

## Steven Schwartz

How Midtown Athletic is fighting back, p40

“

Break-even is 3,000 members. We hit that in pre-sale

## GymNation

Opening 50,000sq ft gyms in Dubai, p76

## Exercise

Worth £85.5bn to the economy, p62

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Industry's focus must be on health, p52

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On launching Club V p22



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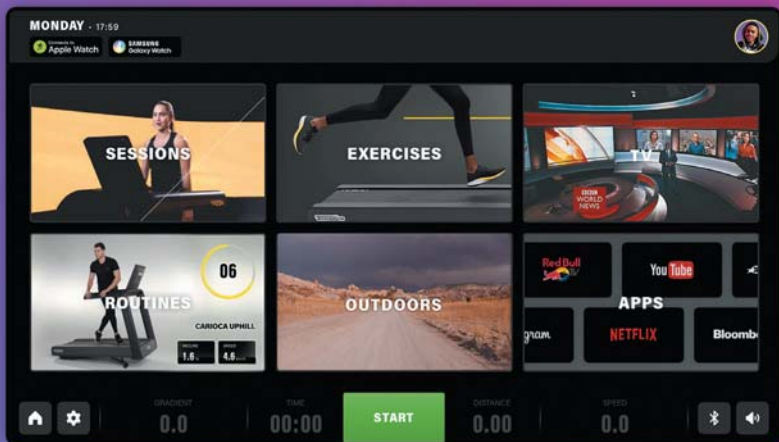
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## Next round

The hard work is paying off and we're earning a reputation for safe operations. Now it's time to tackle the next set of challenges – increasing capacity, yield and memberships, deepening engagement and rebuilding profits

**W**e know we're controlling COVID-19 in gyms and delivering safe environments for members, thanks to regular studies by our global trade associations, with transmission results from IHRSA, Fitness Australia and ukactive giving a solid base of evidence with which to fight our corner.

In addition, evidence is emerging to indicate that COVID-19 transmission is actually happening in harder-to-regulate establishments, such as restaurants.

New research from the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in the US found that adults who tested positive for COVID-19 were twice as likely to have eaten in restaurants in the previous two weeks.

*Community and Close Contact Exposures Associated with COVID-19*, found restaurant attendance was the only factor which correlated with testing positive for the virus.

So now we're well on the way to winning a reputation for safe operations and the true sources of transmission are starting to be identified, what are the next challenges?

In addition to building and refining hybrid options, two of the biggest are meeting capacity demands and winning back members, with operators reporting they've lost anywhere between 10 and 40 per cent, depending on location.

Location itself is another challenge, with homeworking skewing the performance of sites in office catchments.

All these pressures will begin to reshape the industry, as some operators go into disposal and investment cycles to shed poorly performing sites and take advantage of more favourable locations.

Safety limits on class numbers are a concern – we know group ex is a huge driver of retention, so the fact many operators are having to limit class numbers is having a reverse effect, with some members leaving because they can't get slots.

We need creative yield management solutions to increase capacity, prevent this attrition and optimise the powerful engagement of group exercise. We'd love to see an industry thinktanks convened to tackle this and propose practical, creative solutions.



SHUTTERSTOCK/JACOB LUND

**Member engagement will underpin the recovery**

**6 A study in the US found that restaurant attendance was the only factor which correlated with testing positive for the virus**

Also challenging are changes to guidelines which are confusing consumers – the UK's 'rule of six', for example, which bans gatherings of more than six people, doesn't apply to gyms and yet many consumers are unaware of this and operators are reporting attendance dips as a result.

Keeping very closely connected with members is vital if we are to earn and re-earn their loyalty and also to get the cut-through to ensure they understand new rulings.

It's telling that a recent survey (p27) indicates boutiques – with their deep member engagement – are back to pre-COVID-19 trading levels in some world regions.

**Liz Terry, editor**  
lizterry@leisuremedia.com

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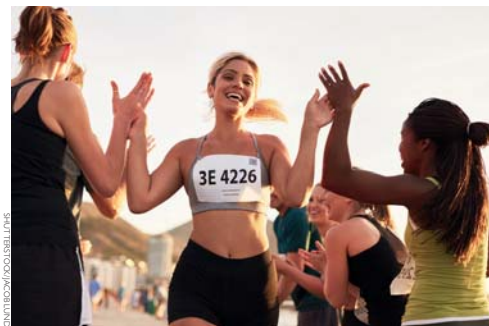
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A close-up photograph of a woman with short, wavy grey hair, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a light blue t-shirt. Her hands are raised in front of her chest, with her fingers interlaced to form a heart shape. The background is a soft, out-of-focus outdoor setting with light blue and green tones.

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# Write to reply



Speedflex is offering a subsidised programme to support people with a BMI over 30

## Obese or overweight participants will burn more calories than others in the room – often topping the leader board, which makes them feel great

### Paul Ferris, CEO Speedflex

The Government's new obesity strategy and Boris Johnson's admission that his excess weight was a key reason he needed intensive care treatment after contracting COVID-19, will spur consumers to do something about their weight. It's also a massive call-to-action for the fitness industry to step up and really engage with people whose chief concern is losing weight.

I believe we have a duty of care to help this demographic get fitter and healthier by adapting our programmes and removing barriers to participation.

Operators must provide specific routes to help overweight and obese



individuals get healthier: just 'opening the gym' won't cut through for many.

At Speedflex, we have introduced a new subsidised initiative to support people with a BMI over 30 and this is working well.

The programme starts with a specialised InBody assessment which allows our experts to measure, track and record participants' progress. There follows six weeks of bespoke HIIT classes and then a final InBody assessment to take stock and assess their success. Knowing price can be a huge barrier for some people to exercise, we're doing this for £50.

Our equipment allows people to work out at a high intensity while keeping

the impact low – a key consideration for those carrying extra weight. The programme generates personalised resistance, so everyone can train at their optimum level. No-one stands out as 'not keeping up' in any shape or form. In fact, obese or overweight participants will burn more calories than others in the room – often topping the leader board, which makes them feel great.

A focused programme that makes people feel good about their exercise will engage and motivate them to return, which is why I truly believe our new initiative – alongside good nutrition – is a fast track to better health.

Let's take the lead and seize the moment to support the obesity strategy by helping those wanting to turn their health around.

► **Research has indicated up to 10 per cent of people who contract a viral infection will experience post-viral fatigue. This figure may also apply to COVID-19 survivors**

We are representatives of Forward ME, an advocacy group led by Carol Monaghan, MP and the Countess of Mar.

Our goal is to support people with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) and Post-Viral Fatigue Syndrome (PVFS).

We write in reference to your feature on post-COVID-19 recovery programmes (HCM issue 8 2020).

A diagnosis of ME often follows a prolonged viral infection and a period of post-viral fatigue syndrome.

Research has indicated that up to 10 per cent of people who contract a viral infection will experience post-viral fatigue and this figure may apply to COVID-19 survivors as well.

When it comes to rehabilitation, instead of the usual 'reconditioning',

we recommend that people should be helped to adopt a paced approach to activity management to avoid symptom exacerbation or post exertional malaise – a primary symptom of ME. Similar issues seem to present in people struggling to recover from COVID-19.

Other strategies that might prove useful include ensuring individualised care and support, adequate rest, sleep, and nutrition.

We feel it's vital that patients don't receive Graded Exercise Therapy (GET) as a matter of course, because ME research and patient experience has shown it to be ineffective and harmful in many cases.

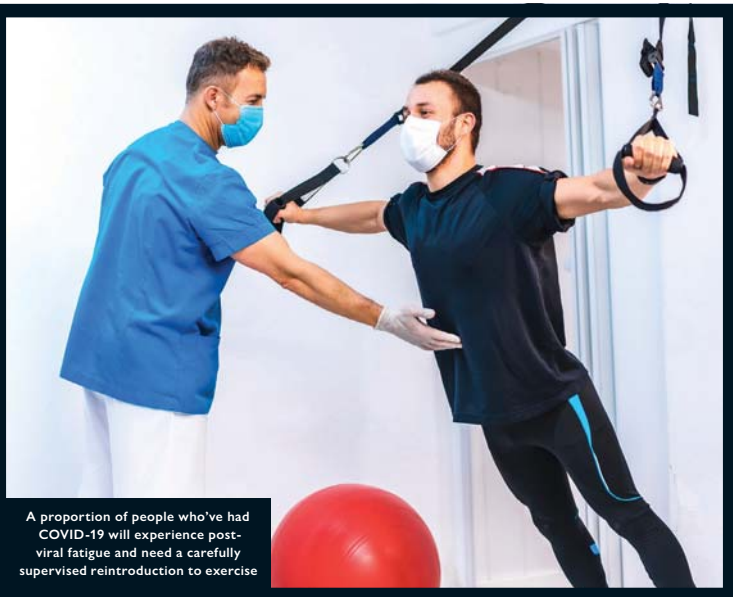
This was highlighted in a survey commissioned by Forward ME and completed by an academic research

group from Oxford Brookes University, which found that 80 per cent of people with ME reported having adverse events because of GET.

There is extensive evidence to show that people with ME have abnormal responses to exercise and while we don't yet know if this might apply to post-COVID-19 survivors, it's possible there will be similarities.

These abnormalities include reduced maximum heart rate, reduced maximum oxygen consumption, reduced cardiac output, insufficient blood pressure increase on exertion and decreased capacity to use oxygen. When exercise is repeated the next day, abnormalities are more severe. ●

[www.HCMmag.com/PhysiosforME](http://www.HCMmag.com/PhysiosforME)



A proportion of people who've had COVID-19 will experience post-viral fatigue and need a carefully supervised reintroduction to exercise



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# HCM people



PEOPLE THINK MAKING A  
CHANGE IS EASY AND FAST,  
BUT THAT ISN'T TRUE. IT'S  
HARD AND IT TAKES TIME

**Luca Maggiora**

Co-founder, House of Wisdom



House of Wisdom offers meditation classes

### How would you describe the House of Wisdom?

It's a social space that's been created to help people live better lives. We use a combination of personal and spiritual development to help our members to unblock whatever issues and problems they may be facing and to help them move towards a more fulfilling life.

Our offering is based on various pillars: movement, breathwork, meditation, sound healing, talks and workshops.

Movement consists of yoga nidra and kundalini yoga, tai chi and capoeira. Breathwork, meanwhile, was a revelation for me: you just can't under-estimate the power of teaching someone to breathe properly, how clear and free you feel.

With meditation, really our approach is more about mindfulness. We teach people to be present and enjoy the moment, rather than constantly checking their phone and thinking about what they're going to do next. Then, in our sound healing classes, we use the gong and the Tibetan bowl and it's incredibly relaxing. You feel reborn after 45 minutes.

Our talks and workshops focus on a wide range of empowerment topics: how to overcome fear, how to build a winning mindset, how to communicate with people, how to set boundaries, how to make a career change, how to set goals. We also run occasional workshops on broader themes, which can be anything that might give people a different perspective on life, including managing social media, Cambridge Analytica, health, etc.

Between the five co-founders, we deliver life coaching, sound healing and breathwork. We then bring in external experts for movement, neurology, psychology and life coaching in areas we don't specialise in: relationships and self-love, for example. We're open to working with anyone who can contribute to making people's lives better.

### Why the name?

House of Wisdom abbreviates to HOW – a powerful word.

How do we achieve acceptance, gratitude, kindness, compassion, empathy, self-love? How do we live a more fulfilled life? How do we become more mindful? How do we build more awareness? How do we learn these things?

That's the reason behind this strong, three-lettered name. And then the wisdom: you need to find the wisdom within yourself if you want to make a change.

People think making a change is easy and fast, but that isn't true. It's hard and it takes time, and the first step is having the wisdom to accept the stage in life you are at – that it isn't right or wrong, good or bad – it just is. ▶

### Maggiora says sound healing classes make you feel reborn





**Movement classes consist of yoga nidra, kundalini yoga, tai chi and capoeira**

- That's the first step: acceptance of "this is where I am". Commitment to action, to make a change, to live a better life, can then follow. And that's why House of Wisdom was born.

#### **What was your personal motivation?**

All of the HOW founders have been through our own struggles and learned techniques to help.

My journey really began four years ago. I had done well in my career, moving from investment banking to hospitality, where I'd created a number of successful nightclub brands – including Toy Room, which opened in seven cities around the world – and a new venture in restaurants.

Everyone was telling me I should be proud of what I'd achieved, but I wasn't happy and I didn't feel proud. I felt as though I was climbing the wrong ladder.

So, I decided to do something about it and began to search for my own personal definition of success and happiness.

I discovered techniques to improve my life and make me feel more fulfilled, became an NLP life coach and learned mindfulness to help me enjoy every moment.

I'm now a totally different person. I like to think I'm a better version of myself – Luca 2.0 – and that helps me cope better with the other side of my life – the nightclubs and so on.

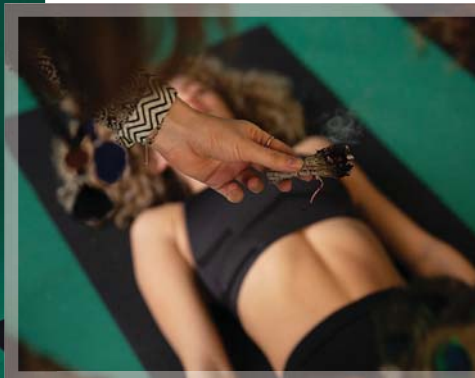
#### **How open are people to the HOW message?**

The biggest challenge for us at House of Wisdom is that while struggles with mental health are no longer a taboo subject in our societies, the various elements of our offering at HOW are still quite niche.

We want to change that, to bring it mainstream. This isn't big yet, but it should be because we all need it.

#### **Maggiore wants to bring wellness techniques to the mainstream**





House of Wisdom is targeted at everyone, from teenagers up to those in their 50s and above

We would all benefit from learning skills to help us live life better, but some people get scared when you mention meditation, breathwork, sound healing. You have to speak about it in very simple terms, focusing on the benefits for people. We explain that we can help them relax, develop more clarity, set boundaries in their life and so on. And we encourage them to make room for this in their life.

#### Who's your target audience?

The target market for HOW is anyone from 16 or 17 years of age all the way up to 50+. I honestly believe it's rare to be entirely happy with life, so I do think everyone can find something at HOW to help them. If you learn to breathe properly, to relax, to be mindful, to set goals, to communicate better, your life will improve.

Young people are a big focus for me, though. I'm not a therapist or a psychologist, but for 15 years I was out five nights a week, meeting around 5,000 people each week. I must have met over a million young people – those in Generations Y and Z – and you know what it's like, people get talking after they've had a few drinks, so they would often tell me about their problems.

And this age group do face big challenges. They've grown up with social media telling them they can be absolutely



anything they want to be. That they can become an overnight success with power, recognition, money, millions of followers. Their hopes and dreams are fuelled by this.

When they realise that life isn't that easy, they go into a deep crisis and this will now be compounded by the challenges they face as a result of the coronavirus. ►



**A Tibetan gong is used in the sound healing classes**



**WE CAN SET OURSELVES A GOAL AND ONLY BE HAPPY WHEN WE ACHIEVE IT, OR WE CAN ENJOY EVERY STEP OF THE JOURNEY. THAT'S OUR ONLY CHOICE**

- When I talk to them, I try and help them understand that they have one simple choice in life: they can set themselves a huge goal and only be happy when they achieve it, or they can enjoy every step of the journey. Because really, that's the only choice any of us have.

#### **What's your business model?**

While we want to do good, we also need HOW to be profitable. We're running this as a business.

You can access us in different ways: you might just come for yoga or breathwork, or you might explore the full range of what we have to offer. You might just do classes or you might want to explore some one-to-one therapy too.

You can pay per class or, in the long run, opt for weekly, monthly or annual membership. Classes cost £18–22 and workshops at around £40–45; one-to-one are a little more expensive. We aim to make it accessible but profitable.

We're aiming to build a community, so our word-of-mouth is our most powerful tool. We all know someone who could benefit from what we offer.

We're also offering corporate outreach – it's a world I know well from my time in banking – and would love to go into schools and universities as well.

#### **What is your ambition for House of Wisdom?**

We're certainly not doing this with a view to only opening one site. We want to make a change in the world through the brand we've created.

Our goal is to have a House of Wisdom in every big city in the world. In the shorter term, we're aiming to have three locations – a second site in London and then one in the US. And then absolutely, we want to expand it even further. ●

#### **Luca, what will people find if they visit HOW?**

HOW is a 2,500sq ft space that uses calming colours – blue, ochre, green – to create a relaxing environment for our visitors. We're aiming to create a safe space for our community.

We have a living area with a bar where you can just spend time, enjoy a healthy smoothie or an infusion and a library where you can sit and read, or borrow a book to take home.

We have changing rooms and two studios for classes which can each hold around 25 people lying down, or around 45 if we open them up to make one big space.

#### **GETTING THROUGH LOCKDOWN LUCA MAGGIORA WRITES**

**We were supposed** to open on 15 March – the venue was ready after months of hard work. We ended up opening on 17 August.

During lockdown we helped people with online classes focused on self-empowerment via things such as breathwork, mindfulness and meditation.

We have amazing teachers who were willing to share their knowledge and help others get through lockdown in the best shape possible.

We took the view that we're here for the long run, so we remained positive while looking forward to welcoming everyone to our new home.



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PEOPLE IN CLUB V TRUST ME AND I WANT TO DO  
THE BEST FOR THEM AND HELP THEM PROGRESS

**Talilla Henchoz**

Founder, Club V



As the daughter of  
Esporta founder,  
Patrick Henchoz,  
Talilla grew up in  
the fitness industry

“When lockdown hit,” says Talilla Henchoz, “I wanted to give back and to help keep people happy and healthy.”

Henchoz, a trained PT, started offering daily live workouts on Instagram for friends and family. “I turned up to sweat alongside hundreds of people every day for three months,” she says, “until I realised I wanted to offer more – that there was an opportunity to create a new fitness solution based on exercise progression. People were doing workouts online, but they weren’t getting the kind of development in terms of their achievements that they needed to keep motivated, so we tuned into that.”

With her background in the fitness industry (she’s the daughter of Patrick Henchoz, founder of Esporta Health and Fitness Clubs), Henchoz also saw a need for a fully rounded online community to support people through the pandemic and beyond.

#### **The Club V concept**

She set about creating it based on the five pillars of sustainable health – body, mind, nutrition, community and sustainability and called it Club V (five).

“My vision for Club V is to build bodies for life,” she says, “My approach is not just to offer another fitness plan designed to ‘burn fat’ and ‘detox’, but a way to hit the reset button and create sustainable, long-term change.”

“We want to develop positivity and a supportive community where members feel as though they belong. These are the main drivers behind the club.



Club V also offers advice on nutrition, mind, body, community and sustainability

“COVID has landed a lot of people in a lonely, negative place,” she explains, “Club V enables members to share and support each other, with a weekly live workout schedule, monthly challenges, recipe booklets, health brand discounts, and content from five health experts; a nutritionist, yoga and pilates instructors, a psychologist and personal trainers. We’re providing an all-inclusive offering.”

