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INTERVIEW

RICHARD
MILLMAN

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talks about working
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robust response

Facts about the state of the health and fitness market have rarely been more eagerly awaited than those contained in this year's *FIA State of the UK Fitness Industry* report which was published towards the end of last month by The Leisure Database Company, in partnership with the FIA.

The big question preoccupying industry leaders has been how robust our sector will prove to be in the face of recession.

Although operators are reporting tough trading conditions, with some slipping into a loss, so far it appears their situation is sustainable and there have been few casualties. This is borne out by the State of the Industry data which shows the sector is proving remarkably resilient in the face of the downturn.

Researchers analysed the 12 months to 31 March 2009, with an audit covering 6,000 health clubs. The industry scored well in a number of areas, including growth in membership numbers and fees. It also found a steady stream of new facility openings in both the public and private sectors.

In the private sector, 64 new health clubs opened and 66,444 new members joined, creating a 1 per cent like-for-like membership increase. Monthly membership fees increased from an average of £42.37 in 2008 to £42.91 in 2009 – a below inflation increase, but an increase nonetheless.

Researchers calculated the market value of private clubs by multiplying the number of members by the average adult membership cost to arrive at a valuation for the year of £2.70bn – a 3.2 per cent increase on the previous year.

In the public sector, investment in wellness saw 50 new fitness facilities opened, with 52,534 additional memberships signed. Public sector market value, calculated on the same basis as the private sector, grew by 2.3 per cent during the

survey period, taking its value to £1.07bn. As the public sector doesn't have a profit motive, this is less relevant, however, it acts as a benchmark and shows the public sector has grown to rival the private sector in scale and scope.

The State of the Industry findings give a total market value of £3.77bn for the public and private sectors combined, representing a 3 per cent increase on the previous 12 month period.

On the participation front, researchers found that 12.1 per cent of the UK population, or around one in eight people, is currently registered as a member of a club – either public or private sector.

Commenting on the findings, Sport England CEO Jennie Price, said: "These figures tally with the latest findings from Sport England's Active People Survey, which found that regular participation in sport has increased by half a million people since 2005/06."

The year to March 2009 included one quarter of sound trading before the impact of the global slowdown began to bite and a second quarter before recession began. This means these numbers have benefited from the tail-end of the strong trading of early 2008. Nevertheless, the fact that the numbers have remained positive in spite of the difficult market conditions since last summer is extremely heartening. It will be interesting to see how things look this time next year so we can understand more fully how the industry has dealt with the full effects of recession.

Liz Terry, editor

email: healthclub@leisuremedia.com



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CONTACT US The Leisure Media Company Ltd, Portmill House, Portmill Lane, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG5 1DJ UK

SUBS Tel: +44 (0)1462 471915 Fax: +44 (0)1462 433909

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Subscriptions
Julie Albone
+44 (0)1462 471915

Circulation Manager
Michael Emmerson
+44 (0)1462 471932

Editor
Liz Terry
+44 (0)1462 431385

Managing Editor
Kate Cracknell
+44 (0)1462 471906

Assistant Editor
Katie Barnes
+44 (0)1462 471925

Journalist
Caroline Wilkinson
+44 (0)1462 471911

News Desk
Tom Walker
+44 (0)1462 471934

Pete Hayman
+44 (0)1462 471938

Products Editor
Sarah Todd
+44 (0)1462 471927

Mark Edmonds
+44 (0)1462 471933

Designers
Claire Toplis
+44 (0)1462 471910

Andy Bundy
+44 (0)1462 471924

Ed Gallagher
+44 (0)1905 20198

Website Team
Michael Paramore
+44 (0)1462 471926

Dean Fox
+44 (0)1462 471900

Tim Nash
+44 (0)1462 471917

Katie Eldridge
+44 (0)1462 471913

Emma Harris
+44 (0)1462 471912

Publisher
Jan Williams
+44 (0)1462 471909

Sales
John Challinor
+44 (0)1582 607970

Tessa Alexander
+44 (0)1462 471903

Nadeem Shaikh
+44 (0)1462 471902

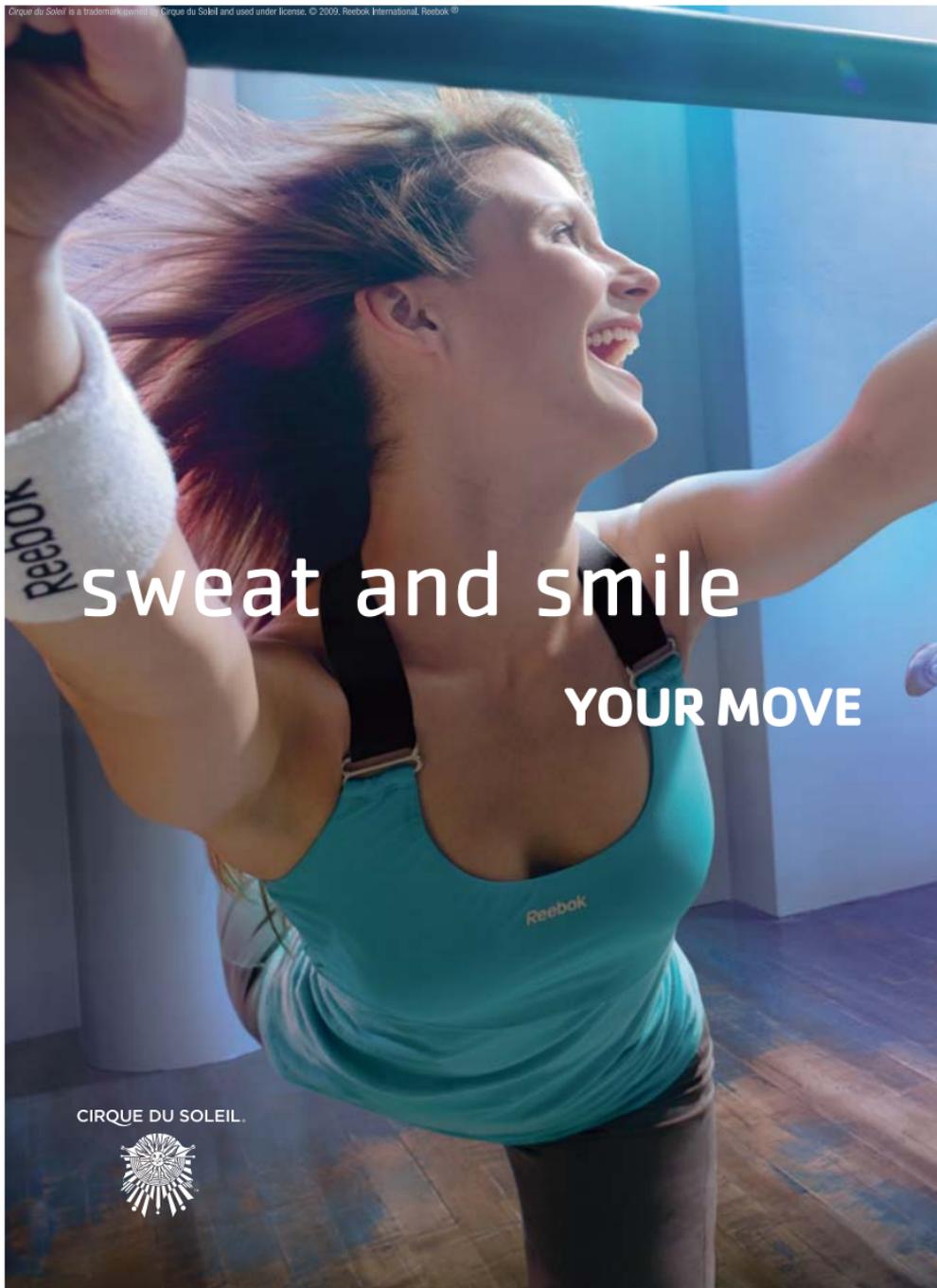
Julie Badrick
+44 (0)1462 471919

Nuzhat Hayat
01604 415144

Financial Controller
Sue Davis
+44 (0)1395 519398

Financial Administrator
Denise Gildea
+44 (0)1462 471930

Credit Controller
Rebekah Scott
+44 (0)1462 733477



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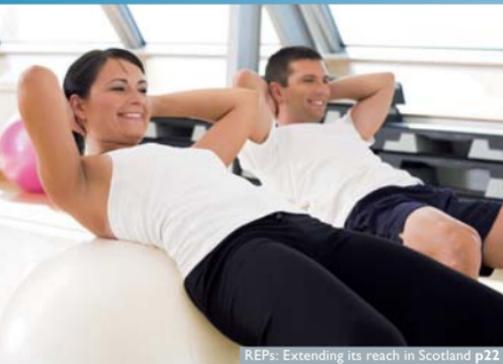
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REPs: Extending its reach in Scotland p22

