strength training appeals to all gym-goers.

STRENGTH



Michael Dorman
Strength Products Manager
Precor

Selectorised strength is very much a part of the complete gym and facility experience. This spring, we launched the new Resolute Strength line. We've focused on product and motion designs that support accurate biomechanics, regardless of body type or sex. Our research into exerciser preferences shows a desire for timeless equipment that feels right and isn't gender specific – the new line works for every body type.

We have always known that selectorised strength is a safe, effective place to both begin or continue a strength journey. Resolute strikes

a balance between adjustability and usability. So for example, a patented add-on for weight works like the flip of a switch to allow exercisers to add as little as 2.6 kg (5lb) at a time. This provides an opportunity for men and women to experience incremental gains in their strength.

In research we conducted, we learned that some women are uncomfortable with strength training and can be intimidated by the machines. Since then, one of our primary areas of focus has been on approachable design for all. The frames are designed to be minimalist so they appear less intimidating. Adjustment points are easily discoverable and easy to move. The selectorised and plate-loaded lines have picture-based instructional

placards, along with a QR code that accesses an instructional video too.

In addition, we've partnered with Advagym by Sony. Using the Advagym app, exercisers can experience a fully connected gym experience and access how-to videos and written instruction on each selectorised or plate-loaded piece, eliminating concerns about looking silly. Advagym also allows facilities or personal trainers to push customised workouts to exercisers, boosting their motivation and inspiring them through personal feedback.

Precor with Advagym means exercisers can perform weight training without fear of injury or need for direct supervision from a professional, while offering options to challenge seasoned fitness enthusiasts to progress.



One of our primary areas of focus has been approachable design

Resolute has been designed to be biomechanically accurate for men and women





Matrix's Glute Trainer offers both 'tone and shape' and 'power training' options



A gas-assisted design makes seat adjustments quick and effortless so that everyone, regardless of ability, gender or age, finds the setup easy to use

Matt Gleed
UK Lead Master Trainer
Matrix Fitness

In our experience, most exercisers still use the pin-weighted resistance machines when they want to target an isolated area. The Matrix Versa Series offers light or heavy weight stacks and optional foot support kits so operators can assemble a strength collection that's right for their member demographics.

A gas-assisted design makes seat adjustments quick and effortless so that everyone, regardless of ability, gender or age, finds the setup easy to use.

In a bid to overcome some women's common concerns about strength training, Matrix has increased its strength range. As demand increased

for glute workouts, we designed the Glute Trainer, incorporating a plate loaded weight design for tone and shape as well as a power training option with resistance. We use Ergo Form cushioning to ensure proper body alignment and support, and in the Ultra Range we have Action Specific Grips that are ergonomically designed to reduce stress on contact points, redefining feel, form and function.

The Matrix Intelligent Training Console has in-built demonstrations and pre-set workout plans. Members can also log into a personalised account where a PT can assign specific workouts.

Users can even train with a partner and take alternating turns on the strength kit, with both following the training plans they've been assigned.





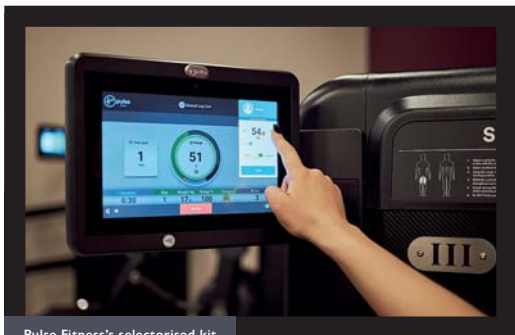
*The console
includes both static
instructions and
video content for
every machine*

Ben Steadman
Business Development
Director
Pulse Fitness

Selectorisrd machines provide an exact framework and movement plane for users to work within and they'll always have a place. Pulse's selectorised strength range has been biomechanically designed for anyone to use, whether they're below 5ft or 6'6" and beyond. To ensure our kit works just as effectively for both sexes it has a standard weight stack and an additional stack feature, plus an incremental 2.5kg selector pin to increase or lower the weight in more fine measures.

Pulse Fitness selectorised machines are clearly labelled with instructional decals and our premium units come complete with 10.1" touchscreen consoles. The console includes both static instructions and video content for every machine, showing how to use the equipment and exercise techniques.