Launched on 1 July 2020 off the back of her popular Instagram feed, the club is delivered through a private Facebook group using Facebook Live and already has approaching 1,700 members across 40 countries, paying up to £19.99/month.

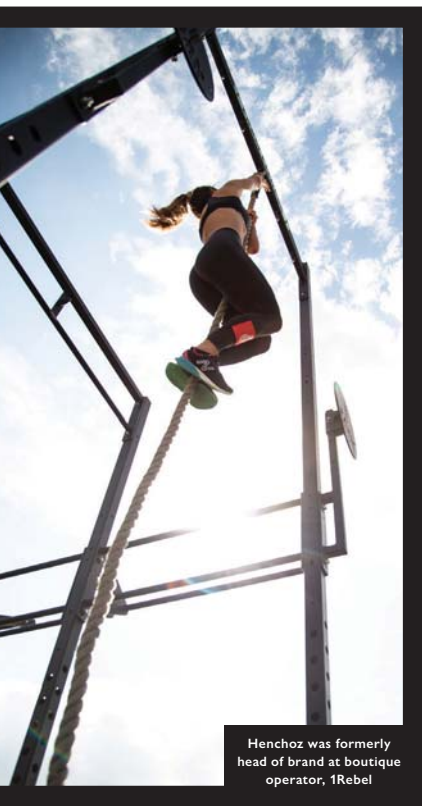
Members sign up and pay on the website and are then invited to join the Facebook group, where content is delivered and the content archive is stored. The number is growing daily and Henchoz decided to cap it at 1,700 to maintain standards. There’s little attrition, so Club V is setting up a waiting list.

Over 25 per cent of members tune in live for workouts, with the rest – many of whom are in different timezones – joining the playback sessions, which include HIIT, strength, low impact, core, yoga and pilates. Sessions are tailored to all abilities.

As part of this new subscription community, Club V showcases and works with industry brands



A PT by training, Henchoz built her original audience on Instagram, before launching Club V on Facebook



Henchoz was formerly head of brand at boutique operator, 1Rebel

such as JBL audio, WIT Fitness, Grenade Supplements, Yogi Bare and Remedy Kombucha to offer discounts and prizes to support members' training.

#### Building a community

Since launching, some members have formed their own WhatsApp groups and meet-ups and made true connections, while getting stronger together every day, says Henchoz. "I believe we can push harder in a team, and that's what the Club V community focuses on. Growth and accountability all delivered within an online club, where members can share their progress and journey.

"Club V is a family," she continues, "A safe space for members to connect from all over the world and form relationships. A judgement-free zone where they can share and grow together, which provides routine and stability – an opportunity for people to check in with their mind and body every day.

"We celebrate the highs and lows, and keep it real," says Henchoz. "Our ethos is focused on what our bodies can DO, not what they look like.

"The power of our community and the collective support between members has been overwhelming," she adds, citing multiple testimonials from members whose lives have been changed by Club V.

Henchoz, formerly head of brand at 1Rebel in London and a marketing consultant, is using these skills to develop the range of Club V.

"We've recently launched our 'Help to Move' Initiative," she says, "which gifts a free membership to someone who can't join for financial reasons. This is to stay true to why I started the club – to help people through this difficult time."

#### The next level

Now Henchoz and the Club V team are looking for additional support from fitness industry experts to help improve their current platform and support the projected exponential growth. "People in Club V trust me, and I want to do the best for them," she says. "I want to connect with people who can help us progress and improve the Club V offering.

"We want to launch an app, for example" she says, "and we want to make sure we're using the right platform – we want to refine and continue to develop the offering and to take it to the next level." ●

Find out more: [www.wearclubv.co.uk](http://www.wearclubv.co.uk)

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## FCA wins business interruption test case – gyms set to benefit

**H**undreds of thousands of small companies in the UK – including gyms – are set to receive payouts on business interruption insurance policies, following a high court judgment in a test case brought by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).

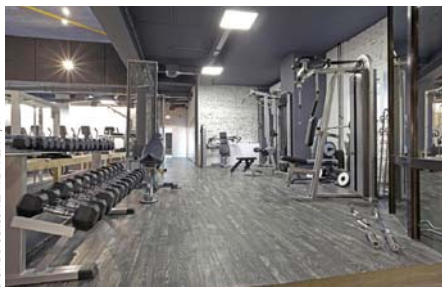
The case examined the policy wording of eight

major insurers to decide whether or not the COVID-19 pandemic should trigger a business interruption insurance (BI) payout.

The court's rulings are expected to apply to nearly 50 insurers, who have sold insurance to 370,000 customers, many of which are small businesses.

Most small and medium-sized (SME) BI policies focus on property damage and only have basic cover for interruptions. But some policies also cover for BI from other causes, in particular infectious or notifiable diseases ('disease clauses') and closures or restrictions ('denial of access clauses').

In some cases, insurers have accepted liability under these policies. In other



SHUTTERSTOCK/REDAWARD MALBANTJIAN

**Hundreds of gym operators could now qualify for payouts**

cases, insurers have disputed liability, so the FCA sought to provide clarity on the "grey areas" within the clauses.

In its judgement, the High Court ruled in favour of the FCA, saying that most of the disease clauses provide cover.

"Today's judgment is a significant step in resolving the uncertainty being faced by policyholders," said Christopher Woolard, interim CEO of the FCA.

More: [http://lei.sr/n8j6e\\_H](http://lei.sr/n8j6e_H)



**Today's judgment is a significant step in resolving the uncertainty faced by policyholders**

Christopher Woolard

## Fitness 'must be included' in future pandemic planning

**E**nsuring physical activity levels do not fall significantly should be treated as a "public health priority" in response to any future pandemics – as well as during crisis planning for a possible second wave of COVID-19.

A study, which shows a decrease in physical activity due to COVID-19, offers insight into why it is crucial for exercise to be included in future pandemic guidelines.

The research, led by Katie Di Sebastiano, a postdoctoral fellow in kinesiology at the University of British Columbia in Canada, shows that while all physical activity



SHUTTERSTOCK/JOLESANDR

**Exercise must be considered part of public health guidelines**

has declined during the pandemic, moderate-to-vigorous activity rebounded over the first six weeks.

However, lighter and more incidental exercise did not – which researchers said could

have "significant and long-term implications for health".

"The results show the need to consider exercise when creating public health guidelines for future pandemics," Di Sebastiano said.



**Public health measures need to allow space for everyone to exercise**

Katie Di Sebastiano

"In particular, our findings demonstrate the necessity for public health measures that provide extra space for everyone to exercise."

More: [http://lei.sr/3H6r4\\_H](http://lei.sr/3H6r4_H)

## People believe exercising is the best way to support the NHS

**E**xercise has been voted the number one way people in the UK believe they can help the National Health Service (NHS).

A study of 2,123 UK adults by Savanta ComRes found people believe being physically active to improve their health will support the NHS and reduce pressure on its services.

Next on the list – by a margin – is cutting smoking, followed by improving diets, paying taxes and cutting alcohol consumption.

In total, more than half (51 per cent) of respondents rank exercise in the top three ways to help.

The research, published ahead of this year's National Fitness Day, also shows how



**Physical activity can play a vital role in supporting our NHS and creating a healthier society**

Tim Hollingsworth

people have discovered the benefits of exercise during the pandemic.

More than two thirds (69 per cent) of respondents now want to do more exercise due to the impact of COVID-19, while more than half (58 per cent) of respondents



**Exercise has been voted the number one priority in the UK**

said during lockdown, they were able to manage their mental health and wellbeing through being active.

"These findings are the latest evidence of the vital role that physical activity can play in supporting our health service and helping us create

a happier, healthier society," said Tim Hollingsworth, CEO of Sport England.

"Our sports clubs, gyms, parks and leisure centres help form the fabric of our society and improve wellbeing."

More: [http://lei.sr/z3f9m\\_H](http://lei.sr/z3f9m_H)

## Report: boutiques back to 91 per cent of pre-COVID levels

**B**outique gym attendance and class bookings in some world regions have bounced back to around 91 per cent of pre-COVID levels.

The figure comes from research by gym management software provider, Glofox, which collated and analysed data from gym attendance and class bookings globally – including online classes – to draw insights into how the

fitness industry has changed amid the pandemic.

The report is based on analysis of activity across a sample of 2,000 fitness businesses in the US, UK, Ireland, Australia and Asia.

Around 70 per cent of the operations included in the research are boutique studios, 20 per cent are gyms and 10 per cent are yoga and pilates studios.

Data shows boutiques in some regions – such as the UK and Australia – are now busier than before COVID-19, while online classes account for 5 - 10 per cent of activity.



**Some boutique businesses are now busier than before COVID-19**

Glofox

More: [http://lei.sr/U9R2n\\_H](http://lei.sr/U9R2n_H)



**Boutiques are trading well, according to the report**

## EuropeActive: digital skills crucial in upskilling fitness workforce

EuropeActive has released its latest information and insight paper, focusing on how digital solutions are transforming the European fitness and physical activity sector.

Titled *Innovation and digitalisation in Europe*, the paper offers an outline of the current EU strategy on digitalisation and how it might impact the fitness and wellness sector.

It also looks at future trends and what links can be made between innovations in the

fitness sector and EU policy. Among the future trends identified in the report is the importance of digital skills in developing "tomorrow's fitness workforce".

"With more fitness facilities relying on digital platforms in the future, investments in the fitness workforce's digital upskilling will be crucial," the report reads.

Another key trend is the increased use of artificial intelligence (AI) in everyday operations – and how the use of AI will be governed in the future.

"AI has been introduced in the fitness industry with simple customer-related tasks," the report states. "These include answering services, class registration and chatbots for customer support".



The fitness workforce is increasingly relying on technology

"Operators will look for further AI applications in their businesses, to process a wealth of data in order to target specific segments of clients, or propose personalised offers."

A third trend identified is the use of member data and apps.

"Apps have become popular in the fitness industry," the report reads.

"Operators seek more solutions like an 'omnichannel' or a 'one-app' approach."

More: [http://lei.sr/e3s2C\\_H](http://lei.sr/e3s2C_H)



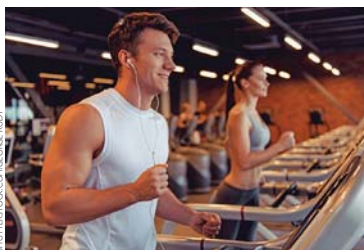
**Operators will look for further AI applications in their businesses**  
EuropeActive

## Research shows gyms in England are controlling COVID-19

New research from industry body, ukactive, has found gyms are almost risk-free environments for COVID-19, with an estimated 0.020 positive cases per 10,000 gym visits – results that are statistically insignificant.

ukactive collated data from more than 1,300 gyms and leisure centres to analyse the prevalence of the virus within the sector's facilities.

Charting the three weeks from reopening (from 25 July to 16 August), the data reveals that there were more than eight million visits to fitness facilities by members of the public.



Research is finding operators are creating safe environments

Only 17 people visiting gyms in England went on to test positive for COVID-19, giving the figure of 0.020 cases for every 10,000 visits, with only nine reported cases of

COVID-19 among members of staff across all 1,300 facilities.

According to Huw Edwards, ukactive CEO, the findings support a "growing evidence-base from across the globe"

which shows that "operating procedures are proving very effective at protecting people from COVID-19".

More: [http://lei.sr/f5d8z\\_H](http://lei.sr/f5d8z_H)



**Gym operating procedures are proving effective at protecting people from COVID-19**  
Huw Edwards

## £1.5m of free training will retool industry workforce

**A** new training initiative is aiming to 'retool the physical activity workforce' to help businesses recover after lockdown.

Funded by Sport England, the £1.5m ReTrain scheme has been set up to support employers by providing free training for staff, enabling them to work in new roles.

Delivered in phases, the training provided through ReTrain will be delivered by training companies accredited by CIMSPA.

During Phase 1, the focus will be on courses that lead to new CIMSPA-endorsed qualifications in areas such as group exercise, gym instructors, personal



“  
**ReTrain is a major investment helping employers to plug any skills gaps they have**

Colin Huffen

trainers, swimming teachers, lifeguards, sports coaches and pool plant operators.

As a key part of ReTrain, CIMSPA has partnered with the Royal Life Saving Society to provide £400,000 worth of lifeguard training. This will help train around 11,000 new



Sport England has allocated £1.5m for industry training

lifeguards, allowing swimming pools to open safely.

“There is a real risk of a significant number of people (in the sports and physical activity sector) not returning to work in the sector after lockdown,” said Colin Huffen, head of education at CIMSPA.

“ReTrain is a major investment in addressing this and helping employers to plug any skills gaps they have, enabling them to continue providing this vital service to the public.”

More: [http://lei.sr/r7B5W\\_H](http://lei.sr/r7B5W_H)

## US gyms are beating COVID-19, according to IHRSA numbers

**A** study of gym visit data from the US suggests that health clubs and fitness facilities are not contributing to the spread of COVID-19.

An analysis of 69.4 million member check-ins across

2,873 gyms in the US over three months studied the “visit-to-virus” ratio data from health and fitness clubs.

It showed that, out of the nearly 50 million visits, only 0.0023 per cent had tested positive for COVID-19 – a result deemed statistically irrelevant.

The study was undertaken by member experience specialist, MXM, and IHRSA.

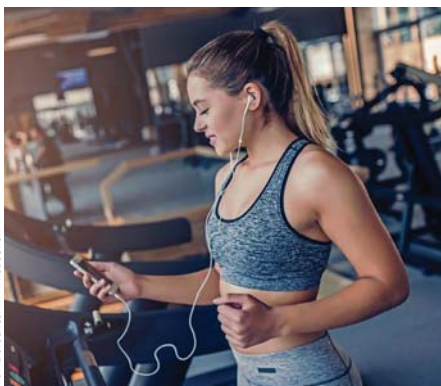
“The check-in data proves that gyms and health clubs – when following the strict cleaning and safety protocols – are safe,” said Brent Darden, IHRSA interim president and CEO.



“  
**The check-in data proves that gyms and health clubs are safe**

Brent Darden

More: [http://lei.sr/M3V6T\\_H](http://lei.sr/M3V6T_H)



The “visit-to-virus” ratio at US clubs is just 0.0023 per cent

## Core Collective signs deal to be gym partner for Soho House

**B**outique fitness operator Core Collective has become a gym partner of Soho House – the private members club with 10 locations in the UK and 17 abroad.

The deal will see Core Collective delivering exercise classes at Soho's White City House club in London.



**“We’re working to provide something dynamic for Soho House members**  
Jason de Savary

Core will run three classes each weekday and another two at weekends.

The classes delivered will include Circuit, TRX and Sculpt/Band.

Core Collective was founded by Jason De Savary in 2015 and the brand has three studios in London – at Knightsbridge, Kensington and St. John's Wood.

“We’re working to drive the engagement and provide something dynamic for Soho House members,” De Savary told HCM.

“Soho House is always looking to explore ways of enhancing the member experience.”

De Savary also hinted that the partnership could lead to further collaborations, saying, “After the way 2020



Core will deliver Sculpt/Band classes for Soho House

has gone so far, I don't feel comfortable trying to predict the future, but we're always looking for ways to expand and develop what we do – and make working out the best part of peoples' day. We are open minded.”

Founded by Nick Jones in 1995, with the opening of Soho House in London's Greek Street, the company has developed a cool, edgy reputation.

More: [http://lei.sr/f8j8c\\_H](http://lei.sr/f8j8c_H)

## Apple, Facebook and Amazon muscle in on digital fitness

**A**pple, Facebook and Amazon have entered the fitness market with a bang.

Apple has launched a virtual fitness subscription service called Fitness+, which will utilise the new Apple Watch Series 6 – the brand's most advanced smartwatch yet.

“Apple Fitness+ intelligently incorporates metrics from Apple Watch for users to visualize on their iPhone, iPad, or Apple TV, offering a personalised workout experience,” said Tim Cook, Apple CEO.

Meanwhile, Facebook has introduced a new service enabling users to create



Apple Fitness+ will utilise the new Apple Watch 6

their own workouts or classes, then host and collect payments in one place. The solution builds on Facebook Live, which allows users to stream live to followers.

The trio of major new players is completed by Amazon, which has launched an AI-powered wearable alongside a subscription service and smartphone app.



**“Apple Fitness+ will offer users a personalised workout experience**  
Tim Cook

According to Amazon, the Halo Band collects a plethora of data “not seen in wearables before”.

More: [http://lei.sr/W8c7E\\_H](http://lei.sr/W8c7E_H)

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More people  
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More often



## Doing HIIT workouts during the teens could lead to stronger bones

**H**IIT exercise activity in early life could help improve bone health and prevent osteoporosis, according to new research.

A study by University of Bristol analysed data from 2,569 participants in the *Children of the 90s health study*. It found that more time spent doing

moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity (MVPA) from the age of 12 was associated with stronger hips at age 25.

Time spent in time in light intensity activity, however, was less clearly associated with adult hip strength.

Researchers also found evidence to suggest that adolescent MVPA was more important than MVPA in adulthood – and that MVPA in early adolescence may be more important than in later adolescence.

There was also some evidence that higher impact activity was related to stronger hips at age 25.

"The unique availability of repeated accelerometer assessments over many years, beginning at age 12 within



Exercise in adolescence is linked with stronger hips

the Children of the 90s cohort, allowed us to describe the trajectory of time spent in different physical activity intensities through early life and to examine how this might relate to adult hip strength," said Dr Ahmed Elhakeem, lead

author and senior research associate in epidemiology.

"The results highlight teens as an important period for bone development through high intensity exercise."

More: [http://lei.sr/n6Y5S\\_H](http://lei.sr/n6Y5S_H)



**The results highlight the teens as an important period for development**

Dr Ahmed Elhakeem

## Benefits of exercise lost in those with increased blood sugar levels

**R**esearch has suggested that some of the benefits of aerobic exercise may be reduced by higher-than-normal blood sugar levels – known as hyperglycemia.

A team of scientists at Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston, US propose that high levels of blood sugar may prevent muscle remodeling in part by modifying the "extracellular matrix" proteins in the space between the muscle cells, where blood vessels are formed.

According to the researchers, the results strengthen the view that diet and exercise should not be treated as separate ways to improve health.



High sugar levels in the body disrupt the adaptation process

The research was led by Joslin's Sarah Lessard, who has previously demonstrated that a biological pathway known as the "JNK" signaling pathway can act as a kind

of molecular switch to tell muscle cells to adapt to either aerobic or strength training.

In those with hyperglycemia, the JNK pathway signals can get crossed.



**The muscles of those with hyperglycemia have bigger fibres**

Sarah Lessard

"The muscles of those with hyperglycemia have bigger fibres and fewer vessels, typical of strength, rather than aerobic, training," Lessard said.

More: [http://lei.sr/k9z2T\\_H](http://lei.sr/k9z2T_H)

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The relaxation in legislation means empty shops could be transformed into gyms

## Everyone's talking about high street gyms

Gym operators in the UK can now open on the high street, without planning permission, thanks to changes in legislation. What impact will this have on the industry? Kath Hudson reports

High streets across the country were struggling even before the COVID-19 lockdown pushed everyone further in the direction of online shopping.