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A look at the advances in online learning p68

contents

08 letters

Staff fitness levels aren't the problem, says Graham McPherson, GM of Bannatyne's in Ayr. What alienates members is their lack of customer care skills

10 news round-up

The £20m Mountbatten Centre opens and a new fast-track apprenticeship scheme is launched to help fill industry skill gaps

16 international news

Volcano Health Club opens in Prague and the first luxury World Class site opens in Russia

18 fia update

MoreActive4Life launches this month, and Steven Ward looks at the progress of EHFA to date

22 reps update

The Register aims to extend its reach in Scotland



How inclusive are we? p42



First Holmes Place for Galicia p16

24 people news

Barry Aspinall leaves DW Sports and Fitness, Carole Bailey joins Matrix, and Johnson Health Tech UK appoints an interim MD

26 competitive edge

Charity events to motivate your staff and members

27 diary dates

Plan ahead for the FIA Golf Day in August and LIW in September

28 everyone's talking about... fitness benefits

Are operators missing an opportunity by focusing on physical appearance rather than the broader health benefits of fitness?

30 interview richard millman

The new CEO of Leisure Connection talks about his first impressions of the industry

34 drink up

Sports scientist Nick Morgan looks at the latest research in the field of sports drinks. Plus a round-up of sports drink launches

38 don't stop me now

New research shows that, if you've had a heart attack, you must keep exercising to maintain the benefits

39 young at heart

Caroline Wilkinson visits the first standalone SHOKK énergie kids' gym

42 buying into inclusion

An assessment of how far the industry has already come in the provision of inclusive fitness, and a look at what more can be done

46 activity partners

Lisa Taylor gives her advice to leisure operators wanting to work more closely with their local PCT



The SHOKK factor p64



From full service to budget club p53



New sports drink research p34

- 50 full steam ahead**
The economy may be fragile, but funding is still available – especially for public sector projects
- 53 crm series making the switch**
Sean James looks at how, and why, full service operators might consider switching to a budget model
- 57 comings & goings**
How should clubs deal with membership cancellations, and should they be more lenient in these tough times?
- 60 buy & sell core training**
Crunches with the AbdoFit, incorporating the XCO Trainer, and Balanced Body's EXO chair
- 62 bucking the trend**
The results of the FIA State of the Industry report, plus analysis
- 64 supplier profile jonathan williams, shokk**
The CEO of youth specialist SHOKK talks about addressing youth on their terms, franchising and global expansion plans
- 68 home delivery**
With all the innovations in online learning, will this channel ultimately replace classroom training?
- 72 show & tell**
A round-up of some of the new products launched at FIBO in April
- 74 fitness-kit.net special vending**
New vending options, including healthy foods and cash-free payment
- 83 lightweights**
Cellulite-busting underwear, shopping as a workout, and an alarm clock that gives you an early workout

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buyers' guide:

For suppliers of products and services in the health club and spa markets, turn to p78



write to reply



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

grey market: we must offer the right exercise and environment

I read the article in the April issue of *HCM* entitled *New Perspective*, written by Colin Milner, CEO of the International Council on Active Aging. I'm disappointed at the advice that he's offering to clubs as I think he has missed the fundamental point: clubs in the UK are simply not offering the type of exercise or the environment that the majority of this older market wants.

Speaking from many years of experience in the health and wellness sector, I've seen senior people pushed into memberships at conventional gyms, only to have them become yet another attrition statistic at the end of their fixed-period membership. For the last four years, I've been working closely with the over-50s market and have come to understand that the type of exercise they want to do, and the environment in which they want to do it, simply isn't provided by mainstream fitness facilities.

The over-50s market, and ladies in particular, want to feel comfortable when they're exercising. It's as much about the social scene for them as it is about the exercise itself. Long gone are the days when these members would want to be seen sweating it out on the treadmill wearing an MP3 player.

Power-assisted equipment is a successful alternative for this market, offering a way of maintaining or



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The over-50s, particularly women, want to feel comfortable exercising

improving fitness levels and enhancing weight loss in a sociable environment.

If we want to provide for our ageing members, we need to truly understand the customer and what they want.

racheal browes
uk sales director, shapemaster

the letter of the law

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

Q A 16-year-old boy injured himself on our running machine nearly four years ago. Can he still claim compensation?

A While the normal rule is that a claim for personal injury must be brought (ie a court claim must be issued) within three years of the accident, there are a number of exceptions. When a child is injured, the clock starts ticking on his 18th birthday, so in this instance he is well within the time limit for claiming. Of course he still needs to prove fault on the part of the club, such as lack of instruction or supervision, or faulty equipment.

CRONER
CONSULTING

it's staff inexperience, not their fitness levels, that intimidates members

I was intrigued by the Talkback feature on staff fitness levels and whether we're leading by example (*HCM* March 09). Similar to when we discuss retention, the panel seemed to be scrambling to create an 'aren't we great' image.

I'm not sure, for example, how we can actually measure being healthy as opposed to simply being fit. There must be several criteria for judging a healthy lifestyle, some of which may be hard to quantify.

The fact is, our industry offers low pay rates and attracts a young workforce. The majority are enthusiastic about fitness and wellness, but are inexperienced in the workplace. It's this inexperience and attitude towards clients – not their fitness levels or muscular appearance – that intimidates members.

If we employ a young workforce, we have a responsibility to develop their customer care skills and attitude so that, with guidance and time, they will develop into staff who lead by example and who have the ability to address the broad spectrum of members' needs.

Yes they should practise what they preach, but we shouldn't pretend we don't have our little vices like everyone else.

graham mcpherson
gm, bannatyne's health club, ayr



Fitness staff shouldn't pretend they don't have their little vices

© PHOTOGRAPHY: BIKI RESI/AGENCY: DREAMSTIME.COM

CARDIO TRENDS & INNOVATIONS -

Excite VARIO

The R&D team at Technogym recognises that health club members want to have fun during their cardio workout and has developed the new Excite VARIO to meet this need.

The new machine is easy to use and gives members the freedom to do short strides, longer strides and even steps, so they can be creative in developing their own workouts and not be restricted to fixed planes of movement.

The Excite VARIO also picks up on the trend towards total body training and can be used by people of all abilities.

innovation: the Excite VARIO

So let's have a look behind the scenes at the key drivers for creating a new cardio machine. Firstly, it's important to replicate natural body movements. To do this, the scientists have to define a safe, natural movement pattern. Secondly, the new machine must adapt to each user's natural stride length and allow them to actually change their stride length during exercise.

Therein lies the main difference between VARIO and an elliptical machine with a fixed range and pattern of movement - VARIO automatically adapts to the user's natural movement and stride.

Intense testing in the R&D labs with people of all abilities helped Technogym create a unique 83cm stride length for its new machine. This, combined with a



Innovation: The new Excite VARIO has a unique 83cm stride length

maximum user height of 210cm, means it can cater for people of all sizes.