We've deliberately created our equipment with a sleek design to soften the appearance and ensure it looks easy on the eye. Our premium upholstery also ensures the best possible comfort levels during use, to make it accessible and a pleasure to use for people of all ages and levels of fitness.



Pulse Fitness's selectorised kit includes touchscreens with both static and video instructions



Strength training using free weights can be intimidating for many women



We're launching a campaign later this year to help women who have concerns or nerves about getting into strength training

Anoushka Moore
Master Trainer
Life Fitness Academy

The design of Life Fitness's selectorised equipment has evolved over the years, with the aim of making it accessible and welcoming to more users.

First and foremost, it needs to enable the user to work the muscle intended in the best and most efficient way, with ergonomic support and easy options for adjustment that ensure it fits as many users as possible.

All our equipment is designed in this way, so those who are new to strength training can exercise safe in the knowledge that by following

the guidelines, the machine will deliver the workout as intended.

Every machine displays a visual representation of the exercise and what muscle groups it uses, to help exercisers understand its purpose and how to use it effectively. Weights increase in increments of 2.5kg so there's no need for big jumps. All this makes people feel more confident as they build their understanding of strength training.

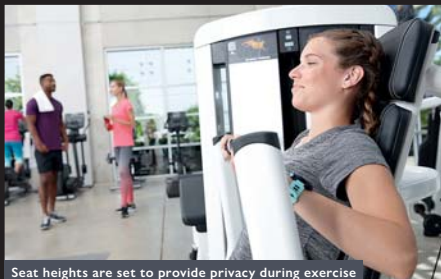
We've also reduced the footprint of a lot of our equipment, so it isn't quite so daunting in appearance, and introduced tinted shrouds and set the seat height to help provide privacy during exercise, which can be especially important to new members getting used to the machines.



Life Fitness and Hammer Strength selectorised equipment travels through a scientifically-researched set pattern of movement so you have no option but to follow it, reducing the risk of getting it wrong, but also encouraging natural, comfortable movement.

Our Life Fitness Academy (LFA) trainers work with our customers to help them deliver instructions to members on how to use each piece, which is key in building confidence and competence while training. Along with guidance on our social channels, website and the Halo app, we're also launching a campaign later this year to help women who have concerns or nerves about getting into strength training.

Selectorised kit will always have a place on gym floors as, coupled with good instruction, it offers a safe and simple introduction to resistance training. ●



Seat heights are set to provide privacy during exercise

EQUIPMENT BUILT FOR ATHLETES, BY ATHLETES



BLK BOX

Get in touch with our team to start building your dream facility
www.blkboxfitness.com | team@blkboxfitness.com | +44 (0) 28 90 45 41 23



BOUNCEBACK

ukactive, 4global and partners have modelled the likely recovery from the lockdown. Ed Hubbard outlines the numbers

A new report has revealed the likely timescales and shape of the UK fitness market's recovery from the COVID-19 lockdown, finding that nearly 90 per cent of users intend to return to the UK's gyms and leisure centres.

Using live data provided by organisations from across the sector, the new report, *The COVID-19 impact report: the fitness and leisure sector's path to recovery*, has provided an unparalleled view of what the next 12 months may look like for the physical activity industry in the UK.

The work, co-authored by ukactive and 4global Consulting, draws on millions of customer visits captured by the DataHub, alongside data points from across the wider sector, including polling from Leisure-net, Sport England and Savanta ComRes, TA6 Alliance, MyCustomerLens and YouGov.

Using this data, it measures the known impact of COVID-19 on the sector, as well as modelling projections for the sector as a whole.

PREDICTING THE FUTURE

Future modelling, which predicts throughput after lockdown is relaxed and facilities are allowed to open, takes into consideration potential restrictions, including 50 per cent capacity, no access for participants aged 70 and over, no swimming lessons and no team sports.

Assuming that these restrictions are in place for three months after lockdown ends [assumed as early July for the sake of the model], by the first week of January 2021 it's estimated that the industry will have stopped 'recovering', with throughput reaching a new normal at 2 per cent lower than 2019 levels.

This is estimated to be over 7 per cent lower than the industry would have achieved if COVID-19 had not happened, compared to 2021 projections.