As a result, the loosening of planning regulations to allow gyms on the high street is welcome news that could breathe new life into towns full of empty shops.

The changes relate to amendments to the Use Class Order, the legislation which defines the nature of businesses permitted to operate on the high street. The limited nature of the Use Class Order has made it difficult for towns to diversify their retail

mix in response to changing consumer demands.

This relaxation in legislation allows commercial and retail properties to be quickly repurposed, without a planning application or local authority approval, so health and fitness operators can move in, bringing with them vital footfall.

How much of an opportunity is this for the health and fitness sector? Is the post-COVID high street a good business proposition? Will premises in more visible positions help to broaden the market and enable gym operators to build more high-profile consumer brands? Will we see new operators and new concepts emerging? HCM ask the experts.

## Huw Edwards

ukactive

**T**he physical activity sector has been one of the fastest-growing in the UK during recent times, supporting the health and wellbeing of local communities.

Our nation's gyms and leisure centres form the fabric of our society, contributing more than £7.7 billion to the economy annually and with public leisure alone generating more than £3.3 billion in social value – on account of improved health, reduced crime, increased educational attainment and life satisfaction.

But, to date, the industry's potential to regenerate town centres and improve community cohesion has been stifled by archaic town planning regulations, which ukactive has lobbied against, so we're pleased to see these efforts reach fruition, with the change in government policy.

We repeatedly asked the question: how can it be easier to open a chicken shop than a fitness facility, when the government wants to address obesity and improve the nation's health?

This reform to the planning system is a welcome step in the right direction, providing operators with greater flexibility and incentive to open facilities in new areas. Demand for our services has never been greater – insight

reports show gyms and leisure centres top the list of consumer priorities, ahead of non-essential services such as cinemas and shopping.

Gyms and fitness studios can help to drive footfall on the high street, boosting our economic growth. However, the timing of this change means many operators are not in the position to capitalise immediately. Our members continue to face significant financial pressures and uncertainty, which is likely to hamper their ability to take full advantage of the reforms to the Use Classes Order.

It's crucial that the sector receives the financial support it needs from the government to recover fully. We will continue our conversations to ensure this support, so that we can recover and then grow the sector to play its vital role in our nation's public and economic health.



We repeatedly asked: how can it be easier to open a chicken shop than a fitness facility, when the government wants to improve the nation's health?

ukactive lobbied government to allow gyms to help revitalise ailing high streets





The changes are good news for the industry, but operators will need support, says Treharne

## John Treharne

### The Gym Group



The commercial units around our Vauxhall gym love us because we attract 2,000 people a day to the area

In principle it's a good idea to allow gyms to open on the high street, and the change in planning laws are particularly welcome, as this will streamline the process and avoid lengthy, painful delays.

This will be a huge benefit to the health and fitness industry – our worst experience of planning was an 11 month wait.

However, the health and fitness sector will need support to make high street clubs work. Firstly from landlords: retail rent is higher than a leisure operator will pay, so landlords will need to respond to this.

As the high street continues to be negatively impacted and with a growing number of empty shops, they will have to be reasonable about rent levels. COVID-19 has encouraged more people to do more shopping online and it looks unlikely that this will change.

Secondly, support will be needed from local authorities. High business rates are a major contributing factor to high streets failing and the preponderance of charity shops. The price of car parking

also needs to be addressed, as often local authorities charge exorbitant prices for parking, which stops people coming to towns altogether.

As health and fitness members would have to add parking to the cost of their class or PT session, there will need to be some negotiation, for example two hours of free parking for health club members.

If these factors are addressed, I think health and fitness operators could breathe new life into the high street by bringing high footfall. The commercial units around our Vauxhall site love us because we attract 2,000 people a day to the area.

On the whole, I think this opportunity will appeal most strongly to independent operators, however, The Gym Group will be looking for sites with the right population demographic for our small box concept which is 8,000-10,000sq ft.



Fitness operators are likely to want to see renewed confidence in the high street before making a serious commitment

## Ross Kirton

Colliers International

Our 2019 research paper, *Meet Me At The Bar*, showed there is scope for many more high street gyms, so the proposed change to the planning regulations is much needed good news, although fitness operators are likely to want to see renewed confidence in the high street before making a serious commitment.

There have been a number of occasions over recent years when we've been advising fitness occupiers on expansion, identified former office or retail space, only for the planners to refuse change of use consent. Their fears were mainly around a loss of retail and the space having an uninviting frontage.

High street units do offer some strong advantages. They have good prominence and accessibility and offer greater opportunities for secondary spend.

While some retail premises can be difficult to retrofit, because of floor loading and structural columns, former department stores or larger retail units, such as furniture stores, as well as redundant offices above retail parades are usually easy to adapt for fitness use.

The rise of the studio gym model in London has been a notable success and the likes of Barry's Bootcamp have brought people to places like Canary Wharf, which they perhaps wouldn't have gone to at weekends, so this could be a scaleable model for high streets.

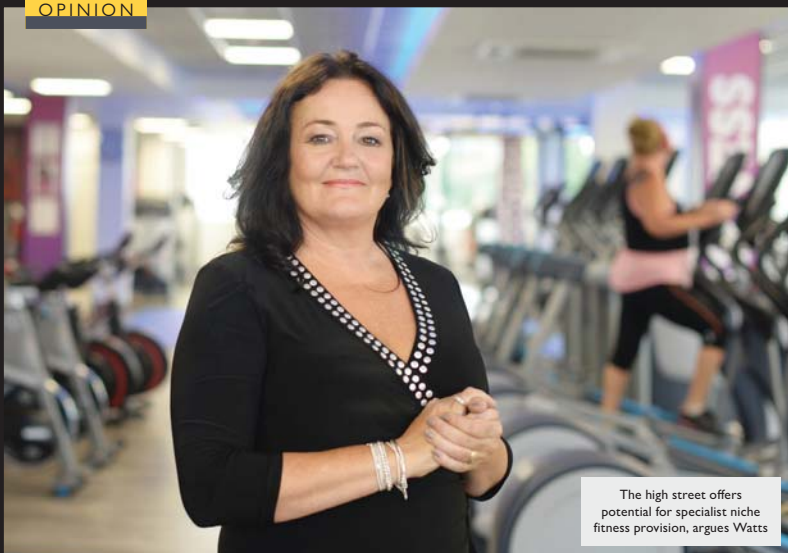
I also think we will see more offers develop which blend a retail offer with a fitness offer and make high street gyms more seamless. Blended offers could become more prevalent, particularly with retailers moving to online platforms and physical locations becoming more showroom/concept in style.

Planning hasn't been the only obstacle preventing the high street from recovering. An outdated rates system, rents at unsustainable levels and expensive car parking have all been influential, and these matters will need to be addressed before health and fitness operators will want to move in.

● Read *Meet Me At The Bar* here: [www.HCMmag.com/colliers-report](http://www.HCMmag.com/colliers-report)



Recent research by Colliers showed that high street gyms are increasingly popular



The high street offers potential for specialist niche fitness provision, argues Watts



The design of fitness outlets will need to be sympathetic, so high streets don't have rows of frosted glass shopfronts

## Sarah Watts

### Alliance Leisure

**M**aking it easier for gyms to open on high streets has the potential to improve the visibility of our sector and attract more users.

However, a package of support, such as VAT relief and rent and rate relief may be needed if we are to see operators move in on a significant scale.

Post-lockdown, most operators won't be in a position to expand rapidly. However, these reforms to the Use Classes Order, combined with affordable rents, create an opportunity for specialist niche provision.

When operators are in a healthier position for expansion we could see more Tesco Express-like gym models roll out, with facilities targeted at specific groups. For example, Your Leisure launched a Shapemaster studio in Margate high street following the success of the concept at its Ramsgate

Leisure Centre, indicating that boutique products such as cycle studios, pilates, HIIT and digital circuits could work well.

Many operators are looking at rationalising their estates and may well consider switching part of their offer to the high street to create satellite community facilities.

Low rents or situations where local authorities co-own retail assets will be critical to ensuring these niche sites are cost-effective and sustainable.

Convenience, accessibility, good transport links and the ability to combine exercise with other activities, such as shopping, are some of the benefits of moving fitness into the high street. Car parking – lack of and the expense – could act as a barrier. Also, the design of fitness outlets will need to be sympathetic, so high streets don't have rows of frosted glass shopfronts.

## Phil Horton

miha bodytec UK

**W**e all have a role to play in making activity and health more accessible, and it's reassuring to see the government, private operators and councils looking at ways to do this by reinvigorating the high street.

There's a huge opportunity to capitalise on this change in legislation which has come at the same time as small and medium sized businesses are being given access to grants of between £1,000-£5,000 to access new technology, as well as professional, legal, financial and other advice.

This pot of £20m will go some way to help businesses to recover from the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Health and fitness companies have undoubtedly been hit hard hit and this feels like a real moment where independent operators, such as owners of EMS studios, should see an opportunity to drive visibility among new audiences.

All too often, our customers have faced challenges finding new locations on the high street, due to planning regulations and issues with landlords.

An EMS studio, which is minimal in size at around 800sq ft, is a perfect fit for the high street and does not have any added complications of noise concerns from things like loud music and crashing weights on the floor.

We have studios in the UK reporting an increase in membership of 25 per cent in August alone, indicating there's likely to be demand on the high street.

To prove this, you need look no further than Bodystreet whose business model is based on high street locations. It has more than 300 studios globally and an annual turnover of £44m.

Some medical services are exempt from VAT, and I'd like to see wellbeing be treated the same way.

In London alone, Surge recently opened a new studio in Bank, and has another almost ready to open in Fleet Street. Vive also opened in London this year. By comparison, Paris has more than 60 studios, so we haven't even scratched the surface of what might be possible. ●



This change in legislation has come at the same time businesses are being given grants to access new technology

Miha Bodytec manufactures and distributes equipment for EMS training



# Steven Schwartz



*From top of its game to fighting for its life, Midtown Athletic Clubs' rollercoaster COVID story will resonate with operators across the sector. Its CEO has a frank conversation with Kate Cracknell*

Steven Schwartz started his career in hospitality before joining Midtown in 1987 and later becoming CEO



Midtown Athletic Club was founded by keen tennis player Alan Schwartz (pictured) and his father Kevin Schwartz



Originally founded by his father and grandfather in 1970, and with his son Alex now making his presence felt as director of marketing, Midtown Athletic Clubs is – as CEO Steven Schwartz explains – a four-generation business. “Dad was a great tennis player: winner of nine national championships and seven state championships. We never had a vacation that didn’t revolve around a tennis tournament,” Schwartz laughs. “He was also passionate about real estate, and what the business did was bring this together with tennis. The clubs were tennis facilities and my dad would get involved in the tennis programming, but the business model had a real estate focus and we always had partners in the clubs.

“In my father’s mind, I think it was an inevitability that his kids would join the family business,” he says, “but I went down the path of hospitality, studying at Cornell hotel school. My dad’s fire

was stoked when my career brought me back to Chicago as director of development for Hyatt Hotels. I got leaned on and I fell for it!

“I joined Midtown in 1987 and started looking at the model. The business certainly wasn’t failing, but tennis wasn’t performing as I thought it could. We started adding elements of fitness, turning Midtown into a multi-recreational business, and learned how to market it. We soon realised this was a more profitable model.

“Dad wasn’t really interested in fitness though, so by 1990 he turned to me and said: ‘You do it!’ We renovated, repositioned and slowly, over a period of about 15 years, bought out all our partners to consolidate ownership.

“We now own eight Midtown Athletic Clubs outright, including ownership of the property itself: four in Chicago and four up and down the eastern seaboard, including one in Canada. We also manage 25 clubs for other owners – hospitals, ▶



“

*Member confidence is the single most important factor, and I say – without doing so lightly – that our cleanliness standards, protocols and marketing are the best I’ve seen in the industry*

► corporations and so on – which is an area of the business dad started and I’ve grown.

“Management contracts are a comparatively small part of our cashflow though. Our eight owned clubs are all very large: US\$8m in revenue a year for our smallest club; US\$13m for our average club; and over US\$40m a year at Midtown Athletic Club Chicago – dad’s original tennis club.

“At least, those were the revenues pre-COVID...”

#### **What sets Midtown apart?**

“What really separates us is our focus on environments, experiences, feelings. This is how we differentiate ourselves from others, and it comes from my background in high-end experiences at hotels and resorts. It’s about lifestyle – creating spaces that make you feel uplifted and where you want to hang out.

“I’m into art and design and have been a photography collector all my adult life. I’m fascinated by how the aesthetic world – the abstract use of composition, tone, depth of meaning – translates



into everyday life, even without us always knowing it. Fuelled by this interest, our design philosophy includes a number of interesting principles.

“‘Space is Luxury’ is one such principle. Space is inefficient. It goes against everything you usually try and do when you design a gym, fitting in as much equipment as possible. By contrast, we’ve created boulevards on the gym floor where two, three, even four people can pass each other comfortably. We don’t even have stairs at both ends of the floors – just at one end – so people have to engage in a stroll, which is a wonderful feeling.

“This dovetails in with a concept we call Alone Together, which is about being around others even if you aren’t directly interacting with them. It recognises that fitness is often a solitary pursuit, but that people still want the social connection of being around others in a space they enjoy spending time in.

“Another design principle is Natural Materials: there’s a real resonance at an emotional level when you see something that’s real.

**Workout areas are designed to be ‘space inefficient’ to give members the luxury of room to move**

PHOTO: ANTHONY FAHLER



**Steven Schwartz took inspiration from the hospitality industry to create high-end, design-led interiors for the clubs**

“Light is another. We have big windows in our ‘do it yourself’ fitness areas, and in our social spaces where possible, to offer uplifting views. The studios are the complete opposite: these are controlled environments where we create an experience, and each experience is dictated by the class that takes place there. I want these rooms to be angular so they lean in to what they are. A lot of other studios already do that well, but I wanted to lean into that, bringing it into our big clubs to create a series of boutique spaces.

“We have entrance areas before the studios, too: it isn’t just a case of walk up, open the door, walk in. As you approach each studio, there’s an area of transition, setting the tone as you move from one space into another and recalibrating your senses. I call it Layers of Wow, where you peel back one layer at a time. In our Chicago club, for example, as you approach our yoga studio Samadhi, you enter a quiet, moodily-lit ante room with a huge Buddha statue. That sets the tone. Then you go into the studio itself and you see a tree in the middle – another ‘wow’.

“Overall, it’s about creating something a little less efficient, a little more fun. Somewhere you can lose yourself for a couple of hours... hence my dislike of signs and clocks!

### **What was your rationale for building a hotel at the Chicago club?**

“The business is now 50 years old, so we’ve had to reinvent ourselves a few times: first adding fitness, then big outdoor pools and recreation areas and now, at Midtown Athletic Club Chicago, a hotel and farm-to-table restaurant. We still have 16 indoor tennis courts at the club – something we did backflips to save – but essentially we’ve dismantled the whole club and rebuilt it. You gotta love my father for letting me do this!





*Overall, it's about creating something a little less efficient, a little more fun. Somewhere you can lose yourself for a couple of hours*

► "The reconstruction project was actually already underway when we came up with the hotel idea. A friend of mine was, at the time, CEO of Wilson Sporting Goods and was considering moving its HQ alongside our Midtown club. We were discussing an integrated concept, with Wilson potentially taking over one of our tennis courts for its Innovation Lab and our members being able to train there, so Wilson could observe real customers using its products.

"And then he pointed out that there was no hotel in the area. With my background, what was I thinking? Ours was an unbelievable hotel location, directly on the expressway between downtown – with its 40,000 hotel rooms – and the airport with its 18,000 rooms. We had free parking, great facilities on-site, we were adjacent to some of the great neighbourhoods if you wanted to go out. And no other hotels nearby.

"I immediately realised I needed to do it. That said, I was too chicken to build a really big one, so decided to build a boutique hotel that was big enough to be a 'real' hotel, but small enough that we didn't have to go after corporate events to fill it."

#### **Is this now the blueprint for all Midtown Athletic Clubs?**

"Hotels won't work at all our locations—they'll work incredibly well at some and not at others – but overall, what we've created at Midtown

Chicago – that secret sauce which brings together angular boutique studios, layers of 'wow' and all our other design principles – will now be retrofitted across all our clubs as best we can.

"At least, that was the plan before COVID hit, and in fact we did manage to convert three more clubs during lockdown – projects we'd already started, and where we put the pedal down as hard as possible to get the work finished while the clubs were closed.

"But now, everything is on hold until we see what the new normal is."

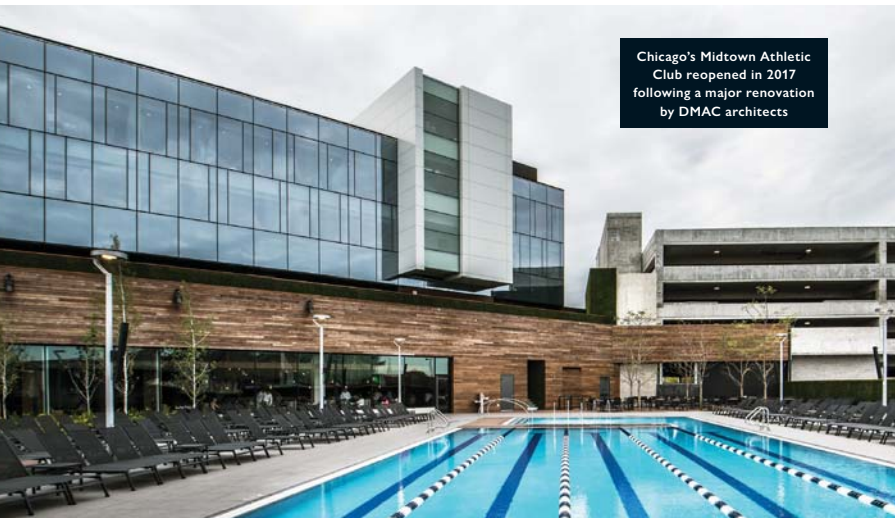
#### **How did the business respond to lockdown?**

"I personally went through all the cycles of grief and more: denial, anger, depression... It was incredibly hard: one minute we were at the top of our game, the next we were fighting for our lives.

One of the things I found hardest of all was furloughing 98 per cent of our staff – people who in many cases have been with us for decades – and how little the US government did to help.

In Canada, the government pays 75 per cent of people's salary when they stay employed. The US paid zero.

In fact, in the US generally, while there has been a reasonable job done for very large businesses – government buying bonds to keep



Chicago's Midtown Athletic Club reopened in 2017 following a major renovation by DMAC architects

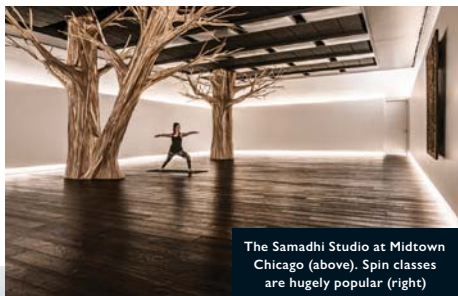


PHOTO: ANTHONY TAYLER

The clubs offer a wide range of classes. There's a focus on organic food at the M-Cafe (right)



PHOTO: ANTHONY TAYLER



The Samadhi Studio at Midtown Chicago (above). Spin classes are hugely popular (right)



them afloat – there has been zero federal support for middle-market family businesses, either during lockdown or to bring them back afterwards.