OK, so the movement is defined. What else have exercisers said they're looking for? Consumer research clearly indicates that a low entry height onto the machine is important, as well as a low user height while in operation. To put it another way, the higher from the ground a person is, the more uncomfortable they can become when exercising. This is a simple point, but it's very important that attention is paid to every detail.

The VARIO is a total body machine with two sets of arms - a set of moving arms to give a 'total body' workout and another fixed set to be using during 'lower body' workouts.

Customer feedback was clear - users wanted to be able to track their heart

rate while using the machine in both settings. Being able to change resistance during a 'total body' workout was also seen as a big plus!

So in simple terms what did the engineers do? They modified the moving handles by adding heart rate grips and also a set of Fast Track Control buttons which allow the user to change resistance during the workout. These are similar to the controls found on a car steering wheel - simple but highly effective!

To conclude, a workout offering total body movement and natural stride length is what the R&D team set out to achieve. The proof of the pudding is in the eating though and you'll have to try VARIO and give us your feedback. It's a great new cardio workout, that feels so natural, it's easy to do and it's fun!



Ergonomic: Technogym undertook consumer research to find out how exercisers respond to equipment

in brief...

revamped leisure facilities for hertfordshire

Three leisure facilities in Hertfordshire will be overhauled pending council approval of the increased capital injection required for the projects.

Proposals for Hartham Leisure Centre in Hertford include a 65-station gym on the first floor, overlooking Hartham Common, as well as a new studio, a crèche and changing rooms. Grange Paddocks Pool and Gym in Bishop's Stortford will feature a new 80-station gym with views over the paddocks, while the former gym area will be developed into a new studio. A dance studio, a multipurpose area and a foyer, as well as an improved bar with a café area, are planned for Castle Hall in Hertford.

meadowside's £5m upgrade

Meadowside Leisure Centre in Burton, Staffordshire, is set to undergo a £5m transformation.

East Staffordshire Borough Council has revealed its initial plans and artist's impressions, produced by Maber Architects, of how the revamped leisure facility will look when it re-opens in summer 2010.

The scheme is set to include a refurbishment of the gym with upgraded equipment and studio facilities, improvements to amenities and changing rooms, and the introduction of a crèche and soft play area. Construction work is expected to start in October.

leeds gets leisure grant

Scott Hall Leisure Centre in Leeds is to undergo a £410,000 redevelopment thanks to a DCMS grant. The grant, sourced from the Free Swimming Capital Modernisation Programme award, will fund the conversion of the centre's existing squash courts into an extended Bodyline Gym area to accommodate a further 17 pieces of equipment. The move is expected to boost net income by around £32,000 per year. Leeds City Council is contributing £132,300 towards the scheme.

little venice to open in summer

A new £4.3m multi-purpose leisure complex in Paddington, London – which will be the only facility in the area to be accredited by the Inclusive Fitness Initiative (IFI) – is to open this summer.

Westminster City Council hopes that the 1,800sq m Little Venice Sports Centre will help to tackle the borough's health inequalities, thanks to the fact that its facilities will be fully accessible to customers with physical disabilities and learning difficulties, as well as being suitable for non-disabled users.

The complex, which has been designed by LCE Architects, includes a 30-station, 172sq m fitness suite equipped by Matrix Fitness Systems, as well as a four badminton court sports hall and a multi-use dance and exercise studio. There is also an IT training suite equipped with cameras to monitor and analyse athletes' agility and durability, as a way of better identifying their specific training needs.

Facility operator manager Nik Walder says: "We want to eradicate health inequalities in Westminster and, as the only IFI site in the borough, it's vital to partner with a supplier that offers equipment that is not only fully accessible for users with physical impairments and learning difficulties, but is also of the high standard that today's

consumers have come to expect." The centre will also be a designated Centre of Excellence for Physical Activity – part of the National Skills Academy for Sport and Active Leisure.

The complex will replace the Westminster Children's Sports Centre, which closed in 2006, and the new building will be made from sustainable materials to reduce its carbon footprint including a sedium roof, made from sedium plants, to help control the centre's temperature.

The scheme is funded by more than £1.6m of external funding from Sport England, SkillsActive, the Big Lottery Fund and John Lyon's Charity Trust.



Little Venice's sedium roof will help regulate temperature in the building

£2m gym upgrade for rivermead

Refurbished Rivermead offers a £2m, 120-station fitness suite

A new £2m fitness suite has been unveiled at Rivermead Leisure Complex in Reading, Berkshire, following the completion of a refurbishment scheme carried out by operator Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL).

Escape Fitness has worked in partnership with GLL to equip the facility, which now offers 120 stations of Technogym equipment, complemented by a free weights area. There are also two 10m BSW sprint-track lanes, which have been installed by Escape in the complex's new exercise studio.

Following the refurbishment of the fitness suite, there is also a new aerobiking studio, a Kinesis studio and a group cycling area, as well as a dedicated area for GP referrals and disabled users. Pavigym's air flooring system has also been installed.



The centre's eight-lane, 50m pool can also be divided into two 25m pools

mountbatten centre is now open

The Mountbatten Centre's fitness facilities have re-opened in Portsmouth following the completion of a £20m refurbishment project.

The Mountbatten Centre offers a 50m, eight-lane swimming pool with a moveable floor and submersible boom, allowing two 25m pools to be created. The centre also features a 12.5m teaching pool, 200-seat viewing area, a 150-station Technogym-equipped fitness facility, a steamroom, spa and treatment rooms, and changing rooms.

The existing sports hall has benefited from a new semi-sprung floor and improved lighting, while the athletics and cycle tracks have been resurfaced.

A dance studio, function room and club rooms have also been built. A new entrance, reception area and refurbished catering area complete the redevelopment, carried out by construction firm Kier Southern.

The project was funded by Portsmouth City Council and a £5.49m grant from Sports England. Now complete, Parkwood Leisure will manage the centre and its adjacent Gymnastics Centre – which opened in February – on a 25-year contract.

The opening of the centre has resulted in the closure of the Victoria Leisure Centre, so the land can be sold to help fund the Mountbatten revamp.

skillsactive's annual industry survey launched

SkillsActive's sixth *Working in Fitness Survey* – one of the largest annual surveys of people working in the UK health and fitness sector – has been launched online.

Conducted by SkillsActive and REPs, the online survey has been created to provide an insight into how the fitness industry rewards its workforce, as well as looking at salary levels and job satisfaction among staff. One purpose of the survey is to find out whether the industry is doing enough to attract

new, as well as retain existing staff. Jean-Ann Marnoch, registrar of REPs, says: "It's really important that as many people take part as possible to get a good representation of jobs in the industry and to be able to identify issues at a local level."

The survey will run from 18 May to 17 July 2009 and is open to any full-time, part-time, or self-employed fitness professional. The results will be reported at Leisure Industry Week at the NEC, Birmingham in September.

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in brief...

kids' zone scheme launched

A new physical activity programme for youth not taking part in mainstream sports has been introduced in Derry, Northern Ireland, to improve the health and wellbeing of young people in the area.

Called Kids' Zone, the weekly club is the result of a joint venture between the Old Library Trust Healthy Living Centre and Derry City Council. The programme will be held at the new Bishop's Field Sports Hall, which was funded by the Big Lottery Fund's New Opportunities for PE and Sport Programme. Offerings will include classes in dance, yoga, gymnastics, cheerleading and judo.

central ymca links with nhs

Central YMCA has teamed up with Westminster NHS in London to offer patients a fitness programme as part of an exercise referral scheme.

Patients, for whom physical activity is recommended, will undergo a 10-week programme including an initial fitness assessment at the Central YMCA club, on Great Russell Street in London, followed by four, one-hour, one-to-one sessions with an instructor and six supervised gym sessions. Participants are then invited to join the club at a reduced rate.