When considering key individual facility types and the same assumed lifting of restrictions three months after lockdown has ended, group exercise is projected to be the most resilient facility type.

Studio throughput returns to 2019 levels by the first week in November 2020, before reaching its 'new normal' of 3 per cent higher than 2019 levels, in the first week of January 2021.

Gym and swim facilities are projected to recover more slowly, with throughput to gym facilities projected to reach 2019 levels in the last week of January 2021 before reaching 1 per cent growth by the third week in March. Swimming pools, however, are not projected to achieve 2019 levels, reaching a new normal of -0.2 per cent by the third week of March.

KEY HEADLINE FIGURES

● The report estimates there will be a 'loss' of around 707 million visits to facilities, in the 12 months following the start of lockdown.



88.9% of gym members are expected to return and group ex will be fastest to recover

● The estimated social value generated by the sector in 2019 was £3.9bn – this could be reduced by £1.7bn in 2020, if restrictions are maintained for three months and £2.1bn if maintained for six months.

● While some facility types show a return to 2019 throughput levels, all of the three key facility types surveyed fail to reach the levels projected for 2020 and 2021, had COVID-19 not happened. These reductions range from 7 per cent for group workout and gym, down to 3 per cent reductions for swimming facilities.

IMPACT DISPARITIES

There's a huge range of potential permutations for the way things could pan out as the UK navigates out of its

current lockdown state. For instance, outputs from the report demonstrate that should restrictions be maintained for six months, rather than the three months modelled above, the recovery of the sector will be slower, with the sector recovery curve taking until the third week in February to stop growing.

Data from the first 11 weeks of 2020 demonstrates the significant impact that COVID-19 had on the sector. It also shows that affluent parts of society with low deprivation levels were impacted less than participants in poorer segments.

Early data from 2020 demonstrates that the sector began the year strongly, with weeks 1-8 outperforming projections by an average of more than 4 per cent. This data, which is supported by the most recent Active

Lives data from Sport England, suggests that without COVID-19, the industry was facing a record-breaking year.

As it panned out, the impact of COVID-19 was first felt in week 9, followed by rapid declines in activity through week 10 and week 11, reaching a maximum of 42 per cent less throughput to leisure facilities in the week before lockdown was imposed.

GREATEST REDUCTION

Using Mosaic Consumer Profiling, researchers found the groups that had the greatest reduction in activity levels prior to lockdown included 'transient renters in low-cost accommodation', 'elderly adults in specialised accommodation' and 'longstanding owners and renters of low-value homes.'



Data shows that until COVID-19, the industry was on track for a record year

© GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

On the other hand, the groups that appeared to be the most 'resilient', included 'high-status households', 'professionals renting premium flats' and 'thriving families with good incomes'.

PROMISING FINDINGS

Using data collected from the recent *Post Lockdown Recovery* survey, delivered by Leisure-net Solutions in partnership with Max Associates and 4global, analysis of responses by level of deprivation provides useful insight.

While participants in 'deprivation groups' 1-3 were among the fastest to stop using facilities prior to lockdown, 31 per cent of participants in these 'high deprivation' groups said they were likely to use facilities more when they reopen, compared to 20 per cent of groups 4-10.

This insight shows that the traditional member base as we know it may be about to change.

It's clear that when we look at who was fastest to stop exercising in leisure facilities pre-lockdown, those in low socio-economic groups were impacted most significantly by the pandemic. The silver lining here is that these participants are now most willing to return to facilities and build on inspiration generated during lockdown. This could be the starting point of a re-balancing period for our sector.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

As the sector continues to plan for re-opening in early July, the focus has intensified on what the industry may look like in the future. Projections continue to

evolve as more data becomes available, with ukactive and 4global committing to refreshing the key insights to ensure organisations have access to the best source of insight to drive future planning.

It's clear the sector's path to recovery will take time, with demand recovering quickly before flattening out. The report identifies key points operators can act on to reduce the long-term impact in their locality, such as re-purposing existing facilities and working to restore consumer confidence.

With the hard work in front of us, there remains light at the end of the tunnel; that this crisis could be the catalyst for greater activity rates among hard to reach groups and the people that the sector has, for so long, struggled to engage. ●

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Bannatyne digital workouts delivered by Les Mills on Demand



Bannatyne members now have access to Les Mills on Demand workouts

Bannatyne has driven member engagement with Les Mills during the lockdown

As gyms closed across the country, Bannatyne Health Clubs joined an increasing number of operators pivoting to digital with the launch of live and on-demand group exercise classes from Les Mills, the group fitness expert behind classes such as Bodypump and Bodycombat.