So, I was wavering between anger and depression for a long time, having realised early on that this could go on for a long time: I told the team we had to hunker down and be ready for a 20-week problem. In the end, even that 20-week prediction wasn't enough, but I think I under-estimated the ineptitude of our federal government. I know it's a tough thing for any government to have to play through, but I just never thought it would be handled this badly.

We husbanded all the money we could and spent the best part of a month working with our banks: securing loans to finish the redevelopments and trying to defer principal payments. In Canada, the banks deferred for six months, no problem. In the US we pushed hard to get three months, and honestly it wasn't worth the fight. In one case, we just decided to pay, even though we had no revenue.

That became our ethos generally: after briefly suspending paying all bills, we then returned to paying them all. Even if we were going to go broke, we didn't want it said that the Schwartzes didn't pay their bills!

#### Did you lobby government for support?


I did. I called members of Congress to try and get PPP extended to our sector, for example, but with no success. Realising we needed to focus at a more local and state level, I set up the Illinois Fitness Alliance, and we now represent hundreds of clubs.

We wanted to work with the City of Chicago and State of Illinois to establish a balance between safety and a survivable level of restrictions on club operations. We signed a pledge to follow the rules, we worked hard to build credibility and raise respect for what we do, we even set up our own self-policing group.

But again, we had very little influence. In the US, politicians just don't trust our industry,



PHOTO: ANTHONY TAYLER



Midtown Chicago features an indoor and an outdoor pool. Hotel guests have access to all facilities

- understand or respect what we do, and I have to recognise that we have some bad actors in our sector and get too much bad press overall.

That said, I do think we've been treated unfairly. The authorities haven't tried to integrate us as part of the solution. They – wrongly – see us as a place where irresponsible young people congregate and they lump us in with bars. The measures in force on gym operations in Chicago are very strict: a maximum of 10 people per class, for example, no matter how large your studio, and masks to be worn all the time while exercising.

So, we started from behind, we still don't get the respect we deserve and the country's healthcare system is still driven by sickness, not prevention. It's very frustrating.

#### **What measures have you put in place to re-open safely?**

Member confidence is the single most important factor, and I say – without doing so lightly – that our cleanliness standards, protocols and marketing are the best I've seen in the industry.

We did a deep dive into the science of it and have the coolest stuff. We pioneered airPHX two or three years ago: an electric plasma chamber that breaks apart air molecules to temporarily create unstable atoms of oxygen.

One of these is gas-phase hydrogen peroxide, which even in these trace amounts is enough to kill viruses and bacteria while being totally safe for humans. After two hours, every surface in the club is sterile, which means our entire clubs are sterilised every night. And during opening hours, the clubs

are permanently filled with air that kills viruses and bacteria. Everything the air touches is sanitised.

We also use ozone in the water for our laundry. The ozone kills all micro-organisms, meaning you can wash at lower temperatures and need less detergent.

I'm big on environmental sustainability, so that's a big tick in the box for me. And then we use Aqueous Ozone Solution to clean all the machines too, because it kills the viruses and bacteria and then reverts to water again, which is better for our skin than all that sanitiser gel and wipes.

#### **How is your business performing now?**

One of our principles was: we won't be the first to open. Better to open later than burn too much cash too quickly.

Our club in New York State opened in mid September. Georgia and Florida opened in June, the rest in July.

Georgia and South Florida got to about 45 per cent of previous usage in just a week or two. Use in Georgia is steady, but in Florida, numbers fell again as restrictions were reintroduced.

Montreal opened mid-July with around 45 per cent usage from the outset. Chicago is a mixed bag: 35-45 per cent, depending on location. We've just been allowing kids back in and they are slow to return, which means the families aren't coming – and the reason figures were so high last year was all the families around the pool area.

Meanwhile, we've had about 12 per cent cancellations, but there's an average of 39 per cent per cent of members on hold. This is a staggering number.



PHOTO: ANTHONY TAYLOR



The Chicago club makes the most of an awkward triangular site



*As you approach each studio, there's an area of transition, setting the tone as you move from one space into another, recalibrating your senses. I call it Layers of Wow*



We didn't charge people when we were closed – that's not who we are. When we reopened, we gave members two free on-hold months. Now we're open and things are safe, we're stopping our free on hold policy on 1 October – that should be interesting.

#### What is your outlook now as a business?

As they say: When man plans, nature laughs. It's like a game of poker: you can know the odds and learn the rules, but chance still plays an important role. All you can do is play the cards you hold as smartly as possible. Not panic. Make considered moves that improve rather than reduce your chances of success. And keep looking at your pile of chips to make sure you don't run out. Don't make every bet so big that you can't afford to make the next move.

With all this in mind, whereas in previous recessions we've actually grown through acquisition, this time our strategy is simply to stay alive to fight another day. We'll wait for a vaccine, wait for the trauma to subside and take it from there. If there's a vaccine by spring/summer 2021, we'll be fine. Even if we only get back to 80–90 per cent of previous usage, we'll be fine. And then hopefully we can finish our roll-out plan.

But there could still be a lot of economic dangers, we still don't know what our government will do, and ultimately we don't know if and when people will come back.

I like our odds: we have a great – and until now wildly successful – concept and I love our long-term prospects of rolling that out. We just need the bridge to get there. In the meantime, it's painful. We just have to ride out this storm. ●

The entrance is wide and welcoming with a pale, calming colour palette

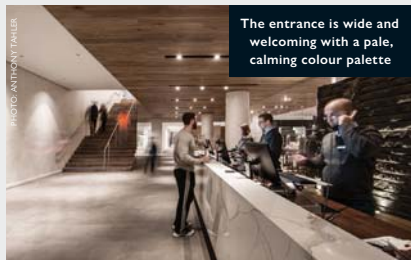


PHOTO: ANTHONY TAYLOR

# EXCITE LIVE

***The only fully connected and immersive content experience***

*Welcome to the world of creative fitness, where exercise and fun merge to change the way we train. Technogym is here to inspire you to offer members the best workouts and experience, making sure they have a great time*

**T**he way people train is changing, the demand for content and experience has exploded and this is shaping the next evolution of training.

Technogym is leading the way with exciting new training experiences delivered through its innovative cardio range, Excite Live.

A seven-piece cardio range, Excite Live has revolutionised training, thanks to the Technogym Live platform, which uses artificial intelligence technology and immersive content to give training an advanced level of personalisation.

Excite Live is designed around four key pillars – tailored training variety,

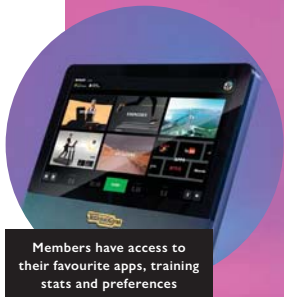
connectivity, space-efficiency and sustainability – to offer a meaningful, engaging, and personal training experience.

## **TAILORED TRAINING**

### **Personalise the experience**

Technogym Live is the new and advanced digital user interface that empowers Excite consoles. It inspires people to embrace exercise and make it a part of their daily lives to achieve results in fun, motivating ways.

Using the power of artificial intelligence which is at their fingertips, members have access to all their favourite apps, training stats and preferences all in



**Members have access to their favourite apps, training stats and preferences**

one place, providing a personalised experience that is as unique as they are.

Excite Live offers a new level of personalisation with the Technogym Coach feature, that entices members and captures their attention, while supporting them in achieving their workout goals.

## **TECHNOGYM SESSIONS**

### **Train with the celebs**

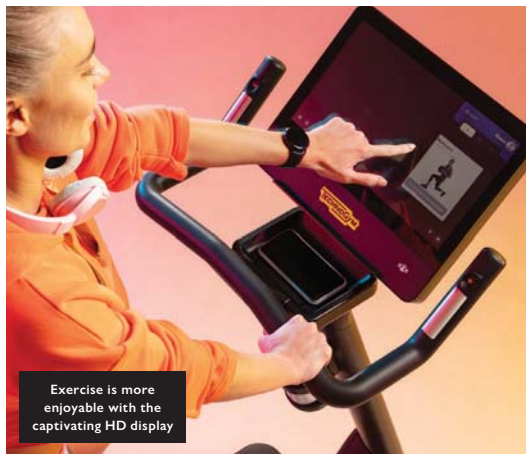
Provide the opportunity for members to enjoy a personalised training experience designed around their personal training goals, while being inspired and motivated by top fitness celebrities and the best master trainers from around the world.

Users are put through their paces with the variety of sessions delivering one-to-one encouragement and inspiration throughout, so they get the most from their cardio workout.

## **TECHNOGYM ROUTINES**

### **Train anywhere in the world**

Excite Live offers Technogym Routines where members can achieve more by stepping out of their comfort zone with advanced HIIT workouts.



**Exercise is more enjoyable with the captivating HD display**



Technogym has brought exercise and fun together to create a compelling new offer with Excite Live

## ***Excite Live has revolutionised training, thanks to the Technogym Live platform, which uses AI and immersive content to give an advanced level of personalisation***

Innovative technology sets the intensity automatically and movements are scheduled, so you can marvel at members achieving their full potential.

They will also be amazed as the immersive content takes them on travels around the world to breathtaking scenic 'locations' to inspire that extra mile.

### **CONNECTIVITY**

#### **Your world with you**

As the trends move towards remaining connected and entertained, training with Excite Live offers the ultimate entertainment options.

By logging in via the Mywellness app or Apple or Samsung smartwatch, Technogym Coach opens everyone's favourite apps.

With the Excite Live console, users can browse the internet, connect with

friends on social media, catch up on their latest Netflix series or enjoy their favourite Spotify playlists.

Not forgetting the smartphone universal wireless charging – a much-needed feature for on-the-go members.

Exercise is more enjoyable, with the widest range of entertainment offered on the captivating HD display.

### **SPACE-SAVVY**

#### **Rethinking design**

Excite line offers the best ratio of floor footprint to user training space, giving members more room to move freely and achieve their full potential.

The Excite Live Run has a redesigned deck, providing greater stability and 13 per cent more space for running and exercising. This groundbreaking new design involves everything

members love about running, while taking up 30 per cent less space.

### **SUSTAINABILITY**

#### **Friends with the planet**

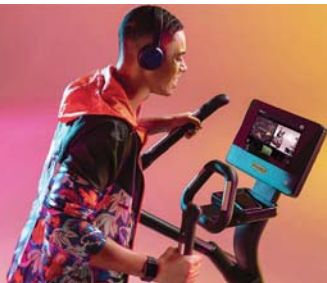
The new Excite line represents the next generation of sustainable equipment. The fully-connected human-powered line is the first generation of smart equipment that doesn't require electricity or batteries to run the 10" LCD touchscreen. It also comes complete with wi-fi, Bluetooth and on-board innovative content.

All the equipment in the line is made of parts that can be recycled and with a more compact design, which requires fewer raw materials, helping to reduce its carbon footprint.

[www.technogym.com/excite-live](http://www.technogym.com/excite-live) ►

## JOIN THE PARTY!

Technogym's Excite Live makes training more fun and inspiring for all ages, fitness levels and training requirements



The University of Stirling has invested in Excite Live for its new performance gym



### CASE STUDY

## University of Stirling

ENGAGING EVERYONE FROM ATHLETES TO EXERCISE NEWBIES

In Scotland, the team at the University of Stirling lives and breathes sport, with a mission of delivering the best for Scottish sport through the powerful and inspirational combination of sport and education.

With such a thriving, modern sports complex, the University has further enhanced the gym with Excite Live, making it suitable for everyone from the most active students to those who are just starting their fitness journey.

"Having undergone a fantastic redevelopment of the sports facilities, creating a complex that enhances the world class student experience at Stirling, we are delighted to feature Technogym's most advanced training experience with the Excite Live range," says executive director of sport Cathy Gallagher. "We wanted to provide an innovative, state-of-the-art gym and by partnering with Technogym, the possibilities the redevelopment is going to bring in 2020 and beyond is an incredibly exciting prospect."



### CASE STUDY

## Ruskin Fitness Club

UPGRADING THE GYM FLOOR WITH EXCITE LIVE

Quick to join the party is Ruskin Fitness Club, which has big refurbishment plans for its private club in Merseyside.

The refurbishment, to be completed by October, will showcase Excite Live cardio products – an upgrade that will give members more variety and enhanced training options.

"Not only has the whole club been redesigned and upgraded to include the

very latest Technogym equipment," says operations director Stephen Palfrey, "but Excite Live will also add a new dimension to our members' training, fitting perfectly with our club ethos of providing the very best fitness environment.

"The huge variety of immersive content is perfect for our members as it energises and modernises our fitness offering."

# RESETTING THE WORLD WITH WELLNESS

## **2020 Global Wellness Summit**

The Breakers Palm Beach, Florida, November 8-11

## **Wellness Real Estate & Communities Immersion**

Serenbe, Georgia, November 11-13



**GLOBAL WELLNESS  
SUMMIT 2020**

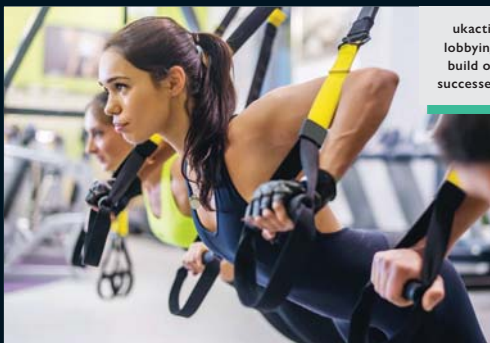
**GLOBALWELLNESSSUMMIT.COM**

# Huw Edwards

*Right man, right place, right time – the CEO of ukactive is helping lead the industry through the challenges of the pandemic. He talks to HCM*



Edwards was appointed CEO of ukactive in July 2019 after joining the organisation in 2016



ukactive's focus is on lobbying government to build on the reopening successes secured to date

*The future of our industry is as a 'national health service' – we can't dance around these conversations – if we're serious about being closer to health agencies, that needs change and commitment*

### What are you working on right now?

The priority is helping members stay open. We've seen an incredibly intense period of work due to the pandemic and it's also been a highly volatile political environment, with lots of uncertainty for our sector.

Every day we're going into battle around issues of operational survival, which everybody understands.

Now we've reopened across all four UK nations, we must focus on influencing decision-making in government to minimise future closures – either as part of localised lockdowns or more national closures generated by a potential second spike.

We're making every effort in our lobbying to ensure decision-making that affects our sector, at both national and local government levels, is based on scientific evidence and factual accuracy, in terms of our operating model.

We must avoid a repeat of the situation that happened with local lockdown in Bradford, where there were challenges around both decision-making and evidence that needlessly damaged the sector there.

### What's the next set of priorities?

We've been working around the clock with members to gather evidence about the control of transmission and provide assurance to the government. In turn, we need the sector to provide us with data that shows we're meeting the challenges set by the guidance and

setting the highest standards of any sector, building consumer confidence to support recovery.

There remains a considerable amount of work for us to do to make sure fitness operators receive the financial support they need to survive. We've been using the collaborative weight of other sectors to make the case for protection from legal action on unpaid rent.

At the same time, we've been calling for VAT relief and giving evidence to DCMS about the need for ring-fenced funding to protect public leisure operators. This support would ensure the short-term viability of part of our sector, aiding public leisure operators' recovery and improving their chances of helping support the population's health and wellbeing at this critical time.

Away from those battles we have a chance to reconsider how the sector represents itself in a post-COVID world.

### Tell us about the lobbying

From the outset, we had a clear plan and message and we've seen some positive wins, including the extension of rent relief and furlough support, and the change to planning regulations around Use Class Order which will enable more gyms to open in the high street.

There are still some major asks on the table and we continue to lobby strongly for those.

The pandemic has devastated many sectors, and so the fight to be heard and influence the small group of decision-makers at the heart of this government is really

tough. But we know our lobbying has had an impact.

For example, we know there were serious discussions about reopening the sector in October, rather than July, meaning we would be still closed today, had we not made that progress. But through our collective efforts with our members and partners, we got that changed for the positive.

Our sector has no single political home, so success also means trying to coordinate multiple conversations across government, bringing different departments together to talk about the urgent needs our sector has to protect its enormous long-term potential to help the nation.

We're so proud of our members, who have come together across many diverging lines with a common goal to protect the industry.

I'm also proud of the work done by the ukactive team; the challenges have been relentless and they've really risen to the challenge.

The governance arrangements ukactive put in place have seen us engage with members to get the best counsel and help drive positive change. It's also been really important that we've worked closely with Sport England, CIMSPA and Community Leisure UK, to show the united voice of our sector in the most challenging of times.

### What has this collaboration achieved?

We all know what's at stake – for our workforce and the communities we serve.

Everyone has been working towards the best possible solutions in the face of the closure. We've seen true collaboration with our operator members, from the smallest to largest, which means we've been able to get on-the-ground feedback and access to expertise based on their specialisms, and they've supported our representations to government.

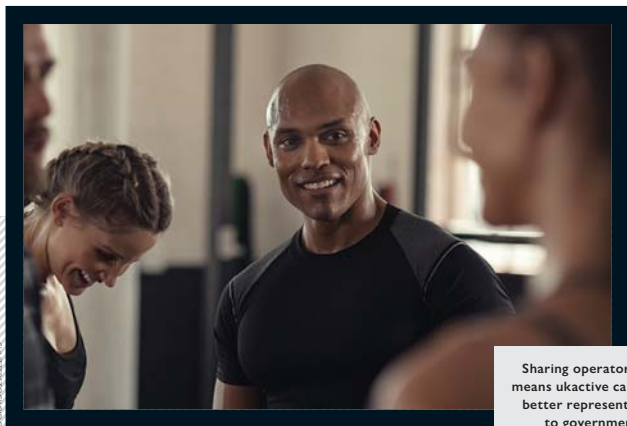
It's also led to a greater appetite to share data, which is so vital for building confidence and informing the decision-making about our sector. It's been great to report on data gathered by both public and private operators, meaning we can make better representation to government.

We want to give the best possible picture to the decision-makers, armed with all the data the sector can provide. We're now able to mobilise with greater agility.

We're much more agile than we were at the start of the crisis, due to the governance structure we now have in place.

We've seen a far greater focus on standards across the sector, which have been under great scrutiny as a result of

*Our success in moving the date for reopening happened because there was a shift in how the fitness sector is perceived*



Sharing operator data means ukactive can make better representation to government

Edwards at Inclusive Sports  
Day 2019, with ukactive  
chair Tanni Grey-Thompson,  
Erin Orford, Para Team  
GBR and Benny Hutton,  
Stoke Mandeville Stadium



COVID-19. As a result, we've taken huge strides on health and safety, but also on the standards we set ourselves across a whole range of societal issues as well. We'll be working a lot over the coming months with our partners to set the highest standards for our customers – we want to be fully inclusive for all the communities we work in.