New college will include sports centre

new centre for technical college

Metrix Consortium's proposals for the £12bn Defence Technical College at the former RAF airbase in St Athan, South Wales, include plans for a new community leisure centre.

Plans submitted to the Vale of Glamorgan Council outline a sports centre comprising a fitness suite with cardiovascular equipment and a free weights area; 12 sports courts plus two squash courts; an eight-lane, floodlit athletics track and 12 outdoor sports pitches for rugby, hockey, football and cricket. A 25m, eight-lane swimming pool will also be built to Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) standards, while an on-site crèche will accommodate the needs of the military personnel; any additional spaces will be open for community use.

The sports facility is likely to be open to the public in the evenings and at the weekends, with the final arrangements being decided via public consultation.

£5m revamp for dulwich facility

Construction work is underway on a £5m refurbishment of Dulwich Leisure Centre in London, which will form the first phase of a wider Southwark Council-led scheme to upgrade leisure facilities in the area.

The entire scheme is expected to take 20 months to complete, and includes a revamp of the centre's 80-station gym and 27m swimming pool, enhanced changing areas and improved access for disabled people. Although the centre's swimming pool, crèche and some of the studios will be closed until spring 2010, so the refurbishment can be carried out, the gym will remain open.

The centre, operated by Fusion, is one of four facilities set to undergo work as part of the Leisure Improvement Programme; Camberwell Leisure Centre, Surrey Docks Water Sports Centre and Southwark Park Sports Complex are also lined up for future refurbishment.



£5m refurb project is now underway

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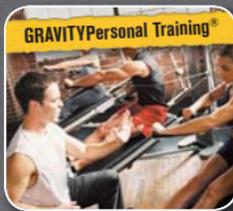
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Haverhill is the first public sector site to acquire Matrix's 7 Series CV range

matrix announces new contracts

Matrix Fitness Systems has signed a raft of new public sector contracts.

The manufacturer has secured a partnership agreement with operator Abbeycroft Leisure to equip the gym at Haverhill Leisure Centre in Suffolk; the centre is currently undergoing a £6m refurbishment, predominantly funded by St Edmundsbury Borough Council. The redevelopment includes the expansion of the gym to twice its former size, with 100 stations divided into zones. There will also be a dedicated combat and personal training area.

"We will be the first leisure centre in the country to offer Matrix's new

G7 strength range and the new MyRide console, and the first public sector site to have the new 7 Series CV range," says GM Dom Greenwood. The centre, which has around 1,400 gym members, will also refurbish its sports hall, swimming pool, soft play area, squash courts and changing areas. Haverhill is scheduled to reopen on 4 July 2009.

Matrix has also secured public sector contracts with Bletchley Leisure Centre, Stevenage Leisure and Fusion which, in partnership with local authorities, provides sport and leisure services in Southwark, Lambeth, Tunbridge Wells, Croydon, Hounslow and Leatherhead.

technogym's leasing options

Technogym has launched a scheme that offers customers the option to lease its equipment to help operators through the economic downturn.

Instead of buying the latest kit outright, customers can select a financing package to suit their needs, with fixed monthly payments, to help them maintain a competitive edge.

Technogym has also signed a co-operation agreement with financing company De Lage Landen to integrate financial solutions into its offering.

barnsley keeps finger on pulse

Operator Barnsley Premier Leisure has awarded equipment supplier Pulse Fitness preferred supplier status, in a deal that could see it equip a number of leisure centres with interactive kids' fitness kit.

The initial contract, worth £45,000, will include 16 dance mat systems from Pulse's Dance Machine range, an interactive Lightspace Play Wall and a full range of Vibe cardio equipment and Vibe kids' circuit.

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We always joke about the English summer and whether we will actually have one at all. Well it's crunch time. Temperatures should begin to rise and the sun should start to shine on our exercise regimes!

So, what if we do have a summer? The warmer weather will impact people's ability to maintain the same level of exercise. Any significant increase in temperature will amplify the difficulty of exercise at any given intensity depending on individual fitness levels. That is, exercise will begin to feel harder, sooner. Furthermore, the body has to work harder in the heat to maintain its internal body temperature by removing the heat generated during exercise through perspiration. Meaning we also lose more fluid and the risk of dehydration increases.

It's interesting that at a time when people look to enjoy their exercise even more, there is an increased risk that it could feel harder and less enjoyable. However, this risk can be significantly reduced simply by ensuring that the fluid and electrolytes lost in sweat are replaced.

The guidelines remain the same all year round; drink to maintain hydration by consuming fluids little and often or according to thirst. Just remember you might need a little bit more than normal – even in our summer time!

Nick Morgan

Head of Sport Science for Lucozade Sport

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training news

£1.9m aep scheme launches

The government has launched its £1.9m Apprenticeship Expansion Programme (AEP) in sport and active leisure, created to get more than 1,400 people involved in apprenticeships during the next two years and to help fill the skills gap of not enough Level 3 professionals.

AEP is led by the National Skills Academy for Sport and Active Leisure (NSA) in collaboration with training provider Lifetime – the Centre of Excellence for Fitness for National Employers. The programme is designed to meet the additional expenses, such as training and management costs, associated with expanding apprenticeship schemes from Level 2 to Level 3.

Apprentices will be equipped with the necessary work-based skills by Lifetime, which will provide government-funded training in Level 2 fitness instructing during a four-week course, as well as a



Apprentices will enter the workplace to complete their NVQ

Level 3 personal training qualification over five weeks. They will then enter the workplace to complete their NVQ. The government may also fund the first three months of an apprentice's wages.

The programme will be run in partnership with private operators and leisure management companies that are NSA members.

fit for sport and total fitness join forces

Training provider Fit For Sport has partnered with Total Fitness health clubs to equip 56 of its fitness staff with the skills to run children's activities.

The Active IQ-accredited NVQ Active Leadership qualification includes practical training in behavioural management, the engagement of children and communication. The seven-month course is designed to provide instructors with the skills to adapt and improve existing classes.



Staff will be trained to engage with children

ALL PICTURES THIS PAGE WWW.STOCK.COM

shokk is accredited by the nsa

Youth activity specialist SHOKK has been awarded the North West Centre of Vocational Excellence, as part of the National Skills Academy for Sport and Active Leisure (NSA).

SHOKK will work in partnership with Trafford College and Salford University to co-ordinate and deliver free training and qualifications in youth activity, as well as career progression courses. The employer-focused courses include one- and two-day CPD courses, NVQs, VRQs and workshops to train instructors and activity leaders.

All programmes will be linked with key stage 2, 3 and 4 of the National

Curriculum, to ensure young people develop complementary skills in and out of the school environment.

The NSA was developed by Skills Active to create a coherent approach to the industry's skills training, thereby better meeting the needs of employers. It does so through government-funded, work-based learning using a network of Centres of Excellence.

The NSA enables employers to take control of the design and delivery of learning in their industry, working in partnership with the government and training providers from both the public and private sectors.

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in brief...

finnish perspective

The first comprehensive study of the Finnish health and fitness market has been published in partnership by the Finnish Fitness Operators Association (SKY), Satakunnan Ammattikorkeakoulu (a college specialising in research) and *K&F* magazine.

The report shows that, at the end of March 2009, there were 441 commercial health clubs in Finland. If all publicly-owned gyms and hotel health clubs are included in the figure, the total number of fitness clubs in the country climbs to 800.

The sector is estimated to be worth around €200m in terms of total turnover, and employs 6,100 people – most of which (65 per cent) hold a qualification in either sports or healthcare.

According to P-C Nordensved, chair of SKY, 66 per cent of health clubs in Finland are either small (less than 500sq m in size) or mid-sized (500–1,000sq m).