Through the Bannatyne Health Club app, more than 200,000 members across 72 clubs can now access Les Mills on Demand free for 60 days. This includes more than 1,000 Les Mills workouts, alongside fitness and goal tracking capabilities.

Les Mills on Demand enables users to stream or download world-leading workouts at home or on-the-go, presented by the world's best instructors and supported by expert training guides.

"We've been blown away by the support from the Les Mills team during this unprecedented time," says Peter Wilkinson, national sales and marketing manager at The Bannatyne Group. "Our



"People will be back at the gym for live workouts as soon as the lockdown is lifted...we'll support Bannatyne members through their fitness journey now and once they reopen"

Martin Franklin,
Les Mills Europe

goal is to keep members moving, and Les Mills on Demand plays a key part in that. Within a matter of weeks, we were able to completely update our app with Les Mills on Demand and communicate the 60-day offer to members.

"The production quality of the content is second-to-none and as close as you can get to an in-person experience. So far, member feedback has been phenomenal, both from regular group exercisers and also from those that have never done it before. It's given them the confidence to come and try a live class when we reopen.

"Les Mills digital will continue to play a part going forward, to complement the fantastic range of fitness equipment and classes within our health clubs."

Alongside Les Mills on Demand, Bannatyne has also launched a live

timetable of group exercise classes, including Les Mills programmes, via its YouTube channel, led by qualified Les Mills instructors.

Themed days, such as the recent 'Les Mills Lockdown', also generated significant member engagement, with thousands watching the replays afterwards.

"Supporting our club partners and instructors during this time remains our number one priority," says Martin Franklin, CEO, Les Mills Europe.

"We're working with each club to provide vital support during the lockdown and we're thrilled to see the response from Bannatyne members.

"We believe people will be back at the gym for live workouts as soon as the lockdown is lifted. But the shift to digital fitness is helping to break down barriers to fitness for people you might not typically see in the gym, and that's really exciting. With this expanded member reach, we'll continue to support Bannatyne members through their fitness journey, now and once they reopen."

All Les Mills club partners have the option of providing their members with a free 60-day trial of Les Mills on Demand. To further help club partners, Les Mills has created a weekly club support webinar series and a new Re-set Hub to support club's reopening plans. In addition to the LMOD offer and webinar series, the company has also provided instructors with access to more than 25 royalty-free workouts that can be live-streamed to members from home.

To find out more, visit:
<https://www.lesmills.com>
and follow the COVID-19 option.



"We've been blown away by the support from the Les Mills team during this unprecedented time"

Peter Wilkinson,
The Bannatyne Group



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Members at Aberdeen Sports Village can digitally track their workouts across all equipment

The Connected Gym

Working with Precor, Aberdeen Sports Village has undergone a £500k overhaul to strengthen the user experience and put digital connectivity at the core of its offering

The newly refurbished Aberdeen Sports Village (ASV) has undergone a £500k refit to enable it to offer a stronger user experience with full digital connectivity.

The site reopened in August 2019 with capacity for 9,500 members and membership has increased by 17 per cent.

Kris McIntosh, health and fitness development manager at ASV, says: "We knew we needed to update to enhance the atmosphere, modernise kit and move with industry trends in terms of connectivity and tracking." The key priority was to transform ASV with a modern, digitally linked workout area.

It's for this reason that ASV selected Precor's Preva – which captures workout data from CV machines and enables members to set and track goals, plus earn virtual motivational badges. "Preva gives us the ability to gather data like never before," says McIntosh. "We use it to check equipment status daily, monitor footfall at peak times and schedule functional sessions around those to utilise our offering more efficiently."

"From a maintenance perspective we have access to every piece of kit's status, which allows us to highlight specific trends and instantly report faults, decreasing downtime."

In March 2019, Precor partnered with Sony to deliver digital tracking



I've been incredibly impressed. I use the system to monitor utilisation – I know what kit's being used, how often and when

Kris McIntosh



Precor and Sony's Advagym 'puck'

on its strength kit as well. Preva stats are automatically downloaded to the Advagym app, giving users an entirely connected gym experience.