### **Tell us about the COVID-19 response**

We've been capturing evidence on visits versus reported cases of COVID-19 from across the sector, with reporting from over 1,500 sites in the UK – and the list is growing.

This gives us the evidence to make the case against localised closures where those occur. To be blunt, the more data we capture, the greater the chance we can minimise local or national closures going forward.

We have the apparatus in place in terms of standards, but having the evidence base as well helps bust some of the myths about our sector which were perpetuated at the start.

The myths about our sector being a 'super-spreader' of COVID-19 have been thoroughly debunked. We've made it clear: any decisions going forward have to be made based on evidence, not on instinct and whim.

It's early days and we remain vigilant and humble – the most important thing is to look after what we are in control of and not compromise our standards.

### **What future do you see for the industry?**

There's truth in the view that we are not valued correctly by government and that's what we need to change. But we have choices to make when bad things happen and for all the understandable anger and frustration about how we've been treated, we have to work constructively with government to get the results we seek.

This is a powerful government that could be in place for another decade, so we have to collaborate and work to show them we're the solution to a number of the societal challenges they face.

Our success in moving the date for reopening happened because there was a shift in how our sector is perceived. When we hosted the visits to five of our members' sites from the deputy chief medical officer and SAGE, it was a great collaboration with our members to show the very best of our sector and help change their desktop perceptions to a clear understanding of the sector's operations. It gave us a chance to take advice from them and also to empower the deputy CMO and SAGE to fine-tune the official reopening guidance.

### **What's the key to this?**

The value proposition for our sector is not yet as strong as we want. That's been reflected in this crisis

and there's a need for us to continue to make that case collectively. We have to have a fundamental change in the way physical activity is valued in the UK.

We'll only show our true value by continuing to reach for high standards, by telling our story through incontrovertible data and evidence and – crucially – by revealing the long-term, positive benefit the sector can have on, potentially, every person in the UK.

The big question is, how seriously do we all want to be connected with the health agenda, beyond the rhetoric of saying we do? How far do we want to go with social prescribing, backing the discussions ukactive is having with the NHS and National Academy for Social Prescribing? How far do we want to drive the professionalism of our sector, working with CIMSPA to enhance our reputation and truly reflect the totality of people who use our services?

The future of our industry is as a 'national health service' – we can't dance around these conversations – if we're serious about being closer to health agencies, that needs change and commitment.

Over the next few months, ukactive will drive these discussions across the sector, including new consultations on our sector's role in workplace health, and also ageing and long-term health conditions. We need the whole sector to get involved in these important pieces of work, as they will help shape the future relations we have as a sector with both the government and its health agencies.

### What fall-out will there be from the pandemic in terms of facility closures?

Any facility closed is a tragedy, as is the loss of jobs, but we have to be realistic – the sector will not come out of these crises unscathed.

We continue to work to avoid closures wherever possible and in terms of market changes, we need to ensure the collective can service all communities and cohorts, which means we must ensure a strong public, private and independent sector to meet our full potential.

These operators meet different needs in the communities they serve. What we've witnessed throughout this crisis is how strong the collaboration has been between the public and private operators. All have a role to play in our nation's health.

### What shape is the public sector in?

This comes back to value. Public leisure services are non-statutory, so they don't have the same protection as other local services. Difficult decisions are being taken by local authorities but ultimately, central government must be held accountable.

It's a very challenging situation, but we've been clear that the loss of local authority provision weakens the health of the nation. It undermines all of the commitments made by the government to improving the health of the nation.

The Active Uprising and National Summit have gone digital as part of a free events programme



ukactive is consulting  
on workplace wellbeing,  
ageing and long-term  
health conditions

SHUTTERSTOCK/CHROMART

*I invite every organisation to become part  
of our consultation on workplace wellbeing,  
active ageing and long-term health conditions*

Leisure facilities, along with gyms, are knitted into the fabric of our society. Our data shows clearly how vital they are, in particular for those from lower-income backgrounds, BAME communities, and women. Their loss would widen some of our greatest health inequalities.

#### **How can operators diversify?**

This depends on our appetite to be part of the new health agenda. Are we prepared to back the necessary changes, operationally and in our audiences, to support a wider community?

It requires change and investment – less financial, more cultural – but it will strengthen our case for providing a national service.

ukactive will create the enabling environment for the sector to capitalise on, from workplace health, to active ageing and long-term conditions, and children and young people, and I invite every organisation to become part of our consultations on workplace wellbeing, ageing and long-term health conditions, to consider how they might serve these new audiences.

We support the sector by facilitating these opportunities and this will help protect our long-term future and sustainability as a sector.

We're going to continue a national conversation, starting with the Great British Week of Sport, which offers a window into the sector, followed in November by the National Summit. These events represent a chance to tell our story and to show the evidence.

We provide so many opportunities for solutions, but they've got to be unlocked. You can't compromise when it comes to driving change.

#### **What does the future hold for ukactive?**

ukactive will continue to support the sector, focusing on key areas – both strategically and at local level – that provide new avenues for growth and new offerings.

We're already underway with two major consultations; to reimagine ageing by learning how best to engage people to lead healthier lifestyles in later life, and a workplace consultation to understand how businesses can support physically active workforces.

We continue to progress our work in partnership with Sport England, which focuses on the strategic areas of digital transformation, improvement of infrastructure, how the sector can become more inclusive, and the development of our campaigns to engage new audiences.

We all have a duty to re-evaluate our long-term value to the UK and how we speak about our sector. In the short-term, the Great British Week of Sport (19-27 September) is our opportunity to show the best of what we do.

We need to make our voice heard, showing the positive impact we have on the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of the nation. This is the united voice we need to take into the heart of government, showing we're the solution for many of the societal issues facing the UK.

We will draw together the biggest coalition of support from across the sector to make the case. It will help position our sector as a public health service, creating new opportunities for our members.

Moving into the future, in collaboration with our members, partners and stakeholders, we will forge a shared foundation to grow our voice, our customer base and our industry. ●



Eddie Fletcher

## Industry forced to recognise a new, health-focused consumer

*Wattbike's lead sport scientist*

*Eddie Fletcher discusses the importance of health assessments, changes in consumer behaviour post-lockdown and the latest UK government strategy*

A global pandemic affects how we all look at our own health and fitness. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the increased risks that being obese, overweight and sedentary can bring to a person's immune system and its ability to protect against viruses. Studies also show that patients who have Type 2 diabetes or other metabolic syndromes are ten times more at risk of dying from COVID-19.

Lack of exercise is even argued to be as deadly as smoking when it comes to morbidity statistics, and it's estimated that low physical activity levels could be responsible for around 1 in 10 cases of heart disease and just under 1 in 5 cases of colon cancer in the UK alone.

According to research collated by the NHS, exercise can reduce the risk of major

illnesses by up to 50 per cent, and lower your risk of early death by 30 per cent.

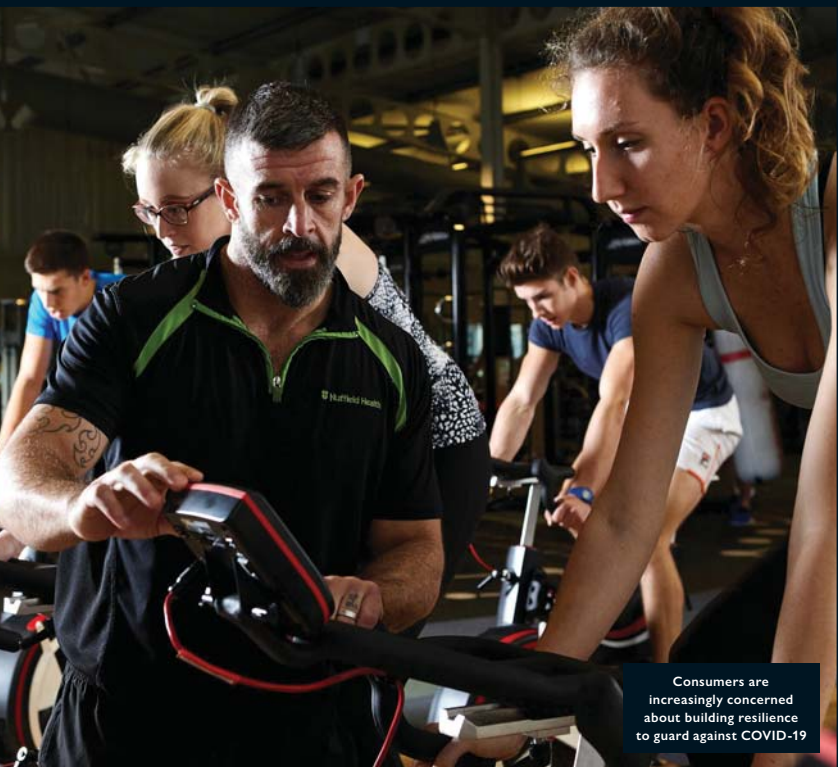
As people return to their fitness facilities, the industry needs to be ready to provide for a new consumer focus. Gone are the days where aesthetic fitness ambitions will be the most-sought after goals. In its place will be the new health-orientated consumer.

Therefore, the industry needs effective ways of testing, benchmarking and improving health markers, as well as providing options that appeal to both those new to fitness facilities, as well as regular gym goers.

It's a tough ask, but Wattbike has the answer: the Wattbike Health Assessment.

**Turn the page to find out more >**





Consumers are increasingly concerned about building resilience to guard against COVID-19

## GOVERNMENT STRATEGY HIGHLIGHTS WEIGHT LOSS – BUT WHAT ABOUT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

The urgency of tackling the obesity time bomb has been highlighted by evidence of the link to an increased risk of COVID-19 complications and death. A major new campaign, unveiled as part of the government's new obesity strategy, aims to encourage millions of adults to kick start their health, lose weight and reduce their risk of serious illness, including COVID-19.

Commenting on this agenda, Richard Baker, Wattbike CEO says: "It's good to see the government taking a stronger stand against obesity, but disappointing to see their campaign focusing on losing weight, with no mention whatsoever about physical exercise.

"Greater awareness of what we consume is an essential factor in weight loss but not the only factor. We know that to win the battle in the long-term, there need to be maintained lifestyle changes, of which exercise is an essential behaviour to incorporate into everyday life.



*"It's good to see the government taking a stronger stand against obesity, but disappointing there's no mention whatsoever in their campaign about physical exercise"*

Richard Baker, Wattbike CEO

"Obesity is closely related to inflammatory diseases such as type 2 diabetes and cardiorespiratory disease and we know that exercise is the medicine that can mitigate against these risks, so it's disappointing that there's no mention of exercise within this campaign."

Huw Edwards, CEO at ukactive, said:

"We're in a health crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating the long-term health

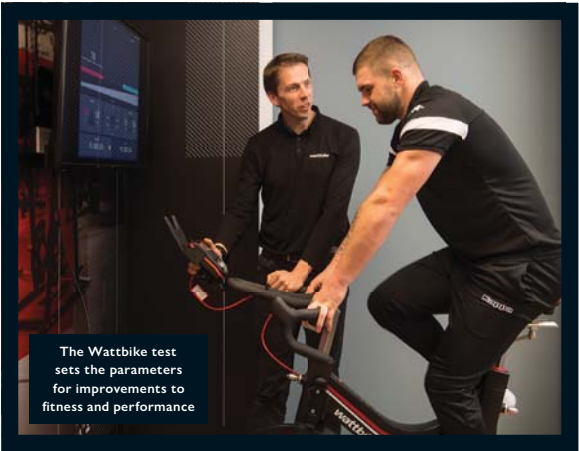
problems we have in this country, that stem from not being active enough.

"Being physically active can improve people's resilience and outcomes in relation to disease, as well as benefitting their overall physical and mental health.

"The government needs to look beyond a campaign based on weight loss and also focus on how exercise can make people healthier, happier and stronger."



The CRF test can function like an initial risk assessment, and can be used as part of a strategy of prevention



The Wattbike test sets the parameters for improvements to fitness and performance

#### THE WATTBIKE HEALTH ASSESSMENT

Scientific research on the benefits of exercise has identified cardiorespiratory fitness (CRF) as an accurate way to measure someone's physical health. In simple terms, CRF tells you how effective your body is at transporting oxygen to the places where it's needed the most.

Although not a diagnostic test, the CRF test can function like an initial risk assessment, and can be used as part of a strategy of prevention to determine if an individual is at risk of developing cardiorespiratory or metabolic disorders, based on their CRF score.

Recognising the importance of measuring CRF, Wattbike has created a simple, accessible and accurate health assessment, which is available via the free Wattbike Hub app. This gives each individual their CRF score and predicted VO<sub>2</sub>max, to show their current health and fitness benchmarks.

Importantly, from this score, each person is then assigned a personalised training plan, as well as individual training zones, so they can work to increase their score by the end of the training block – improving their health and extending their active life.

#### WATTBIKE TRAINING PLANS

After each improved score, the assigned training programme becomes more advanced, to ensure a continued progression without plateau. These training plans are programmed by sport scientists to offer individuals structure, consistency, and motivation for optimum fitness improvement.

Crucially, the plans safeguard the correct, individualised levels of exercise intensity and recovery, based on each CRF score in order to promote effective training and continued improvement. ●

#### Taking the Wattbike test

- Wattbike sampled a user who had taken the Wattbike Health Submax Test (the CRF test).
- The person tested was a 51-year-old man, weighing 92kg and with a CRF score on the 10th percentile.
- The results indicated the participant was at a high risk of CVD, hypertension and type 2 diabetes.
- As well as indicating an increased risk for a number of illnesses, a low CRF score will also dramatically impact recovery time.
- Following the Wattbike Health Assessment test, the participant followed a 13-week Wattbike Health Plan, which included 50 sessions in total, including the initial and final assessments, across low, moderate and high intensity workouts, with rest days prescribed.
- The outcomes included a 9kg weight loss to 83kg and a move to the 80th percentile (+70 percentile).
- Their VO<sub>2</sub> max increased, extending their active life by 1.62 years and they were deemed to be at significantly lower risk of CVD, hypertension and type 2 diabetes.
- In terms of Maximum Minute Power, there was an increase of 31 per cent, and they also achieved a 17 per cent increase in survival benefits in their measure of Metabolic Equivalents (METs).

Find out more: [www.wattbike.com](http://www.wattbike.com)



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Keeping your gym healthy

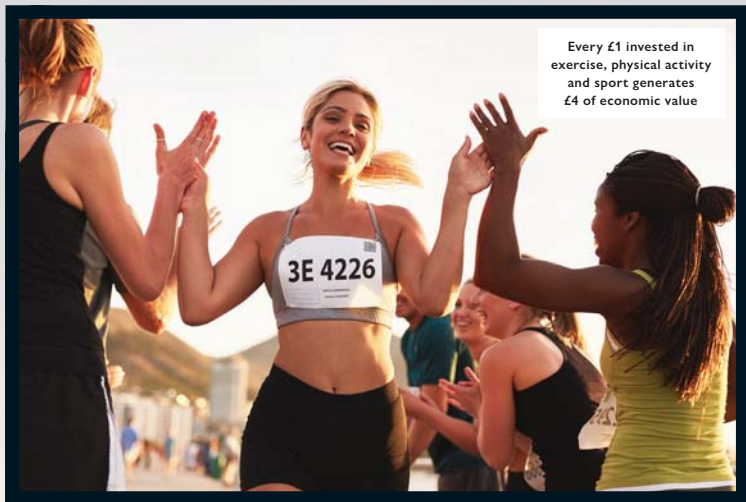
**MADE IN  
BRITAIN**

Q

What adds £85.5bn a year to the UK economy?



PHOTO: JACOB LINDSAY/SHUTTERSTOCK



Every £1 invested in exercise, physical activity and sport generates £4 of economic value

PHOTO: JACOB LUNDQUIST/ISTOCK



## Physical activity

As the physical activity and sports sector unites to fight its corner in making a case for government investment, Sport England has commissioned a research study to prove the economic value of activity, giving weight to the argument. Tom Walker reports

**E**very £1 spent on physical activity in England generates £3.91, according to a study by the Sport Industry Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University.

According to the report, *Social and economic value of community sport and physical activity in England*, commissioned by Sport England, the social and economic benefits created by physical activity and community sport each year are worth £85.5bn.

Researchers also showed how investment in exercise creates a return across health and social care and also helps build stronger communities and develop skills in the population.

An additional £13bn of economic value is also being created through fitness and sports-related goods and services annually.

### Supporting mental health

Physical activity also plays an important role in easing the burden on the National Health Service by preventing a number of serious physical and mental health conditions.

The study estimates that exercise provides savings of £5.2bn in healthcare and another £1.7bn in social care costs – including £450m that's being saved by preventing the need for an additional 30 million GP visits.

"This new research provides evidence that can help local authorities, businesses and the voluntary sector to understand the value of promoting activity, especially as it will play an important part in helping the nation to recover from the challenges 2020 has brought," said Tim Hollingsworth, CEO of Sport England. ▶



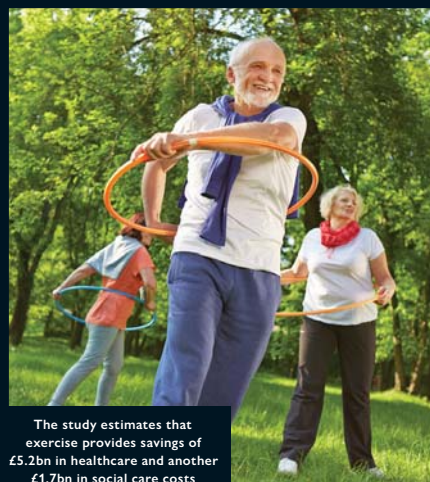
**Exercise & physical activity has a pivotal role to play in bridging the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'**

► "In keeping with a key government priority, this report also highlights how exercise and physical activity has a pivotal role to play in levelling up communities by bridging the gap between the 'haves and have nots,'" he said.

"We would encourage organisations to use this research to better understand the impact that being active can have on the lives of individuals and communities, the delivery of public services and our economy."

The report comes ahead of the Great British Week of Sport – taking place from 19 to 27 September – which is designed to celebrate the value of sport and physical activity to UK communities and includes the World United campaign and National Fitness Day.