Nordensved adds that operators are optimistic about their future, despite the recession, saying: "Up to 87 per cent of health clubs estimate that they will experience growth in the near future, while only 2 per cent are expecting to see contraction in their business."

cirque chooses the amt

Cirque du Soleil's world-famous performers have revealed one of their key training secrets – Precor's Adaptive Motion Trainer (AMT).

Cirque du Soleil has been encouraging its artistes in Dubai to use the AMT as part of their gruelling training regime.

Derek Burke, EMEA sales manager for Precor, says: "We're delighted that the cast of Cirque du Soleil in Dubai have incorporated the AMT into their training."

"These elite athletes require immense strength, stamina and flexibility; their use of the AMT really does illustrate the fact that it can be used by beginners right up to advanced athletes to achieve a challenging workout."

holmes place: a first in galicia

Holmes Place Iberia opened its latest club on 15 May. Located in the city of A Coruña, it's the chain's first club in the region of Galicia, north-west Spain.

Facilities at the 3,200sq m club include a fitness suite supplied by Star Trac and Life Fitness. The pilates studio offers Peak Pilates equipment, while the group exercise studio is equipped by Aerobic & Fitness and Tecnosport. Personal training is also available.

Situated in the Dolce Vita shopping centre, facilities at the new club also include a stainless steel swimming pool, a solarium, spa pool and Turkish bath, and a restaurant. There is also free parking for members.



Holmes Place's latest club offers a stainless steel swimming pool

locals keep in trim with aura

Trim Town Council and Aura Sport and Leisure Management officially opened the new €14m Aura Trim Leisure Centre in Trim, County Meath, Ireland, at the end of April.

The complex is operated and managed by Aura, which runs Ireland's largest

chain of leisure centres. The 368sq m Precor-equipped fitness suite offers 33 pieces of CV equipment, including four AMTs, plus Precor's new C Line strength range. There is also an aerobics studio, sports hall, 25m swimming pool, learner and kiddies' pools, a health suite with steamroom and sauna, two field turf soccer pitches and a lawn bowling facility.

Aura is committed to providing quality, affordable swimming and fitness to the local community; pay as you go options at the new club cover both gym and classes.

Aura Sport and Leisure Management operates 10 centres throughout Ireland, with more than a million visits to its sites every year. The company is renowned for embracing diversity and focusing on access and ability, and has won two O2 Ability Awards in recognition of this.



Trim's 368sq m gym offers Precor CV and new C Line strength range

russian fitness group opens first luxury club

Russian Fitness Group (RFG) opened its latest World Class health club – the 19th in the chain – in St Petersburg in April.

Located on Krestovskiy Island, it's the operator's first luxury club. Built over three floors, the 3,800sq m club has an 800sq m gym with almost 12m-high ceilings. Facilities include group cycling and martial arts studios, both of which have panoramic windows looking out over the embankment. There's also a pilates studio, two group exercise and personal training studios, a kids' club,

doctor's surgery, café and boutique shop selling sports clothes.

An aqua zone offers a 25m, four-lane pool, spa pool, kids' swimming pool and relaxation area, while the third floor is completely given over to the spa, which offers a wide range of facials and body treatments. There's also a Russian bath, Turkish sauna and hairdressing salon.

RFG operates more than 42 fitness clubs – World Class and the lower-priced Fizkult chain – in 11 cities of Russia and the CIS, including franchised clubs.



Facilities at the Volcano Health Club include a Technogym-equipped gym

volcano opens up in prague

Volcano Health Club, an independent club in Prague, Czech Republic, opened at the end of January.

The club's name comes from the hot waters beneath the site, which was an old thermal bath area. Close to the city centre, the club is nevertheless located on the edge of the Prokopske Valley – a nature reserve with protected plants and famed for its rare fossil finds. Members can enjoy views over the valley as they work out, as well as taking part in classes – pilates, yoga, cardio and core strength – in the nature reserve during the summer months.

Facilities at the 1,500sq m club include a Technogym-equipped fitness suite

offering CV and resistance equipment, circuits, FLEXability and Kinesis.

Advanced diagnostic systems are also in place to ensure members receive the optimum workout programme.

The club also has a spa and beauty area. Private spa suites have their own heat and water experiences. There's also a Thai massage suite, hammam, relaxation area, sauna, steamroom, infrasauna, tepidarium, solarium and spa pool.

A terrace, clubroom/relaxation area and restaurant complete the facilities, with childcare and free parking also available to members. Membership costs €80 a month, and personal training is available for an extra fee.

virgin active expansion plans

Virgin Active is reported to be opening 25 clubs in northern Italy over the next three to four years as it boosts its international expansion.

The group is said to have secured most of the targeted Italian sites after signing deals with developers of several mixed-use property schemes.

Virgin Active entered the Italian market in 2004 and is already the country's largest health and fitness club operator; it opened four clubs last year and now has a total of 13 in the market. The new Italian clubs were among 10

new sites added last year, with the other six in South Africa. The group now has 88 sites in South Africa, with more scheduled to open this year, and a global portfolio currently standing at 179 clubs.

Virgin Active is also targeting the Iberian Peninsula, where it has seven clubs, six of which are in Spain. The seventh Spanish club is due to open near Madrid in October, with a second Portuguese club opening in Lisbon in 2010.

Virgin Active revenues were reported up 9 per cent in 2008, to £341.3m, with ebitda also up 12 per cent at £85.5m.



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sector grows despite recession

The health and fitness sector has grown by 3 per cent in the 12-month period ending 31 March 2009, according to the FIA's annual State of the Industry survey.

Compiled by market analysts The Leisure Database Company, the survey of 6,000 sites shows that the industry's revenue reached £3.77bn, while like-for-like memberships rose by 0.8 per cent. The population penetration rate reached 12.1 per cent, with one in eight consumers now members of a health club or leisure centre. Between 1 April 2008 and 31 March 2009, the number of new public and private fitness facilities, also rose by 114.

The industry has also benefited from government funding to support its role as a delivery partner for national public health programmes. Activity-led initiatives that have been developed over the last 12 months include behavioural modification scheme Fit for the Future, launched in April 2009 and targeting 18- to 24-year-olds, as well as activity programmes go and Active at School. All have been created to improve the physical activity levels of youth. MoreActive4Life, a sub-brand of the government's £275m Change4Life campaign, is also due to launch later this month.

Despite these results, Andrée Deane, CEO of the FIA, says: "It has been a

tough 12 months for operators. While exercise now enjoys a much higher profile thanks to public health campaigns such as Change4Life and ones implemented by PCTs around the country, our industry is not recession-proof.

"What the results do prove, however, is that fitness and exercise are no longer perceived to be luxuries, but an intrinsic part of consumers' personal wellbeing strategies – and therefore not so susceptible to economic forces."

David Minton, director of The Leisure Database Company, adds: "The

government's health messages are being taken seriously by consumers who value their gym memberships perhaps over other leisure spend.

"The fitness industry has maintained its performance levels and gained new members despite the difficult trading conditions. It's also heartening to see the industry realise sustainable growth without resorting to price-cutting: the healthy increase in market value of 3 per cent is evidence of this."

Refer to pages 62–63 for more information on the survey.



© PHOTO ANDREA RODRIGUEZ/AGENCY DIRECT/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

Exercise is enjoying a higher profile thanks to recent public health campaigns

brs tax could cripple efforts to improve health

The FIA is calling for health club operators and the government to recognise the "crippling" effect the new Business Rate Supplement (BRS) will have on the sector, and on public health campaigns.

Given the large and expensive spaces fitness facilities require, if the extra tax of 2p in the £1 is introduced, clubs with a rateable value of more than £50,000 would pay anywhere between £1,000 and £13,000 more in business rates – per club, per year.