McIntosh says: "Members touch their phone to the Sony Advagym sensor 'puck' to start tracking sets and reps in real-time, with stats automatically uploaded to the app. I've been incredibly impressed. I use the system to monitor utilisation – I know what kit's being used, how often and when. We had over 1.8 million repetitions across fixed weight machines throughout September. These are astonishing statistics."

Members requested a better functional training area, so ASV installed the Assault Range and an Open Format Queenax Training Rig. ASV also opted for Precor's unique mix 'n' match on CV offering. "This was a big part of our decision to work with Precor – it allowed us to adapt to exactly what our customers need and also to maintain that premium feel," he says.

For McIntosh, added value also came from Precor's ability to pull numerous suppliers together: "Our sales rep Colin has been there right from the start. Always approachable, always helping to liaise with suppliers. He was crucial in getting Advagym up and running and his problem-solving was critical."


Find out more: www.precor.com/en-gb

BALANCING ACT



Balance training is set to become a major fitness trend, with exercisers increasingly appreciating the benefits of having a strong core and good balance, particularly as they age.

Lauren Health-Jones rounds up the latest product releases



The Core-Tex allows users to tilt, slide and rotate 360 degrees

CORE-TEX

Who? Jeff Davis, MD
of Reach Wellness
Company: Core-Tex

About

The Core-Tex is a completely unique approach to three dimensional, functional movement. It is a reactive training tool that combines dynamic strength, razor-sharp reaction, cardiovascular endurance, flexibility and balance in one design, creating the optimal training environment.

The Core-Tex is the only device on the market that allows for movement in all three planes of motion with a base that translates at the same time. It is the only product on the market that tilts, slides and rotates 360 degrees.

It is constructed from durable ABS plastic and features a platform with a non-slip rubber surface, and a base containing ball transfers oriented on the same tangent as the convex underside of the platform. Its patented design creates the unique movements only available on the Core-Tex.

User benefits

Core-Tex Reactive Training challenges the body to successfully respond to imposed stimuli with minimal or no conscious thought to maintain postural equilibrium, to improve timing and coordination, force production of muscular contractions and provide optimal joint stability.

Core-Tex applies the principals of reactive training to a continuously unpredictable environment. Activity of all types and levels all



have one thing in common – variability. Variability has been shown to be extremely beneficial to biological systems. From heart rate to nutrition, variability gives the body opportunities to thrive.

Operator benefits

Reactive variability training with the Core-Tex is a critical part of any fitness programme, because it constantly provides variability to the muscles, nervous system and joints. Every repetition is different, thereby reducing stress on the joints, continually requiring the nervous system to adapt to coordinate new movements increasing muscle activation and efficiency. The results? Your body achieves more in a shorter time, gets smarter with less stress and keeps you fully engaged.

Core-Tex can be used individually, by athletes, therapists, with a personal trainer or even with an instructor in small group training; making it a versatile and cost-effective solution for any operator. Core-Tex is unique and different, yet supplements and complements all other gym equipment in a commercial environment.

Is it also suitable for at-home training?

Yes, Core-Tex is definitely suitable for home training. It takes a small amount of space and offers an infinite number of exercises. When not in use, the Core-Tex can be easily dismantled and stored away.

How much does it cost?

Core-Tex costs £495.00 plus VAT.

TRAINING



Power Plate can be used by clients of any age or fitness level

Power Plate provides improvements in balance, mobility and stability





Power Plate is used in gyms, sports clubs, yoga studios and dance studios

POWER PLATE

Who: Iain Murray, sales director at Power Plate UK

What: Power Plate

About

Power Plate delivers accelerated health, fitness and wellness results, whatever the fitness level or training style. Its whole body training helps users prepare faster, perform better and recover quicker. It makes users feel better by stimulating natural reflexes and increasing muscle activation.

By de-stabilising the body and engaging soft tissue, Power Plate promotes quick reflexive responses in muscle fibres and an increase in circulation, providing greater whole-body balance, mobility and stability in a shorter time frame than with traditional training methods.

User benefits

Power Plate helps to build strength by improving muscle tone, posture and stamina, as well as promoting better balance, stability and flexibility through better co-ordination and an enhanced range of motion.