The campaign is organised in partnership by ukactive, Sport England, the UK Government and the European Commission and will showcase a variety of sports and activities. ● Get the report at [www.HCMmag.com/economic](http://www.HCMmag.com/economic)



**The study estimates that exercise provides savings of £5.2bn in healthcare and another £1.7bn in social care costs**

PHOTO: JACOB LUND/SHUTTERSTOCK

PHOTO: ROBERT KNECHES/SHUTTERSTOCK

# HOW HAS LOCKDOWN AFFECTED YOUR FITNESS JOURNEY...?



Physique  
Rating



BMR



BMI



Bone  
Mass



Metabolic  
Age



Segmental readings for  
each leg, arm and trunk



Muscle  
Mass



Body Fat  
%



Total Body  
Water



Visceral  
Fat



Weight

corevue



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# Get a healthcheck

**COVID-19 is driving huge consumer interest in health, creating the opportunity for operators (with the right kit) to offer body scanning and analysis. We look at some of the top options**

## Inbody

**Sectors:** medical, gyms, health clubs, corporate wellbeing

**Clients include:** BXR, Evolve Fitness

**Number of kiosk options:** five

**Measures available:** (Standard) weight, total body water, dry lean mass, lean body mass, body fat mass, skeletal muscle mass, body mass index, percent body fat, segmental lean analysis, body composition history, body fat-lean body mass control, basal metabolic rate, impedance at each segment/ frequency. (Additional) Intracellular water, extracellular water, ecw/tbw analysis, visceral fat, segmental fat analysis, visceral fat area, segmental body water analysis, segmental ecw/tbw analysis, segmental icw analysis, segmental ecw analysis, leg lean mass, tbw/lbm, reactance, whole body and segmental phase angle

**Website:** [www.inbody.com](http://www.inbody.com)

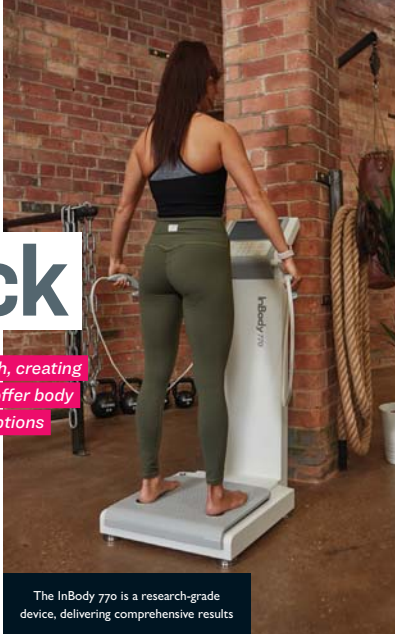
Founded by Dr Kichul Cha in 1996, InBody has grown from a small biotech startup in South Korea to a multinational corporation working in 80 countries.

The company works in the health and fitness and medical fields, providing accurate body composition data from easy-to-use devices.

InBody's flagship product is the research-grade InBody 770 (pictured top right), which goes beyond traditional body composition analysis and takes a deeper look into body water, offering two types of results sheets: body composition and body water.

### Impact of body composition on the immune system

In light of the global pandemic, InBody has developed a paper with its Medical Application team to demonstrate the effects of healthy body composition on the immune system. You can download the paper free of charge at [www.HCMmag.com/Inbodyimmune](http://www.HCMmag.com/Inbodyimmune)



The InBody 770 is a research-grade device, delivering comprehensive results

## Healthcheck Services

**Sectors:** gyms, health clubs, corporate wellbeing

**Clients include:** The Gym Group, Pure Gym

**Number of kiosk options:** nine

**Measures available:** weight, height, bodyfat, vascular, total body water, muscle mass, physique rating, bone mineral mass, basal metabolic rate, metabolic age, visceral fat

**Website:** [www.healthchecksolutions.co.uk](http://www.healthchecksolutions.co.uk)

Healthcheck Services has been operating for over 30 years, providing kiosks for all levels of operation.

Corevue 360 uses multi-frequency bioelectrical impedance analysis, to provide insight into body fat percentage, muscle mass, bone density and metabolic age, enabling the delivery of a full body composition analysis in 15 seconds.

The Corevue 360 also has automatic height measurement and comes with both card and coin payment options. It's available via purchase, rental or profit share and enables on-screen advertising, so it can function as a profit centre.

The kiosk responds to voice and text instructions and comes in a range of options, including hands-only, feet-only and hand and feet, providing full segmental body composition analysis.



*Anytime Fitness in the Philippines has seen a 14.2% increase in PT revenue and a \$1m increase in overall revenue through data analytics and digitisation*



# DIGITAL reVolution

**As the fitness industry grapples with the challenge of optimising digital, Volution's Adam Norton shares his vision for a customised data-centric approach that will lead operators into a new era of success**

**W**e're in a fast changing, challenging world – there's so much noise and confusion and so many mixed messages, I empathise with health and fitness operators wading through the challenges.

Here at Volution, our mission is to enable companies to be better and more efficient at handling data to drive member engagement, retention, experience creation and lifetime value.

Volution doesn't compete, but instead harnesses the power of all technology partners to better serve and support the sector. We genuinely believe in positive partnerships and proactively working with other tech companies to deliver outcomes that operators need.

Data and tech, in spite of being enablers, can sometimes cause people to be wary of change, but with challenges comes opportunity – we're at the epicentre of some of the most significant changes this sector has seen in 20 years and now, more than ever, operators need to have a clear line of sight across their whole operation.

## Powering the hybrid gym model

Transparency and understanding are critical, as quick business decisions need to be made to secure the future success of businesses. Harnessing data insights is also essential, so operators can make the best, most informed decisions.

For example, it's clear the future for some is the hybrid gym model, but it's advisable not to launch in haste, just to be able to tick the digital box.

To successfully operate a hybrid model, digital needs to be part of a bigger strategy and something that's central to the day-to-day running of a facility, not just an add on.

Fortunately, technology can do much of the heavy lifting, and when implemented correctly, can automate many of the processes that help operators make quicker, smarter business decisions and unlock new and exciting opportunities to engage members, both inside and outside the four walls of the gym.

## Making the most of virtual

Group classes on Instagram Live, Zoom and other platforms helped many people through lockdown and will form part of the fabric of the fitness industry moving forward. But how can operators put themselves in a position to make the most of virtual training?

One of the limitations of these free-to-use social media platforms is that they don't have built-in tracking to measure member engagement. They've been a great step on the virtual training ladder, but to truly maximise this opportunity, operators need a more intelligent solution.

At Volution, we've created a Virtual Hub that does just that, enabling operators to offer digital content, such as classes and PT sessions via a digital hybrid-membership.

This isn't the same as providing Facebook or Instagram Live classes. It's an entirely bespoke system that's measurable and can deliver commercial returns to operators from day one.



Anytime Fitness in the Philippines has already seen a 14.2 per cent increase in PT revenue and a US\$1m increase in overall revenue by working with Volution on data analytics and digitisation, not to mention that 50 per cent of members who've signed up to the Anytime Fitness Virtual Hub so far are using assisted services for the very first time, enhancing their engagement with the brand.

### Virtual engagement

This leads us to virtual engagement – a trending topic – but what exactly does it mean?

In the 'real world', engagement occurs every time somebody visits your facility and interacts with your brand, staff and equipment. Virtual engagement is about replicating these 'real life' interactions, online or through technology, to increase the affinity between your facility and members.

Using a virtual platform, you can learn which classes, PTs, or kit have the highest and lowest attendance and usage. From there, you can swap to higher performing – both online and offline – and see the effect this has on penetration rates, attendance, and lifetime value of members via your Volution dashboard.

### What is Volution?

Volution is a software company offering a suite of digital management and experience delivery tools, including business intelligence, retention technology, club management, lead generation, promotion and club management. Volution also supplies the systems needed to deliver virtual training.

### Data analytics

The Volution data analytics system has been developed in partnership with big-name fitness brands, such as Anytime Fitness, Fitness World and REPS UAE, to integrate seamlessly with existing software across any fitness business.

Volution plugs directly into your current IT framework, connecting with all systems via secure APIs, ensuring there's no disruption to your day-to-day operations or your business.

### Volution dashboard

A fully customisable Volution dashboard gives you sight of every metric that's crucial to a range of management controls, including attracting new members in real time, reducing member churn and enabling you to sustain revenues.

You can also see your sales and financial data, marketing activity, gym machine usage, staff reports, PT performance and class booking overviews.

The dashboard highlights key trends in customer behaviour, demographics, monthly spend, inventory and churn rates, giving you a detailed picture of how your communities are behaving at any given time, directing decisions relating to your member attraction and engagement strategies.

It also enables you to assess the popularity of various products, equipment, instructors and classes, to truly see what your members like.

The system is customised to your needs, to ensure a seamless fit and works for all operator types, including franchise, single-site and multi-site operations.

Get a demo at [www.volution.fit](http://www.volution.fit)

Volution has developed a range of customisable tools and solutions for health and fitness operators

*If you're ready  
to embrace the  
digital world,  
Volution is  
here to help*

Virtual engagement is about using data to establish what works and what doesn't, to give members more of what they want, at the times they want it, through their preferred channels, ultimately, providing them with the best experience possible to secure their loyalty.

**Find out which workouts are most valued, at home and in-club, to increase engagement**

### Experience economy

Some operators have focused on the traditional brick and mortar facade of gyms and health clubs and relied on the goodwill and self-motivation of members and customers to continue to attend.

However, we've moved into an experience economy and genuine commercial and business value is generated by goodwill, loyalty and member engagement. Now's the time to approach member engagement differently, to ensure you're hitting the right notes to enhance their experience and increase lifetime value.

In the fitness industry, F45 is a brand that's nailing member engagement, largely as a result of its instructors' ability to create a genuine community. Although this is more achievable at clubs with smaller memberships, it's perfectly possible to recreate this outcome in larger volume gyms by utilising the power of data.

### The power of better systems

Some operators are still working with old data and software systems, which can be limited in scope and laborious and time-consuming to use.

The prospect of change can be daunting, with misconceptions around processes, price, implementation and even capability and this can lead to change-paralysis, although typically, this is based on perception, rather than reality.

This paralysis can come from previous experiences, but this is a fast moving field and

providers and solutions have advanced. The sector is far more sophisticated, and – most importantly – more user-friendly than ever before, so now is the time to consider upgrading.

### Easy to implement

To give an example, Volution's solutions don't require businesses to change tech platforms, instead, we develop and integrate new and high performing applications with existing systems to enable businesses to have greater visibility of data, gained from multiple data sources, which in turn can improve business performance.

### Embracing digital in 2021

It's an interesting landscape we're all navigating at the moment and one which will see changes and challenges as we enter 2021. Investing in data and virtual engagement is an operator's best point of defence and attack as we enter this new stage in the development of the industry.

If you're ready to embrace the digital world, Volution is here to help. We don't have a product to sell, but instead we work with brands in the industry to consult, advise, and genuinely deliver results which strengthen the operation.

Your data is our passion, and together, we can trailblaze a bold new world of hybrid gyms and experience-based offerings that epitomise the customer-centric approach to enable your facility to be successful – now and in the years to come. ●



## Connect the dots between home fitness and the gym experience to completely unite your fitness ecosystem in this new age

Volution works with operators and fitness brands like you to create innovative solutions, with data as the lifeblood.

Whether it's creating virtual hubs to drive member engagement and lifetime value or using data forensics to create a more efficient operation, Volution will integrate your current systems and processes to enable you to stand out from the crowd and grow your business.

To understand how you can better utilise the data at your fingertips simply visit: [www.volution.fit](http://www.volution.fit)

Download the brand new playbook about driving virtual member engagement: [www.volution.fit/playbook](http://www.volution.fit/playbook)



VOLUTION



# THE LAY OF THE LAND

*Five months after the start of lockdown, Leisure-net did a survey to gauge how public sector operators and industry suppliers are faring*

**T**he UK's public leisure sector has faced unprecedented challenges this year. Lockdown and social distancing measures since government restrictions eased have placed immense financial pressure on local authority leisure, sport and activity providers.

In an attempt to understand just how the public sector is faring, Leisure-net Solutions surveyed operators across the UK as part of its Industry Confidence Survey series.

An inaugural survey had been undertaken at the start of lockdown in March and provided insight into how the sector was feeling. Five months on, this follow-up survey once again

gauged views to determine how confident public sector operators feel about the future and whether their situation is improving or deteriorating now facilities are starting to reopen.

The second survey elicited twice as many responses as the first, so when comparing the March survey results with the latest one, it's important to note that the results will be affected by the different samples, however, the analysis shows useful trends.

## Trusts hit harder than councils

Public sector operators have been significantly affected by the pandemic, with 88 per cent of them saying the impact has been extreme.

They've adopted a number of measures in response, the most common of which are reducing capacity, moving to online-only booking systems and cutting opening hours.

The data shows that three quarters (75 per cent) of external partners – organisations operating more than two contracts on behalf of local authorities – and just over half (56 per cent) of leisure trusts have made staff redundancies, compared to only 13 per cent of local authorities.

## Adopting technology

External partners and leisure trusts have been much more active in reducing opening hours and permanently closing sites/services than local authorities. They are also more ready to adopt new digital offerings, with 75 per cent of external partners and 72 per cent of trusts looking to invest in technology, compared to just 38 per cent of local authorities.

The majority of operators (83 per cent) believe the impact of COVID-19 will be extremely significant in the short-term, up from just 17 per cent in

DMITRY ZINKEVICH/SHUTTERSTOCK



**EOD**

**External partners and trusts are more likely to adopt digital offerings**

EVERYONE ONLINE/EVERYONE ACTIVE

Trusts and external partner organisations have cut services significantly more than local authorities



March, while 48 per cent believe this impact will be sustained in the medium term, compared to 34 per cent in March.

#### Long term prospects

In the long-term, 76 per cent of operators believe the pandemic will significantly impact business. Leisure trusts appear to be most worried about the impact of COVID-19 in the short- to medium-term, although only a third (33 per cent) believe it will be extremely significant in the long term, leaving 67 per cent who feel more positive about longer-term prospects.

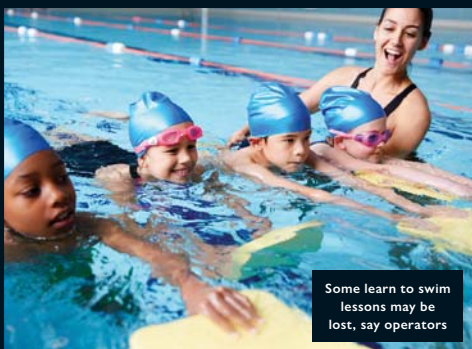
The majority of public sector operators – around 60 per cent – are confident their business will survive the next 12 months, with 40 per cent less certain.

#### Suppliers are more optimistic

With their ability to trade with the more buoyant private sector and also direct to consumers – in some cases – Leisure-net found suppliers far more optimistic.

Only 39 per cent reported the impact of the pandemic had been extreme, while 75 per cent said they didn't think it would have a long-term impact on their business. In addition, 89 per cent said they still expect to be in business next year.

**To order a copy of the report, email: [davidmonkhouse@leisure-net.org](mailto:davidmonkhouse@leisure-net.org)**



Some learn to swim lessons may be lost, say operators

## A call to action #WorkOutToHelpOut

Survey respondents say it's time for government to act

**T**he Leisure-net UK research surveyed happiness levels among public sector operators and commercial suppliers in relation to the support and advice received from industry organisations and also from government, throughout the crisis.

In relation to support from industry associations, operators are much happier than suppliers with the support, with 40 per cent saying they're extremely happy, compared with just 21 per cent of suppliers.

By contrast, levels of happiness with the support and advice received by government have declined steeply, with 67 per cent of both operators and suppliers saying they are not at all happy – from 19 per cent in March.

The sector believes the government needs to provide support to ensure its survival. Some suggest support packages such as an equivalent to the UK government's campaign, #EatOutToHelpOut – with incentives encouraging people to get fit and boost their immunity to protect against the virus.

**Whatever this support is, it needs to happen soon, say operators.**

*“We need government to step up and save recreation, leisure and health buildings”*

*“Government support for the industry needs swift commitment and longevity in the event of future lockdown situations, to enable businesses to plan properly for the longer term and be realistic about what products, services and assets are viable”*

*“Sport and physical activity need to be identified as a preventative measure – for physical and mental health conditions – and awarded recognition in terms of funding, priority and status”*

## Precarious position

**Leisure-net found some public sector operators are facing tough challenges**

**T**he qualitative feedback received from respondents provides greater insight into the status of public leisure operators.

One of their chief concerns is their ability to withstand any future outbreaks of COVID-19 while they also report that a lack of investment in community facilities is likely to result in the loss of key services, hitting those who depend on these services the hardest.

One of the few positives to come out of the situation is that it has encouraged the sector to think differently, with one operator saying: "Whilst the impact has been severe, one upside is that it has challenged us to bring in new ways of working and technology that will be a positive for the future."

"The pressure is to get through the here and now before we start rebuilding again."

Another commented, "We will have to invent our own 'new norm' and build from there."

*Lockdown and government restrictions implemented since centres have reopened have left them in a vulnerable position, as these comments show:*

"We have a plan that will work for the time being, but there is no certainty that the government interventions will get us back to a normal situation. Thus, our fiscal situation will be unlikely to improve"

"I worry that operating under social distancing restrictions will continue for much longer than we anticipated – perhaps to mid-2021. Operating in these conditions is fundamentally a massive shrink in our business, and we still lose money every month in this scenario. It's not viable to carry current levels of fixed costs for this length of time"



**Respondents say commercial work will need to be the priority, to the detriment of community initiatives**

"We've been fortunate that we held some reserves and this money has been used to cover ongoing costs. However, we own our building and any repairs and breakdowns must be funded by ourselves. We feel that we have survived so far, but if we have a major structural problem in the next six months, we could face significant issues"

"The lockdown and heavy financial costs mean our contributions towards replacing a swimming pool have had to cease and delays will mean increased costs and potentially a threat of not being able to replace the pool before its scheduled closure in 2025"



“The ongoing fiscal situation will mean capital sums are harder to get and this may jeopardise plans”

“This is going to affect ordinary people and our grassroots organisations and may permanently alter or diminish their purpose in communities. When it comes to things like sports clubs, the options for learning to swim and back to health and health referral schemes, we'll have to focus on the commercial work that underpins these first, to the detriment of those services”

“

*Perhaps a ‘federal’ approach that sees local trusts retained, but with shared back of house services is the way forward?*

### Why leisure trusts feel more vulnerable than other operators

**Andy King, CEO of Link4Life** gives insights into the pressures being felt by trusts running local authority contracts



**M**any leisure trusts have reached the bottom of the well after making efficiencies and focusing on reducing management fees, instead of building up reserves.

We're acutely aware of the local situation and the demographics we serve and with some people losing what were often already low-paid jobs, users will be hard pressed to pay for leisure in the future, even with the generous targeted subsidies we all offer.

Research such as the Quest NBS (National Benchmark Survey) has shown that trusts often out-perform other providers in terms of efficiencies, but when a trust stands its ground and says it cannot do any more without capital investment, it's tempting for the client to reach for the procurement toolkit, because bigger must be better, right?

The drive to be ever more efficient means that development teams, nutritionists and outreach workers are sometimes jettisoned, despite the 'method statements' submitted as part of a bid. Prices creep up, clubs are squeezed out and the people who need access to our services suffer most.

I believe passionately that there's a place for larger organisations, and that collaboration is essential – not just between trusts but the entire public leisure sector – as we do across GM Active (Greater Manchester).

Having been a regional director of GLL, a director of Serco, the CEO of two trusts that merged and now the CEO of a standalone, single local authority partner, I can say that all models have strengths and weaknesses.