The proposed bill will allow local authorities to levy an additional tax, on top of current business rates, to raise funds for economic development projects. Andrée Deane, the FIA's CEO, says there is a

fundamental inconsistency between the government's targets for increased participation in physical fitness and "imposing a crippling tax burden on the very organisations tasked with helping to reach those targets.

"BRS isn't a stealth tax, but it's not high on many managers or owners agendas – and it should be."

The FIA is calling for fitness organisations to be exempt from the tax and, if not, for the threshold to be increased beyond £50,000. Colin Moynihan, British Olympic Association chair, agrees: "A BRS, with the expected rise in Uniform Business Rates, has the potential to inflict a significant and negative impact on public and private health and fitness facilities."

teachers lead by example

The FIA has finished delivering a pilot programme that assessed the benefits of physical activity on teachers' performance.

Held at schools in Devon, London, Manchester, North Tyneside, and Luton in Bedfordshire, the 12-week programme – called Active Teachers – comprised fortnightly group exercise classes such as body pump, circuits, cycling and yoga.

Organised by the FIA, and funded by the Youth Sports Trust, more than 100 teachers took part. Most attended their local gym three times a week for classes.

The impact of the programme on the teachers' lifestyles, their productivity and stress levels were then assessed. The results will be announced in August 2009, with the view of extending the programme to all UK schools.



PICTURE: WWW.STOCKCOMPENNY.NL/AR4

MoreActive4Life will aim to get a million people across the UK more active

moreactive4life launches in june

More than 1,200 health clubs and leisure centres have registered to be part of the MoreActive4Life campaign, a sub-brand of the government's Change4Life initiative, created to get one million people more active.

Set to launch this month, the summer consumer campaign has been developed by the FIA for members of UK health clubs and leisure centres. It will involve FIA operating members working with the government, as well as national commercial and media partners, to provide consumers with access to a wide range of activities.

The government has already allocated £200,000 to kickstart the campaign, which is being promoted by specialists KTB.

"Using Change4Life as a door-opener, clubs and leisure centres are partnering with major brands such as Tesco and Asda, as well as local GPs and PCTs," says David Stalker, FIA operations director. "FIA members can now position themselves as partners to help tackle our national health problem at a local level."

Participating clubs and leisure centres have access to branded merchandise and promotional material. For further details, contact: moreactive4life@fia.org.uk

peers promote physical fitness

Six schools across England – in Luton, Manchester, North Tyneside and two in Devon – have trialled the new FIA Young Ambassador programme in association with local FIA members.

The pilot, which involved six Young Ambassadors aged 10- to 11-years-old, was designed to assess the impact of peer leaders in running an activity programme. The ambassadors were responsible for motivating their peers as well as ensuring they adhered to the programme. They also acted as intermediaries between the children, their teachers and the FIA programme leaders.

Although a detailed analysis of the programme's impact is yet to be completed, there was a clear increase in the ambassadors' self esteem.

new addition to code of practice

Fitness First is the latest operator to join a select group of companies that meet the FIA Code of Practice.

The accreditation is designed to increase investor, government and consumer confidence by highlighting clubs that reach FIA quality standards for safety, customer care and health delivery.

John Gamble, MD of Fitness First, says: "The Code was an excellent way to develop our in-house protocols as it showed where we could improve. The Code also demonstrates a commitment to our customers."

Other accredited leisure organisations include Belper Leisure Centre, Central YMCA, DC Leisure, LA Fitness, the Reebok Club, Doncaster Dome and SLM.

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WHERE WILL WATTBIKE TAKE YOU?

influencing european policy

Steven Ward, the FIA's public affairs and policy manager, reports on the progress of EHFA and gives his thoughts for the future



The Annual EHFA General Assembly, which took place at FIBO 2009, saw Harm Tegelaars re-elected to his role as chair of EHFA, the body that represents the sector at EU level. Also re-elected to the board was the FIA's André Deane, joined by newcomers including Jan Edholm, CEO of fitness provider SATS Group Sweden; Frank Van de Ven, vice president EMEA for Life Fitness; and Armando Moreira, director of the Portuguese trade association AGAP.

With Tegelaars confirmed in the role for a further two years, I thought it an ideal opportunity to look back on what's been achieved so far and what's in the pipeline for the next 24 months.

steady progress

EHFA has made a great start in developing the relationships needed to shape policy in the European Union.

For the past two years, EHFA has been operating out of its head office in Brussels, and has facilitated an ever-deepening working relationship with key departments of the European Commission: DG SANCO, responsible for health and consumer protection; DG EAC, in charge of education, lifelong learning and culture; and DG Taxation and Customs.

EHFA has also taken an active role in supporting the EU Platform for Action on Diet Physical Activity and Health, run by DG SANCO. In doing so, it has increased the visibility of the health and fitness sector and highlighted the contribution it makes to public health.

DG EAC co-financed EHFA's core operations for the past two years, including the European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPs) and the

PICTURE: WWW.STOCK.COM/BJAN TEZAK



EHFA: Highlighting the contribution the fitness sector makes to public health

accreditation programme. Robert Madelin, the director general of DG SANCO – the highest-ranking health official in Europe – has also expressed keenness to work with the organisation.

EHFA has also begun to form the relationships necessary to shape policies around taxation. Rolf Diemar, the EU official with responsibility for VAT, has promised EHFA an opportunity to have its views heard in the consultation process that will lead to the review of EU VAT guidelines. The fitness sector may even be profiled as an example of why the original regulations are in need of review.

forging ahead

The initial phases of any public affairs programme is making your organisation and its priorities known to key officials. In the past two years, EHFA has achieved this initial objective in the areas of health, sport, education and taxation. It's now time to capitalise on the opportunities that arise as a result.

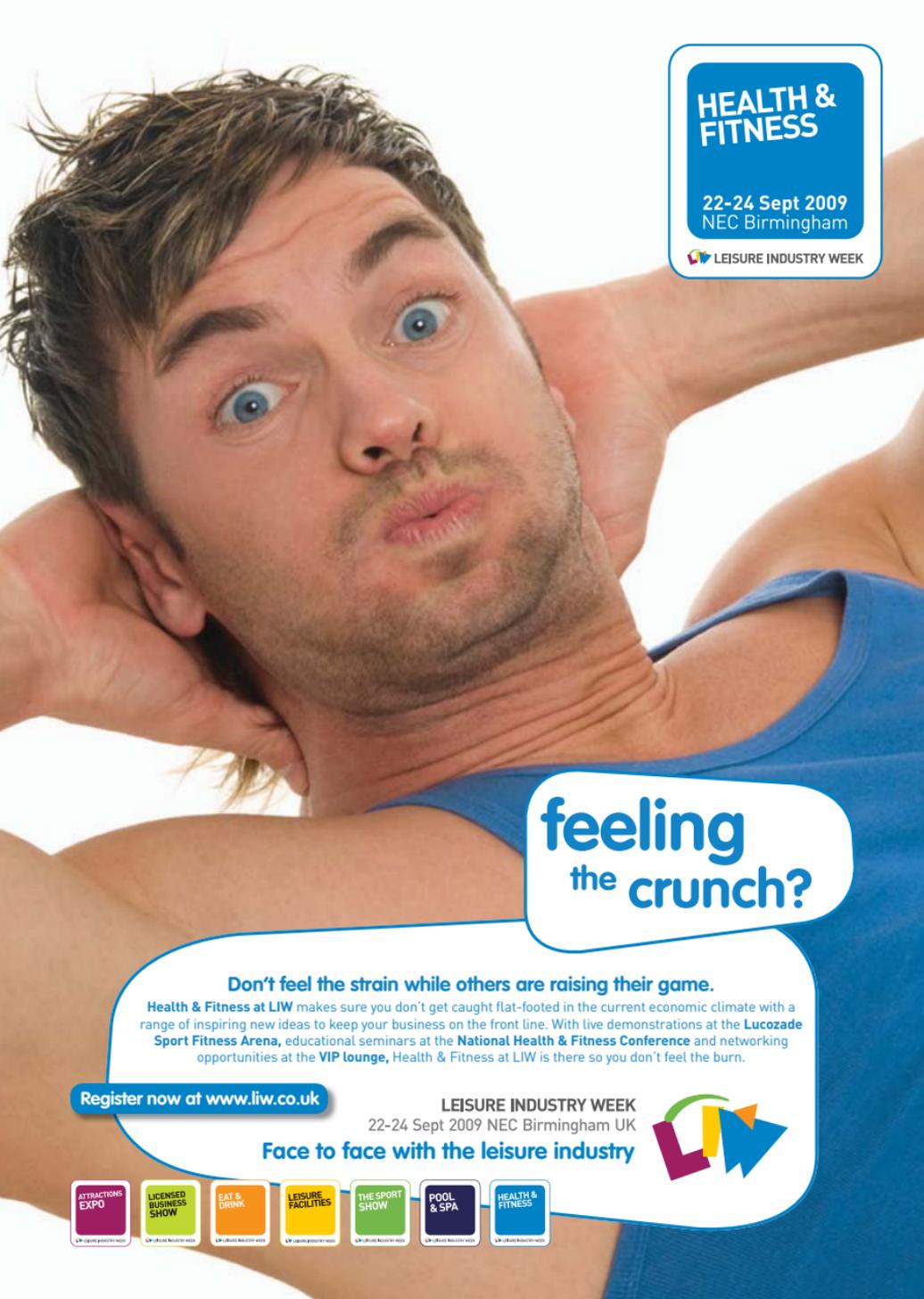
The FIA is fully behind this effort. It is through having people on the ground in Brussels, living and breathing the Commission every day, that the