It can also relieve muscle tension, lower the risk of injury, boost metabolism and reduce stress. Users can also see real results in less time.

Operator benefits

Designed for all age groups, abilities and training preferences, Power Plate creates an excellent



“

A free mobile app gives users access to hundreds of on-demand videos

differentiator to encourage both new sales opportunities and member retention.

Power Plate can work with operators to meet the specific needs of members, from incorporating recovery or rehabilitation into a facility to small group training solutions, education and wellness applications.

Where is it installed?

Power Plate is used by elite fitness professionals, sports clubs, yoga studios and dance studios across the world, and can be found in health clubs including Holmes Place, David Lloyd Leisure, Bannatyne Health and Fitness, Virgin Active, Anytime Fitness, Gold's Gym, Fitness First and Pure Gym.

Is it also suitable for at-home training?

Better balance, stronger muscles and healthier bones – the Power Plate MOVE delivers accelerated health, fitness and wellness results at home, offering the same sleek design and high performance in a smaller, lighter format. A free mobile app gives users access to hundreds of on-demand videos to suit individual needs and fitness goals.

How much does it cost?

Prices start from £1,295.

BOSU

Who: Paula Martin, account manager at Physical Company, UK distributor

What: The Bosu NexGen Pro Balance Trainer

About

The Bosu NexGen Pro Balance Trainer is a unique balance, core, stability and proprioception training device consisting of a flat side and a textured rubber dome with four quadrants. The quadrants allow for precise body positioning while working on cardio, agility, strength, core, balance and mobility exercises, while the textured dome enhances grip for both hands and feet to improve form.

The Bosu – short for ‘both sides up’ – is extremely versatile and can be used either with the flat side or dome side facing upwards. It can help improve balance, flexibility, strength, core and stamina.

User benefits

Appropriate for users of all ages and abilities, the Bosu NexGen constantly challenges the body to stabilise, which improves strength, core strength, stamina, flexibility and even sports performance, while the soft domed surface protects the joints.

The instability of the surface makes simple exercises – such as squats, lunges, core work, stepping, push-ups or jumping – more challenging than if they were performed on a solid surface. Putting the body on an unstable surface whilst exercising is really effective in firing up those smaller muscles that stabilise and support the body, so that they get a fantastic workout too.

Operator benefits

The Bosu NexGen is ideal for group fitness, complex movements or advanced fitness professionals in a professional setting. It is designed with a patented non-slip, dually over-moulded base meant to withstand continual daily gym usage.



“

Thanks to its small size, the trainer is perfect for at-home training

In addition, it is an easy-to-use and space-saving functional training tool that would be a versatile addition to any gym. It can easily be incorporated into a variety of group exercise classes, both indoor or outdoor, and as part of personal training sessions. It is small, mobile and lightweight and allows both personal trainers and users to get creative with their workouts.

Is it also suitable for at-home training?

Thanks to its small size, the trainer is perfect for at-home training. Bosu also offers an at-home model, which gives users all the advantages of working out with a Bosu in the comfort of their own home. Users could even incorporate small equipment that they have at home, such as dumbbells or a med ball, or even a kettlebell, into their training.

The home model comes with four workout plans, an owner's manual, an eating plan and a dual-action hand pump.

What does it cost?

Commercial Bosus retail from £164.55 excluding VAT.