Local authorities decide which model they want and we have to respect their choices and work together across the public leisure sector to be more efficient and effective. Perhaps a 'federal' approach that sees local trusts retained but with shared back of house services is the way forward?

# Martland \* Holland \* Afeaki **GymNation**

Against the COVID odds, this Dubai-based operation has continued to grow through lockdown and its aftermath. The senior management team – Loren Holland, Frank Afeaki and Ant Martland – speak to Kate Cracknell

**WE ONLY NEED 3,000 MEMBERS  
TO BREAK EVEN. IT TAKES THE PRESSURE  
OFF WHEN YOU HIT THAT IN PRE-SALE**



PHOTO: JOHN HUSGAL AND PHOTOGRAPHY

**What was the idea behind GymNation?**

LH: We had grand ambitions, but the main point was to launch an affordable gym offering. As consumers ourselves, looking for a gym to join, we felt priced out of the market. When you're having to pay £100–150 a month just to use a very basic gym – and have to pay for the whole year upfront, as you do in Dubai – you really do struggle to justify it.

I knew lots of people who, back home in the UK, had been healthy, active and fit, but in Dubai all that stopped because of the barrier to entry: the price point.

Around the time we launched our first club in 2018, there was a study done by Deutsche Bank into the affordability of living in key cities around the world. One of the metrics was the cost of gym membership, and Dubai emerged as the second most expensive market in the world to have a gym membership, a close second to Tokyo. That reaffirmed everything we knew.

So, we wanted to launch an affordable gym business. But we also wanted to create a fantastic experience. GymNation isn't just a basic product for an affordable price tag. Ours are high quality gyms with a really cool vibe.

**What do you charge?**

FA: Our publicised pre-sale deal is AED99 a month, and if you join up on that rate, you keep it for a lifetime – or at least, until you leave or add optional extras. If you do leave and then re-join, and you manage to secure that rate again via pre-sale at another of our clubs, then again you can keep that rate for as long as you want.

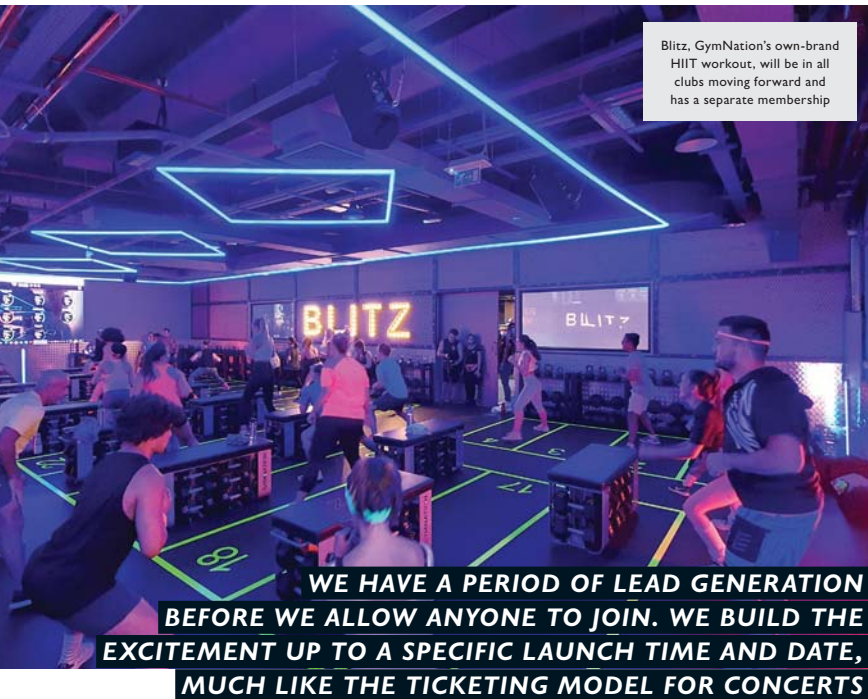
We tend to have a set number of memberships available at that AED99 price point, but even after that it only goes up slightly: price points are generally sitting at around AED139–149 a month across our sites at the moment. And that's still affordable, considering that the average price of gyms here is around AED350–400 a month, and you have to pre-pay for a 12-month period as well. It prices a lot of people out of fitness, because some salaries are only AED4,500–5,000 a month.

AM: We have two options: a minimum 12-month commitment or a slightly more expensive 'cancel any time you like', no-contract option. Most members take the contracted option, because we do let people out of it if they're relocating, if they're injured or ill and have a doctor's note, or if they have any big change in circumstances such as redundancy.



GymNation offers a mix of Les Mills group exercise classes and its own freestyle classes

Blitz, GymNation's own-brand HIIT workout, will be in all clubs moving forward and has a separate membership



**So, you really are the first budget gym operator in Dubai?**

LH: We are, to the point that when we announced AED99 a month memberships, people accused us of being scam artists! They just didn't believe it could be done or could be true.

FA: During the first pre-sale, people would come down to our office to see us and we'd try to sell this amazing AED99 gym off a piece of paper. We were trying to paint a picture to them, and some people really just joined thinking 'worst case scenario I lose AED99'.

Until we opened, we were trying to explain something they were struggling to imagine.

LH: But when we opened, it was actually even better than the renders and pictures. People normally expect the final product not to be as good as the graphics you produce, but we over-delivered and the members were just blown away.

**What do members get for their AED99 a month?**

LH: Our clubs, and the studios within them, are the biggest in Dubai and are open 24/7. Our gym floors typically have around 500 pieces of Matrix kit, alongside which we have three or four studios in each club, including one that's dedicated to virtual, with classes rolling back-to-back around the clock. Each club also has a women-only gym.

AM: We have a huge class timetable – 200 classes a week in every club – with at least 40 per cent of members engaging in group exercise.

We offer a full range of Les Mills classes and also have our own freestyle classes. The most popular class we offer is our rebounder workout – Jump Nation. That's been a huge success: we've had reports of people staying up 'til midnight to book the trampolines, because they sell out in the first hour of the timetable becoming available to book.

FA: Bear in mind, these studios can hold 70–80 people, but the classes are still jam-packed every time.

LH: We've also just launched our own in-house boutique HIIT concept called Blitz – a bootcamp workout – which we built into all our existing gyms during lockdown and which will be in all clubs moving forward. Members need a Blitz membership to access these.

**Any other optional add-ons?**

LH: We have about 20 PTs in every club through our partnership with Enhance Fitness and personal training is very popular with members. There's also a Muay Thai club which is run by Jason Woodham, a former fighter and probably one of the world's best Muay Thai instructors.

FA: We've also partnered with an external company, Kcal, for the nutritional side of our offering – vital in a country where you can get literally any food delivered to you at any time of the day or night!

**WE'RE GETTING HIGH USAGE: TYPICALLY  
2,000 VISITS A DAY. WE'VE ALREADY  
CELEBRATED OUR MILLIONTH MEMBER VISIT**



GymNation offers around 200 group exercise classes a week in each club

A photograph of three men standing in a gym. The man on the left is wearing a black polo shirt with a yellow 'G' logo. The man in the middle is wearing a black long-sleeved shirt with a yellow 'G' logo and blue jeans. The man on the right is wearing a black t-shirt with a yellow 'G' logo. They are all smiling. In the background, there is a brick wall with neon signs that say 'SO TODAY' and 'TR'.

## Meet the GymNation team

### Ant Martland

Ant Martland joined GymNation as director of marketing at the start of pre-sale for the first site. Already based in Dubai for 12 years, he brought with him a wealth of sports and fitness marketing experience from brands including Adidas, Reebok and Emirati satellite TV provider OSN, as well as freelance work in the gym sector. Lured by the chance to join a start-up, and already convinced of the need for affordable fitness in Dubai, he set out to create differentiated marketing in a UAE fitness market which had, he felt, "become stale".

### Loren Holland

In a former life in private equity, Loren Holland invested in UK-based budget gym operator Xercise4Less. Moving from the UK to Dubai and looking for a gym to join himself, he was shocked by the universally high price tags; knowing the low-cost model well, he identified a gap to launch a value-based proposition in Dubai.

### Frank Afeaki

Frank Afeaki arrived in Dubai with hands-on experience of the fitness sector: his family had Crunch, UFC and Hard Candy franchises in Australia and he had worked in the business for five years. Arriving in Dubai with no job lined up, he couldn't afford a gym membership and started to think along similar lines to Holland. So when the two met through their wives and started chatting over a few beers, they soon hatched a plan to launch GymNation.

We have Fuel Up areas in our clubs which provide nutritional advice, and members can get their body fat percentage checked on demand to establish their BMI – that sort of thing. They can then get meal plans delivered to the gym or to their house, including healthy dishes that are ready to heat up and eat.

**How do you deliver all this for such a low fee?**

LH: We're far lower in price than other operators – a third to a quarter of average gym membership fees – but we compensate with huge volumes. Our clubs are typically over 30,000sq ft: our flagship – the first club we opened, on Sheikh Zayed Road – is 40,000sq ft, and as we speak to you now we're sat in our 50,000sq ft Mirdif gym, which is under fit-out at the moment.

We can therefore get to 10,000+ members in each of our clubs. And we get there quickly. We opened Sheikh Zayed Road with 5,000 members on day one, and matured that to 10,000 members within the first year.

Then we cut costs where we can. You'll be familiar with the no-frills model, but for example there's

no towel service. We don't have swimming pools, saunas or steamrooms either, which are some of the highest CapEx and OpEx areas of the gym.

**What's the secret of your impressive pre-sale figures?**

FA: It's credit to Ant and his innovative ways. Back in Australia, it was all about grinding the street and handing out flyers, but Ant's got us to a point where our lead generation leans heavily on social media.

AM: Typically, before the gym even opens, we have a period of maybe two months' data collection and lead generation before we allow anyone to join. We build the excitement up to a specific date when the portal will open to take payments. It's much like the ticketing models for concerts.

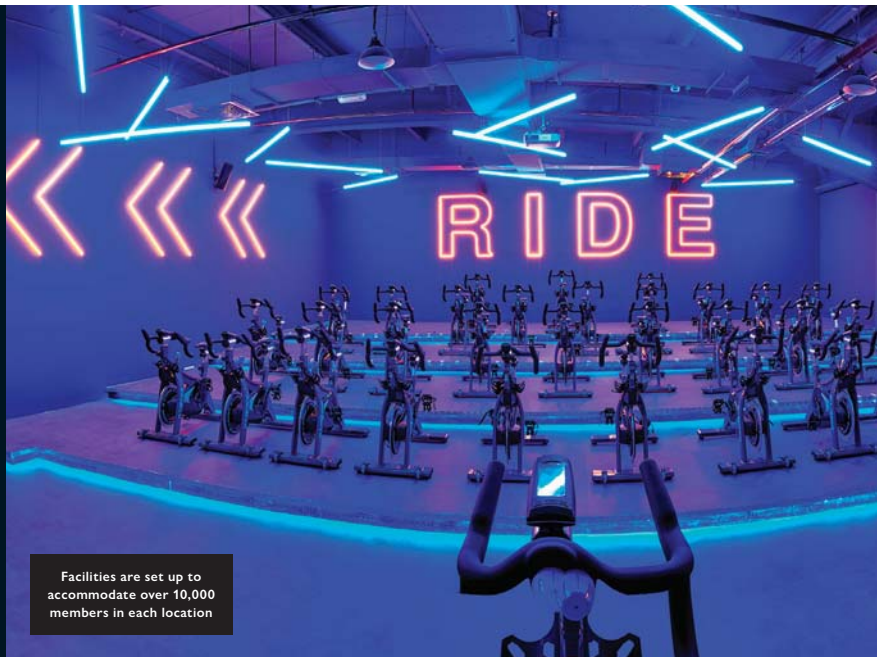
In our Abu Dhabi site, which we launched for pre-sale just before COVID, we did 2,200 transactions in 24 hours.

**What's your target market?**

AM: Age-wise, the core target group is 18–34 – about 65 per cent of members are in that category

**CURRENCY  
CONVERTER**

AED99 =  
\$25.50/£20.50



Facilities are set up to accommodate over 10,000 members in each location



Fuel Up cafés offer nutrition consultations, while bodyweight analysis and home food deliveries are also available



**WE HAVE A VERY  
MIXED DEMOGRAPHIC,  
WHICH IS SOMETHING  
PEOPLE SAID WOULD  
NEVER HAPPEN.  
SOMEONE WHO EARNS  
A MINIMUM WAGE  
CAN BE TRAINING AND  
SOCIALISING ALONGSIDE  
A BILLIONAIRE**

— with roughly a 65-35 male-female split.

But beyond age and gender, the profile varies significantly across our clubs. Dubai is a melting pot of cultures and demographics and we cater for a wide range of nationalities.

If you go to our Al Quoz gym in the morning, you'll predominantly find European and Western expats. Towards the evening, the profile is more sub-continent, then later at night it's very Arab-focused. Meanwhile, at our second location in Bur Dubai, 95 per cent of members are from the sub-continent or the Philippines, and at our new gym in Motor City, the profile will be very expat led.

Each gym has its own target market, depending on the demographic of the population around it, and we cater the marketing accordingly – a heavy dose of Bollywood for Bur Dubai, for example.

LH: We call ourselves The People's Gym and we aim to make our clubs welcoming. A lot of gyms in Dubai focus on bodybuilding and are pretty intimidating for anyone who doesn't look like a fitness model. In our gyms, if you walk in a bit out of shape and just want to train a couple of times a week, you'll feel you belong.

We don't take ourselves too seriously. We have fun with our marketing. Combined with the way we've broken down barriers, particularly around affordability, the result is that about 30–40 per cent of our members are first-time gym-goers.



Jump Nation is the chain's most popular class, typically selling out within an hour

PHOTO: GYM NATION / ANDREW COLEMAN

## Investors & Believers

"We very carefully chose investors with a real estate background, intentionally staying away from anyone with a fitness background," explains GymNation co-founder Loren Holland. "We knew that here, in the local market, people wouldn't believe our model was possible, wouldn't believe it could be executed, so we decided to stay away from anyone who might want to change the model or not properly buy into it."

"Our investors funded the first site on a commitment that, if site number one went well, they would fund a rollout. And we absolutely delivered on site number one, so those original investors are still with us and supporting our growth plans."

"Actually we over-delivered. We hit 10,000 members at our first club within a year of opening, and our second and third sites – Bur Dubai and Ras



al Khaimah – are both going extremely well. They opened at the start of this year, in January and February, with 5,000 and 3,000 members respectively on day one. Typically we only need 3,000 members to break even, and it takes the pressure off when you hit that in pre-sale."

"We're getting really, really high usage too: typically around 2,000 member visits a day, and 1,000 even on our quietest days. Across our three clubs, we've already celebrated our millionth member visit."

"Market penetration in the UAE is around 5 per cent at present, but we expect it to grow to 15 per cent in the next five years."

We have a very mixed demographic at our clubs, which is something people said would never happen. In Dubai, each social group tends to have its own hangouts, with little mixing going on. What GymNation has proved, however – flying in the face of all the received wisdom – is that you can have someone who earns a minimum wage training and socialising alongside a billionaire.

We were told that would categorically not happen, would not be acceptable to the consumer. The three of us disagreed and we've absolutely proved it can work.

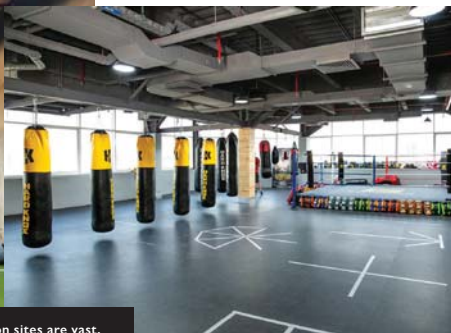
So, it isn't only price-sensitive people who join our gyms. Even those with plenty of money tell us they joined GymNation because it's the best gym in town.

## How popular is 24/7?

LH: 24/7 has been a huge success. Lots of people say their city is 24/7, but Dubai really is: you can go into restaurants and cafés at 4.00 or 5.00am and there will be people in there. If you go to Dubai Mall at 11 o'clock at night, there'll be families in there with children. It's probably driven by the airport, which is also 24/7, but Arab culture is just more nocturnal anyway: it's extremely hot during the day, so people are driven towards more nocturnal behaviour.

So yes, 24/7 has worked well for us. Come to any of our clubs at 4.00am and you'll find a decent number of people working out.

FA: Especially during Ramadan. You go in at 4.00am and it's just packed. Everyone is working out before they break their fast.



GymNation sites are vast, ranging from 30-50,000sq ft, allowing for large memberships



**OUR PRE-SALE DEAL IS AED99 A MONTH AND IF YOU JOIN UP ON THAT RATE YOU KEEP IT FOR A LIFETIME**

**LH:** We were the first gym in Dubai to go 24/7 and were always surprised that no-one else had done it.

The Economic Department here initially said no gyms were allowed to be 24/7, but we just kept going back and saying 'we want to be the first, we think there is demand, we'll do whatever it takes from a health and safety perspective for you to approve this'. And eventually they agreed to let us be the test case.

They're delighted with it now: all of our clubs got approval for 24/7 opening.

**FA:** We even get sign-ups at night. We put our night-time security guard onto a sales contract because he was signing so many people up: we're talking 25-30 sales a night between midnight and 6.00am. He now earns commission.

#### **How did COVID impact your business?**

**LH:** We obviously didn't bill people during the closure period, so we lost revenue and still had a lot of operating costs. Additionally, on re-opening, we lost quite a significant portion of our membership base: people were made redundant and went back to their home countries.

That has quite materially impacted us, but it has been significantly offset by new sales activity.

**AM:** We continued to sell memberships at our three existing clubs throughout lockdown, even though they were closed. People couldn't come to the gym, so we used the time for marketing and sold 2,000 new memberships. Meanwhile, actual pre-sales were also going on for the clubs that were still in fit-out.

**FA:** During that whole lockdown period, people realised health was important. They also realised there's only a certain level of exercise you can do – and will be motivated to do – at home.

As soon as the gyms were open again we were back to normal.

Due to the sheer size of our gyms and studios we can socially distance and still maintain close to previous capacities. The government here does COVID-19 spot checks on gyms. We've been checked more than 40 times now and have a 100 per cent pass rate, so our transmission control measures are working.

It's been almost like a Christmas/New Year period for us, with sales back to their highest



Members can buy unlimited BOXNATION classes as part of their membership

levels since reopening; we've had three months now where our sales have been, as a combined aggregate three months, the hottest sales period we've ever experienced as a business.

**AM:** Interestingly, we were keeping a close eye on what some of the big global players were doing during lockdown and I think we were one of very few operators that kept the marketing team working.

We kept the same messaging, we kept the ads, and in some cases, especially building up to the re-opening, actually increased the budget to help satisfy the interest that was there.

### What are your plans moving forward?

**LH:** COVID was a major disruption, but in terms of our objectives for the end of this year, nothing's changed. We believe our business, our brand, our whole proposition can comfortably trade through this challenging period, so we decided to invest through the cycle.