industry's interests can be best served at the European level. Progress in the past two years suggests that the collaboration between the FIA and EHFA has been the right decision.

Of course, there have been some challenges – not least the strained relations between EHFA and the industry's global body, US-based IHRSA, which is in the process of being resolved. Issues such as music licensing may require a global response; IHRSA and EHFA need to be singing from the same hymn sheet. The issues facing the industry are also being recognised beyond Europe: the World Health Organisation, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Economic Forum are all showing interest in global public health.

As US president Kennedy once wrote to Jean Monnet, a founding father of the EU, only "America and a united Europe, working in full and effective partnership, can find solutions to those urgent problems that confront all mankind". With the state of the economy and waistlines across the globe, I think we have sufficient reason to put these words into practice.

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in brief...

value of cpd is altered

Changes have been made to how REPs members can earn their Continual Professional Development (CPD) points.

Following an extensive consultation, REPs members – who need to earn 24 CPD points every 24 months – can now gain up to 20 points through awarding body qualifications, industry awards and courses with mandatory assessment. Workshops endorsed by SkillsActive are worth up to four points, as are online exams, seminars, conventions/trade shows, completion of self-taught programmes and technical questions posted at the end of the REPs Journal.

new level 4 course unveiled

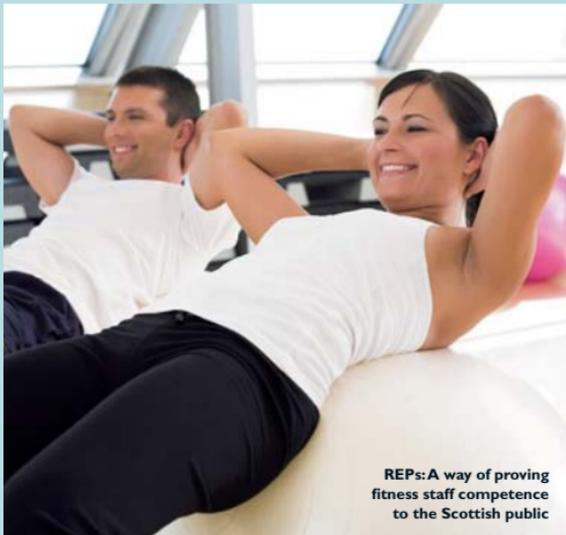
The first Level 4 REPs award, in stroke rehabilitation, has been approved. The award, titled Exercise After Stroke Specialist Instructor Training Course, was developed by Queen Margaret University and is supported by the Stroke Association.

The first 10 graduates from the course will now be able to apply for Level 4 REPs membership. New national standards are also being developed for Level 4 REPs training courses in cancer and exercise, and in respiratory disease.

reps scottish convention

Tickets are still available for the REPs Scottish convention – titled Professionalising the Fitness Industry in Scotland – to be held on the 26 June at The Edinburgh International Climbing Arena.

The conference will comprise eight workshops, as well as keynote presentations by Dave Clark from the Scottish Institute of Sport on strength training in sport, and Dr Colin Moran from the University of Glasgow about the importance of exercise within different population groups. Tickets cost £40 for REPs members. www.exerciseregister.org



PICTURE: WWW.ISTOCK.COM/ERIC HOOD

REPs: A way of proving fitness staff competence to the Scottish public

reps reinforces scottish bonds

A wider range of Scottish qualifications are expected to be recognised by REPs, to make it easier for Scottish fitness professionals to join the Register.

Discussions throughout May, between REPs and Scottish agencies, have resulted in work beginning to link awards delivered by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) with the national occupational standards for exercise and fitness.

REPs has also been co-ordinating with Scotland's National Governing Body for fitness – Fitness Scotland – to establish when students with the Level 2 Scottish Vocational Qualification in Instructing, Exercise and Fitness can be recognised for REPs entry, as a way of increasing their access to CPD.

Both the SQA and Fitness Scotland, along with several key employers – including West Lothian Leisure, South Lanarkshire Leisure and Borders Sport & Leisure Trust – recently took part in a consultation on the new national occupational standards for exercise

and fitness. The consultation, which is being held online as well as with organisations in Ireland, Wales and England, will end on 1 June.

REPs registrar Jean-Ann Marnoch says: "We're delighted to be working so closely with these key agencies in Scotland and are looking forward to supporting the Scottish fitness industry, and our members north of the border, even more in the future. Our work in Wales has been incredibly successful and we've no doubt that these efforts will prove just as fruitful. Great progress has already been made and we're looking forward to taking this to the next stage."

With just over 1,500 Scottish members, REPs is increasingly being seen by employers in Scotland as a way of demonstrating to the public the qualifications and competence of their fitness staff. Future development of the relationship between REPs and the Scottish fitness industry could result in a permanent presence of dedicated REPs staff in Scotland.

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Bailey is Matrix business manager

carole bailey joins matrix

Equipment manufacturer Matrix Fitness Systems has appointed a new business manager to help lead the firm's expansion plans.

Carole Bailey, the former European business manager and interim MD of Nautilus UK, will handle all aspects of the Matrix business including customer service, quality and profitability. Bailey's 15 years' experience in finance, logistics and sales administration at Nautilus is expected to stand her in good stead for pushing forward the second phase of Matrix's three-year expansion plan.

"[Bailey's] appointment adds more depth to our senior management team and will assist us in managing our UK and international growth," explains Jon Johnston, MD of Matrix.

in brief...

nsa regional additions

The National Skills Academy for Sport and Active Leisure has made two new additions to its regional business development teams.

Peter Cooke joins as business development director for London, after 25 years in the sector, to ensure training programmes meet the needs of employers. Julia Whitehead will become business development manager for the South East – a region set to launch this year – and will be responsible for the growth and development of the academy in the region, including establishing new training providers.

jbb managing director resigns

Barry Aspinall, MD of DW Sports and Fitness – formerly JJB Fitness Clubs – has resigned after 15 years with JJB due to family circumstances.

Winston Higham, formerly marketing director of DW Sports and Fitness, becomes CEO of the company.