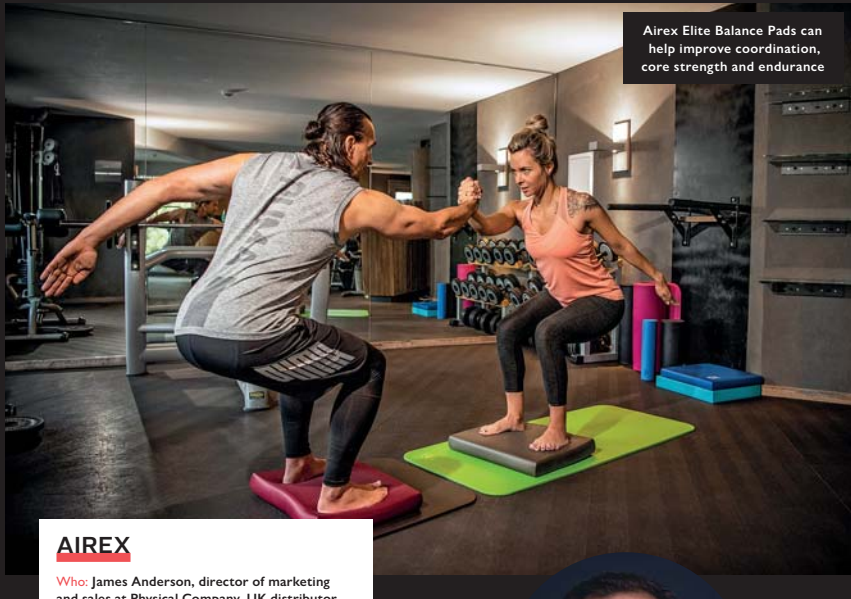
Extra info

Bosu is distributed in the UK by Physical Company, which offers the entire Bosu range, including the Bosu Balance Trainer Elite, which is geared towards athletes and features a firmer dome for more efficient force transfer.



The Bosu NexGen is designed with a patented non-slip, dually over-moulded base

Airex Elite Balance Pads can help improve coordination, core strength and endurance



AIREX

Who: James Anderson, director of marketing and sales at Physical Company, UK distributor
What: Airex Elite Balance Pads

About

The Airex Elite Balance Pads are therapy and training devices, made from soft AIREX foam, that are designed to be used in balance, posture stability and motor skills training.

The pads measure 6cm thick and feature a waffle-like texture on the upper and lower sides, which provides slip-resistance and stimulates the foot receptors during barefoot balance training.

User benefits

Exercises performed on the Balance Pad engage more muscles, and work them more intensely, in comparison to the same exercises done without the Balance Pad.

Due to the yielding quality of the foam, the body is constantly being challenged to re-stabilise, meaning that muscles are constantly working in order to maintain balance. This helps to improve coordination, core strength, endurance and balance while minimising stress on the joints. It also activates the control functions in the brain and stimulates the receptors in the joints and fascia system.

Operator benefits

For operators, Airex Balance Pads are a great tool for fitness training and a versatile addition to pilates, yoga and rehabilitation offerings.

The closed-cell foam material does not absorb moisture or dirt and is highly durable,

“

Everyone should have one by their bathroom sink to encourage people to use it while they're brushing their teeth



so is easy to keep clean, while its antibacterial surface provides antimicrobial protection.

What's the target market?

The Airex Elite is aimed at gyms and health clubs with yoga, pilates or rehabilitation offerings, as well as professional sports players and physio therapists, who use it to rehabilitate and in preventative exercises.

Are they also suitable for at-home training?

Absolutely, they're ideal. I'd go so far as to say that everyone should have one by their bathroom sink to encourage people to use it while they're brushing their teeth. It would guarantee at least four minutes of stability or balance training a day.

How much does it cost?

Balance pads retail for £52.99 per pad, excluding VAT.

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PRODUCT INNOVATION

Lauren Heath-Jones rounds up the latest product launches in health and fitness



Fisikal has teamed up with EMD UK on a free digital platform for instructors, says **Rob Lander**

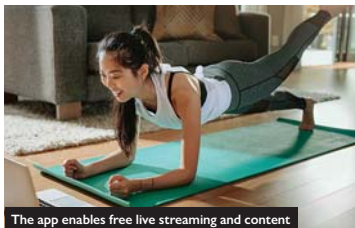
EMD UK, the national governing body for group exercise, and Fisikal have joined forces to offer a no-fee digital platform that allows group exercise instructors and personal trainers to stream chargeable digital content.

This will support fitness professionals' businesses

through the remainder of the period of extended physical distancing imposed by the government to slow the spread of COVID-19 and beyond.

The digital platform is available free of charge and opens up a wide range of functionality, including class scheduling, booking and payment, which class participants and clients can access via an app.

Instructors and personal trainers have the ability to pre-record and upload their own bespoke content or take advantage of more than 250 class and workout videos in the Fisikal library, provided by Escape Fitness and a



The app enables free live streaming and content

number of master trainers, including Matt Gleed.