We currently have two gyms open in Dubai and one in Ras al Khaimah, with a number in pre-sale, including the Abu Dhabi club we mentioned earlier.

By the end of this year, we'll have opened eight clubs and are aiming to reach 50,000 members.

What's been very pleasing is that the pre-sales launched immediately after lockdown have gone very well. We've hit all of our original budgets, which has justified our decision to keep the investment in place and to get our new clubs open.

So I think we've weathered the storm well. We've traded throughout the crisis, and although the market will contract – globally and

specifically here in our market – we believe we can take market share through having a fantastic product that people will happily buy into.

People were already crying out for us to open in their area: we put social media ads up sometimes, asking where GymNation should open next, and we get floods of requests. And now more than ever, given the economic climate post-COVID, there's a likelihood that people will choose to pay AED99 a month for their gym membership rather than AED400–500.

### Fast-forward beyond 2020, what are your plans?

**LH:** Off the back of the success we've had here in the UAE, we want to do further business here: we'll have one club open in Abu Dhabi by the end of the year and there's scope for plenty more there, and we'd like to have a GymNation in each of the Emirates.

We'd also like to roll the brand out across the GCC (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates).

Saudi Arabia, for example, is a market of 30 million people, compared to 6–7 million in the UAE. We've already started our due diligence there and many of the characteristics of the Saudi market are the same as the UAE, with expensive gym membership and comparatively low sophistication among current operators.

We believe it's ready for the GymNation concept and hope to have the same success there as in the UAE in terms of breaking down the barriers around intimidation and affordability. ●

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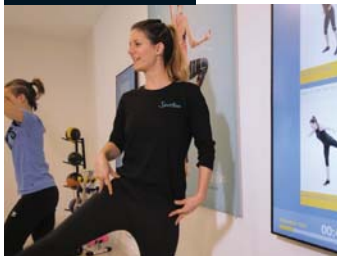




Function has installed a digital circuit for Sporteve



Instructors can spend more time with members



## Digital gym floor

**Sporteve has enhanced its in-club digital experience by working with Funxtion to install multiscreens to power the member experience**

Sporteve, a growing chain of women-only workout spaces, with nearly 30 sites operating across Germany, decided to partner with Funxtion – experts in interactive digital fitness, to integrate digital capabilities onto the gym floor environment, enhancing the training experience for both members and instructors.

Detlef Garburg, executive director of Sporteve explains: "We identified a need to differentiate our offer in what is becoming an increasingly competitive market. We wanted to elevate our member experience to the next level and also optimise the level of coaching and support our gym floor trainers were providing. Funxtion's MultiScreen Solution offered us the perfect solution."

### Adding digital circuits

"Digitalisation is impacting all aspects of life and we wanted to make sure we were aligned to consumer needs and demands. Our members are used to making purchases online, enjoying subscription based on-demand entertainment at home and having fingertip access to unlimited information from their mobile devices.

"Integrating a digital circuit into our training provision seemed like a natural progression."

Depending on the space available at each site, the Sporteve team has positioned three of four Funxtion MultiScreen Solution units to create a digital workout circuit. Each screen



***This partnership allows Sporteve to enhance their offer to a much more engaged, connected level for members***

**Ernst De Neef, Funxtion**

demonstrates a unique exercise for a pre-programmed time frame. Once this comes to an end, members are promoted to move on to the next screen, or exercise station. This enables them to enjoy an effective circuit concurrently, ensuring a delivery of a social setting where varying abilities can all train safely alongside each other.

### Instructor engagement

"The beauty of this setup is that instructors can focus their time with members who most need it, safe in the knowledge that the other participants are supported by the on-screen coaching," says Garburg. "We installed this solution to enhance gym floor instruction, never to replace it. Members can also self-activate the digital circuit, allowing them to work out at times most convenient to them.



***We wanted to elevate our member experience to the next level and also optimise the level of coaching on offer***

**Detlef Garburg, Sporteve**

"The quality of the provision is second to none. All recorded exercise demonstrations are performed by real people, not animations and we felt this was important to promote a closer connection for our members, who are mostly busy seniors with limited or no previous gym experience, so it is key that any new introductions to our offering are simple and safe," he explained.

Ernst De Neef, CEO, Funxtion adds: "This partnership allows Sporteve to enhance their offer to a much more engaged, connected level for members. They can now differentiate their product and the integration of digital circuits has provided a unique service to attract and retain members, whilst aiding staff." ●

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Find out more: [www.funxtion.com](http://www.funxtion.com)



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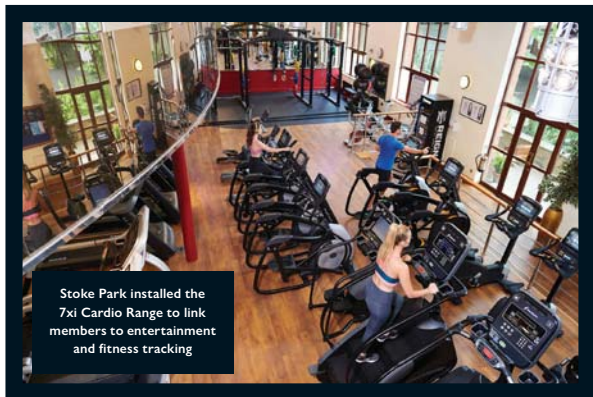
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**MX4**  
By **MATRIX**



**Prestigious estate, Stoke Park, has invested in a new fitness technology upgrade by Matrix**



Stoke Park installed the 7xi Cardio Range to link members to entertainment and fitness tracking

## Positive feedback

**W**ith a recorded history of over 900 years, Stoke Park is steeped in history and remains one of the most prestigious estates in the country. With a reputation for the highest quality, Stoke Park decided to refurbish its 4,000sq ft gym earlier this year, with the latest in fitness technology from Matrix Fitness.



***"Stoke Park is renowned for the highest of standards, so it was imperative that we worked with the perfect supplier partner"***

Sarah Westbrook-Burr, Stoke Park

The aim of this project was to enhance the digital offer of the fitness facilities, as well as create a user-friendly member experience which was in keeping with the other high-quality facilities that the estate is so famous for.

Sarah Westbrook-Burr, head of fitness at Stoke Park, explains: "The driving force behind this installation was to provide first-class, easy to use digital fitness upgrades to enhance the experience for all of our members and visitors, giving them a seamless and connected member journey through their workout. Stoke Park is renowned for the highest of standards, so it was imperative that we worked with the perfect supplier partner."

As part of the upgrade, Stoke Park opted to install the latest Matrix Fitness 7xi Cardio Range to provide a digital, fully connected way to link users to entertainment, effective fitness tracking and brand-building communication whilst they work out.

The project also incorporated the Matrix Magnum Mega Double Rack functional frame, which is a combination of two racks and custom connection elements, so that sites can tailor their functional training options to their facility and audience.

She continues: "We've had really positive feedback from both members and our fitness team. They all love the connectivity, visuals and entertainment options that the new Matrix cardio range brings. The style of the equipment is in keeping with our premium offering and Matrix was fantastic to work



***Premium fitness suites and versatile gym designs are playing an increasingly vital role in the spa and hospitality sector***

Nigel Tapping, Matrix Fitness UK

with throughout the entire project, supporting us from start to finish."

The upgrades to the fitness suite reinforce the offering that Stoke Park provides its visitors and members across the entire estate.

Nigel Tapping, head of sales – spa and hospitality at Matrix Fitness UK adds: "Stoke Park is rich in heritage, so it was vital for us that we help provide a fitness suite to match their other award-winning facilities.

"Premium fitness suites and versatile gym designs are playing an increasingly vital role in the spa and hospitality sector and it has been fantastic to collaborate with the team at Stoke Park to provide a cutting-edge, digital member experience."

The new fitness equipment was installed in May 2020, and has since been highlighted as a key motivator in attracting members and visitors back to Stoke Park since lockdown restrictions have eased. ●

Find out more: [www.matrixfitness.co.uk](http://www.matrixfitness.co.uk)



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The gym specialises in bodyweight training, so kit has a minimal presence

#### PHYSICAL KIT LIST

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- 8mm flooring
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- Storage units
- Custom-branded benches

## The personal touch

**SIX3NINE opened its second London studio in August, and will continue to partner with Physical Company as it aims to open up to five studios across the city**

**W**hen personal training brand SIX3NINE – operating in London’s Covent Garden since 2012 – decided to open its second London-based studio, it turned to Physical Company to help replicate the atmosphere and brand of its inaugural site.

SIX3NINE’s Dan Baldwin explains: “It wasn’t just about bringing across the décor and logo, although Physical Company absolutely delivered here through custom-branded equipment, it was about ensuring the whole place feels like the first site: the flow between equipment, the floor space, the cool selection of kit.”

Innovative design helped achieve this goal. “For example, building squat racks and Olympic lifting platforms into the floor has created a seamless flow around the gym,” says Baldwin.

Crucially, Baldwin also wanted smaller equipment to be as multi-functional as possible, given the one big difference between site one and this new site off Liverpool Street: the addition of a studio for group exercise and small group training. “Having equipment that can be moved from one area to another, and that has more than one function, is very useful,” he says.



**“What really stood out, and the reason we would definitely work with Physical again, was the customer service”**

Dan Baldwin, SIX3NINE



**“It has been a pleasure to work with SIX3NINE on creating the best possible space to support its training ethos”**

James Anderson, Physical Company

#### ‘Brilliant’ storage

Storage was another key requirement, as Baldwin explains: “Our training focuses on free weights and bodyweight, teaching clients to better use their bodies through everyday movements.

“To reinforce the idea that your body is the equipment, we wanted people’s first reaction to be: ‘Where’s all the kit?’ Physical Company’s storage solutions are brilliant in this respect, seamlessly blending our equipment into the background when not in use.”

He continues: “But what really stood out, and the reason we would definitely work with Physical again for future sites, was the customer service. From our first meeting, it was such an easy relationship: the way they handled our account and our needs was so personal and so responsive.”

Physical Company sales and marketing director James Anderson comments: “With its focus on quality – on creating the best possible space to support its training ethos – it has been an absolute pleasure to work with SIX3NINE on this project. We very much look forward to supporting the team as the brand continues to grow.”

Find out more:  
[www.physicalcompany.co.uk](http://www.physicalcompany.co.uk)

# PRODUCT INNOVATION

Lauren Heath-Jones rounds up the latest product launches in health and fitness



Keepme's new platform will help operators retain members, explains **Ian Mullane**

**K**eepme has launched its new V2 platform, which uses artificial intelligence to help operators monitor their customer journey and tell how and when to engage members who are in danger of leaving.

The sales and marketing platform builds on the original version of Keepme, blending AI, operational tools and a unique automation engine to streamline actions in order to attract, retain and re-engage health club members.



## V2 presents a genuine step-change in club technology

Ian Mullane

At its heart is the AI engine, which helps operators make data-driven decisions to maximise revenue and integrate different tools.

The AI has the ability to evaluate each lead and funnel

them into tailored sales flows, while the sales playbooks and automations ensure every lead is followed up.

"Following the fallout from COVID-19, it's more important now than ever for fitness operators to understand their customers and I'm confident that Keepme V2 will give the industry the necessary tools to tackle its challenges," said Ian Mullane, founder and CEO.

"V2 presents a step change in club technology, enabling operators to increase profitability at every stage of the membership lifecycle."

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

KEEPME



Keepme's V2 platform uses AI to retain members

MZ-Remote enables participants to get heart rate feedback from wherever they work out, says **Dave Wright**

**M**Z-Remote is a live virtual gym training tool that displays the heart rate feedback of all participants on one screen, no matter where they work out.

MZ-Remote allows operators to digitise their offer and add value to members by streaming live workouts, while simultaneously tracking the heart rate display of participants.

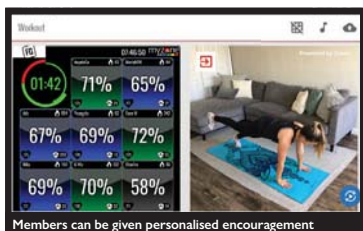
When paired with the Zoom streaming platform, the solution allows instructors to monitor the collective effort of all class participants and provide individual encouragement.

The technology enables operators to recreate the club experience for their members, whether they choose to work



## Operators can add value for members

Dave Wright



Members can be given personalised encouragement

out at the gym, from home, in the garden or at the park.

Members book sessions through the Myzone app – MZ Book – to create a virtual at-home studio, complete with real-time effort feedback and instructor guidance. They can also see how they're

performing against their fellow participants, helping to drive friendly competition, motivation and results.

MZ-Remote is free of charge to Myzone customers.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

MYZONE



*Opportunities for club growth through a connected member experience are huge*

Martin Franklin



Clubs can now offer Les Mills classes via live stream

## You can go hybrid with Les Mills' blended digital solutions, says **Martin Franklin**

Les Mills has launched a trio of digital solutions to help fitness operators shift towards a hybrid model.

The three newly-launched solutions include a Les Mills On Demand Affiliate Programme, enhanced livestream workouts and app-based workout content.

With the new Affiliate Programme, clubs can create

a holistic fitness journey for members by providing home workouts via Les Mills On Demand and receiving a share of the revenue for each sign-up. Members have access to the full LMOD ecosystem, including Les Mills workouts, training programmes and community support.

The new enhanced livestream workouts mean

that clubs and studios offering live Les Mills classes can now deliver them to members via livestream.

Meanwhile, with the new app-based content, clubs can bring Les Mills workouts into their own member app without separate investment and mass content creation.

"We're now entering a new age of fitness, where clubs

are uniquely placed to meet growing consumer demand for a blend between online and offline fitness services," said Martin Franklin, Les Mills Europe CEO.

"Opportunities for club growth through a connected member experience are huge."

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

**LES MILLS**

## The Life Fitness Axiom Series features upgraded biomechanics and inviting design, explains **Dan Wille**

Life Fitness has unveiled Axiom Series, a comprehensive line of strength equipment featuring 10 single-exercise and eight dual-exercise selectorised machines, a dual adjustable pulley, and 12 benches and racks.

Axiom Series single and dual exercise selectorised machines are designed with a low-profile tower that allows clear sightlines across the floor.

To ensure exercisers have a smooth and comfortable experience, Axiom Series utilises high-quality weight stacks, guide rods, pulleys and cables, in addition to a standard accessory tray on top of each tower to store a water bottle, towel or mobile phone. Customers can also

choose between a rear shroud only or full shroud solution depending on the design of their facility.

"We're thrilled to expand our industry-leading strength portfolio with the Axiom Series to offer fitness facilities a single, complete



*The Axiom Series will upgrade the look and experience of any facility*

Dan Wille



The Axiom Series allows for clear sight across the floor

solution for strength training," said Dan Wille, the global vice president of marketing and product development at Life Fitness.

"We've listened to feedback from our customers and we're excited for them to experience the full breadth and versatility of this line. The Axiom lineup features a fresh, inviting design with upgraded biomechanics and is the perfect solution to upgrade

the look and strength training experience of any facility."

Life Fitness Axiom Series benches and racks offer wide-ranging solutions for both storage and training.

The Axiom Series dual adjustable pulley is a centrepiece for functional strength training with a wide range of training options.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

**LIFE FITNESS**

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Exercise strengthens the brain's resilience

SHUTTERSTOCK/ACCOLLINO

# Stress buster

A new study suggests that exercise leads to elevated galanin levels – which in turn helps the brain's stress response, giving more resilience. Tom Walker reports

A study by researchers at Emory University in the US has shown exercise can strengthen the brain's resilience to stress, by elevating levels of the neuropeptide, galanin.

The research team studied two groups – a sedentary group and one that exercised regularly. They measured anxious behaviour in the test subjects 24 hours after an artificially created stressful event.

Those who exercised regularly showed less anxious behaviour after the stressful event compared to those that didn't exercise.

## Elevated levels of galanin

The exercise group had elevated galanin levels in the locus coeruleus, a cluster of neurons in the brainstem that are involved in the stress response.

Crucially, the amount of time spent exercising correlated with the amount of galanin in the locus coeruleus, which in turn correlated with the degree of stress resilience.

“The findings of this research could help explain the link between exercise and relieving stress – which, apart from there being a plethora of anecdotal evidence – has not been well understood by scientists

The findings could help explain the link between exercise and relieving stress – which, apart from a plethora of anecdotal evidence, isn't well understood by scientists.

## More reliable than drugs

“Increased physical activity is associated with stress resilience in humans, but the neurobiological mechanisms underlying this effect are not clear,” explained the researchers.

“The neuropeptide galanin has been implicated in stress-related neuropsychiatric disorders in humans,” said researchers.

“While pharmacological treatments for these disorders are ineffective for many individuals, the research

study found that physical activity is beneficial,” said the research team.

“This study shows that genetic overexpression of galanin in noradrenergic neurons causes resilience to a stressor and the anxiogenic effects of optogenetic locus coeruleus activation.

“These findings support a role for chronically increased noradrenergic galanin in mediating resilience to stress,” they concluded.

● The study, titled *Chronic environmental or genetic elevation of galanin in noradrenergic neurons confers stress resilience*, was published in the *Journal of Neuroscience*.

Find out more about this research at: [www.HCMmag.com/galanin](http://www.HCMmag.com/galanin)

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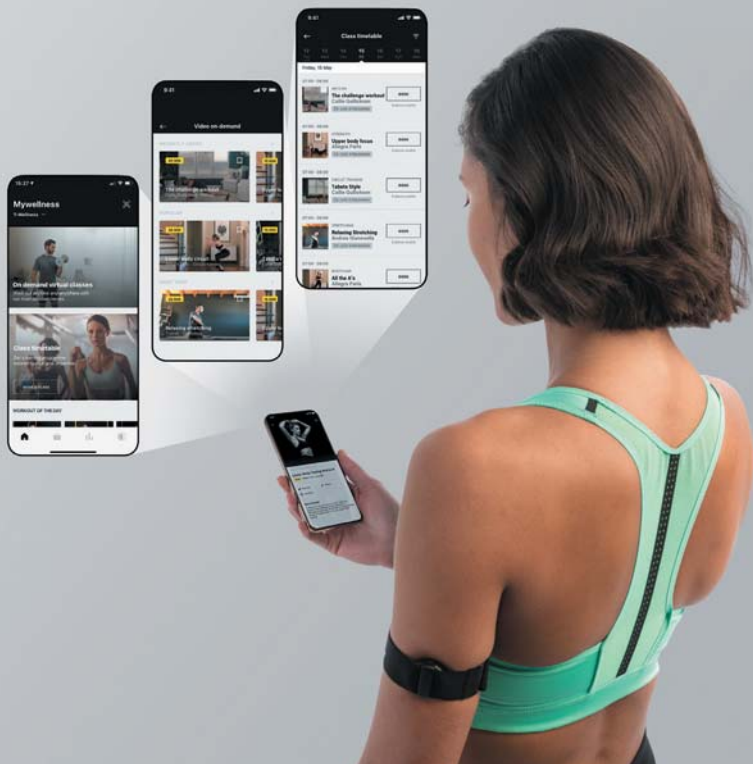
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