Instructors can also stream live workouts via an integration with YouTube Live.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

FISIKAL

The platform will provide many instructors and personal trainers with a financial lifeline

Brett Pearson, EMD UK



Fisikal's Rob Lander

Apex bike brings Boom Cycle into the living room, explain **Charlie Lucas and Simon Cook**



There's no screen on the Apex bike, taking it to a lower price point

Apex, the latest home bike concept, has partnered with Boom Cycle – known for its inclusive high-energy 'party-on-a-bike' workouts – to create exclusive class content using their expert instructors.

"We chose Boom Cycle as they align with us from both a brand and culture perspective, says co-founder Charlie Lucas.

"They have talented instructors and their classes are fun, energetic, encouraging and inclusive.

Using Bluetooth technology, riders can connect to the bike via iPad or iPhone, or cast to their TV screens.

Unlimited Apex classes are available on a subscription basis.

Simon Cook, co-founder, says: "Our bike is more affordable because we chose to sell it without a screen – households already have too many and the majority of technical issues competitors have faced are screen-related."

Real-time, interactive leaderboards measure RPM and resistance, and reward each rider with Apex points based on power output vs height/weight/age. Apex also provides a reward scheme.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

APEX

Ei8ht Energy drink boosts body's ability to transport oxygen, says **Ray Averre**

A UK company has created the first drink proven to substantially increase the body's ability to transport oxygen.

Called Ei8ht Energy, it increases oxygen transport by close to 5 per cent for 80 minutes after ingestion.

In an independent efficacy study, carried out by Surrey University's Human

Performance Institute, the drink helped cyclists benefit from an average 37-second time improvement over a 16km time trial and delivered a 6.6 per cent average increase in peak power output.

Avrox Technologies has been developing the product for the past five years, working alongside researchers from the University of Oxford.

The unique feature of the drink is a patented oxygen delivery system which utilises natural, vegan ingredients to create molecules which capture and retain oxygen and deliver it to the tissue.

Users mix a sachet with water and shake for 30 seconds. This stimulates the creation of microbubbles which are 500 times smaller than the thickness of a human hair.

These are ingested, passing through the



Ei8ht Energy increases oxygen levels in the body

stomach wall and into the bloodstream in as little as four and a half minutes, ready to pair with oxygen.

Founder Ray Averre says: "Our aim was to develop a product that demonstrably enhances the body's ability to transport oxygen, to deliver health and performance

benefits. A lot of claims are driven by marketing. We wanted to create a scientifically proven product.

Ei8ht Energy also delivers vitamin B3 and B12 by the same mechanism.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

AVROX TECHNOLOGIES



We wanted to create a scientifically proven product and we have achieved that emphatically

Ray Averre

Amplify Pro enables PTs, physios and coaches to work remotely, says **Damian Milkins**

A free-to-use online platform has been launched to enable personal trainers, physios and coaches to create and deliver fitness and recovery programmes remotely.

Amplify Pro provides the tools needed to communicate with clients, set tasks and learn from statistics.

The platform gives access to a library of

video demonstrations explaining how to safely undertake a range of exercises. Users also have the option to upload their own videos from YouTube.

Amplify says all videos are made by professionals to ensure they're safe and accurate.

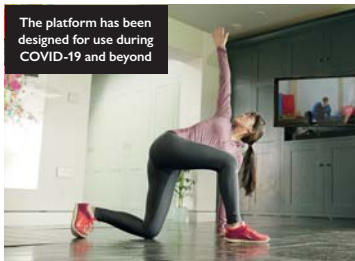
Exercise programmes are sent directly to service users by email and can then be viewed online.

The portal also allows professionals to monitor the progress of their clients and to collect feedback in areas such as compliance, pain and progress.

It's a ray of hope in the current climate, because it provides them with an opportunity to stay close to their clients

Damian Milkins

The platform has been designed for use during COVID-19 and beyond



Founder Damian Milkins said: "The ability to set bespoke individual programmes remotely is a major benefit and, once registered, the platform is free for the professional and for those following the regime.

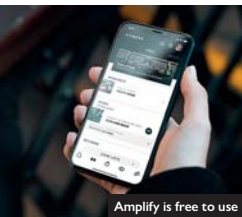
"It's a ray of hope in the current climate because

it provides them with an opportunity to stay close to clients and monitor their progress in difficult times.

"It's also a tool designed to enhance face-to-face practice once COVID-19 is a thing of the past. ●

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

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