Aspinall says: "My resignation comes at an exciting time for the business in as much as the new owner, Dave Whelan, will be the catalyst of a new and even greater era for the clubs. But in saying that, I have explained to him my concerns going forward – that, for personal reasons, I cannot guarantee being able to give the same commitment that I have in the past."

Whelan, the founder of JJB Sports, bought back the troubled company's nationwide chain of fitness clubs in a £83.4m deal that formed part of the new DW Sports Fitness.com venture.



Aspinall leaves JJB for personal reasons

He has assumed ownership of 53 of JJB Sports' 55 fitness facilities, with Irish properties in Dundalk and Limerick excluded from the deal. It's hoped that the new venture will ensure the long-term future of the JJB Sports company.

jht uk appoints interim md

A new interim managing director has been appointed at Johnson Health Tech UK – the distributor of Horizon Fitness and Vision Fitness at-home fitness products and a subsidiary of parent company Johnson Health Tech (JHT), which is based in Taiwan.

Bob Whip, former president of Horizon Fitness, has taken over from Jamie Burton, who has left to pursue other career challenges. Whip will direct JHT's retail subsidiary as part of the group's worldwide expansion.

Jason Lo, CEO and president of JHT's global business, says: "The UK is one of the most important global markets and forms a major part of our expansion plans. We're delighted to continue to invest in our UK businesses, creating new opportunities for our business partners and customers."

Johnson Health Tech is also parent company of the commercial fitness equipment division US-based Matrix Fitness Systems, which has distributors worldwide, including the UK.

barnsley's new manager

Leisure centre operator Barnsley Premier Leisure (BPL) has recruited a new swimming development manager to oversee the free swimming initiative, in conjunction with Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council.

Edward Lim, a former duty centre manager and competitive swimmer, will ensure that members under the age of 18 and the over-60s get the most out of their free swimming opportunities.

BPL's swimming venues include Metrodome Leisure Complex, Hoyland, Dearnside and Royston Leisure Centres, and Wombell Swimming Pool.

new sales team for pulse

Pulse Fitness has appointed three new sales managers.

Steve Grapes, formerly of Life Fitness, and Ken Wattam, formerly of Technogym UK, have taken up the roles of territory sales managers in Wales and the North of England respectively. Meanwhile Darren Murphy, a former sales executive for O'Neills International Sportswear, will take control of Pulse clients in the north and south of Ireland.

The new team is expected to push the expansion of Pulse forward and raise brand awareness in their areas.

PEOPLE PROFILE



david sye

As founder of Yogabeats, a company based on a unique mix of meditative styles, Sye talks about his work with troubled teens and how he went from social anthropologist to a yoga elder

What is Yogabeats?

It's an eclectic mix of yoga styles including Ashtanga Vinyasa and Hatha, driven by music and rhythm. My experimental form of high-energy yoga is designed to provide young people with a natural high within five minutes – if it takes any longer than this, you'll lose their attention. At the end they feel happier in themselves and it starts to disarm them and open them up to new possibilities and positive behaviour. The transformation in these angry kids is extraordinary: they end up dancing around, laughing and being respectful.

Why did you start the company?

I was suffering from ulcerated colitis about 25 years ago and, for lack of any other options, I tried Tibetan yoga in a desperate effort to reduce the pain. When I went back to the hospital for a colostomy, to everyone's surprise the tumours had disappeared. It changed my ideas on life completely and I started to investigate the practice a bit further.

I moved to Yugoslavia to work for a non-political radio station in the early 1990s and found myself caught up in the Bosnian war, unable to leave the

country. I taught soldiers yoga for food and often included music to drown out the sound of war. Yogabeats was born.

I have more than 24 years of yoga-teaching experience and three years ago was dubbed a yoga elder for my contribution to the practice. Yoga has survived for 7,000 years because it makes people feel good and enables them to transcend the mundane. This is one reason why it's ideal for working with feral youth.

I've worked with violent youth gang members at the 409 Gang Intervention Project in Brixton, London, with prison inmates and, most recently, at Glasgow's Easterhouse estate – a three-year project which I visit once a month to maintain.

How can health clubs help?

Health clubs and organisations need to participate via outreach: they can't expect the youth to come to them. The programmes also need infrastructure and funding to succeed. I fund all my projects independently through my other work with celebrities and yoga teacher associations, but public funding is needed to ensure the programmes can be consistently delivered.

The idea is to create a model programme that can solve the problem of anti-social and criminal behaviour and unite communities, which can then be implanted anywhere within the UK.

What else is on your CV?

I'm about to start teaching postgraduate training in Yogabeats to yoga instructors, whereby it will be mandatory for them to take their work into communities that can use the practice for sociological change.

Outside of my commitments to the youth projects, I've taught at the Israeli Yoga Teachers Association, the Zurich Bikram Association, teachers' associations across Italy, and have taught Palestinians in Jericho. I've also taught yoga at The Third Space in London.



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JUNE-JULY 09 race for life

This year, Cancer Research UK has organised 230 5km runs across the country for its Race for Life campaign. In 2008, Race for Life was reported to be the UK's largest female-only fundraising event, where women of all ages and fitness levels came together to walk, jog or run to raise money for the fight against cancer. Entry costs £12.99 per person, but there is no set sponsorship. To help women train for this year's events, Cancer Research launched 'shoppercise' exercise sessions at 11 retail centres throughout the UK (see p83). Details: +44 (0)871 641 2282 or www.raceforlife.org



So far, four million women have raised around £240m for the cause

The two routes vary in difficulty



24-28 SEPTEMBER 09 hadrian's wall trek

A three-day trek which promises to be both challenging and beautiful. It starts in Carlisle, Cumbria, and finishes at the Roman fort remains at Great Chesters. On the second and third days, two routes are offered, with one being an easier option. This is an open event, so walkers can raise money for the charity of their choice. Registration costs £465 and the minimum sponsorship is £1,400. Details: www.tallstories.co.uk

The challenge is open to teams



16-26 OCTOBER 09 trekking in peru

Charity events organisation Across the Divide has created a unique charity trekking route in Peru, which only they have permission to use, away from the hustle and bustle of the main Inca Trail. The route takes trekkers through hidden valleys, mountain passes, along long-forgotten Inca trails and through small villages where little has changed and they still follow traditional methods of farming. The trek ends at Machu Picchu by passing through the Sun Gate to view this stunning sacred city. This is an open challenge. Registration costs £350 and the minimum sponsorship is set at £3,300. Details: www.acrossthedivide.com



A private route towards Machu Picchu

1 NOVEMBER 09 the whole hog

A 12km-plus running-based adventure challenge takes you through the grounds of Wantisden Hall and Bentwaters Parks. The course usually takes between three and six hours to complete, with loads of thrilling obstacles and challenges throughout. The race is for individuals as well as teams of three people, with prizes for both categories. The event is organised by Ace Fundraising and the entry fee is £35, along with a minimum sponsorship of £150. Details: +44 (0)114 233 5858 or www.acefundraising.co.uk



The IDEA World Fitness Convention aims to 'inspire the world to fitness'

JUNE

29-30 | The Facilities Management Forum

Venue Whittlebury Hall Hotel, Towcester, Northamptonshire, UK
Summary

Designed to save time, effort, money and stress by changing the way companies source innovative solutions.
Tel +44 (0)1992 374100
Web www.forumevents.co.uk

JULY

2-3 | 2nd National ISPAL Conference

Venue Warwickshire, UK
Summary

Aimed specifically at those in the sports and active leisure sector and focusing on 'Inspiring a More Active Society'.
Tel +44 (0)118 929 8355
Web www.ispal.org.uk

AUGUST

4 | FIA Golf Day

Venue Staverton Park, Northamptonshire, UK
Summary

Golf and networking come together in this event for industry professionals.
Tel +44 (0)1753 740074
Web www.promotepr.com

6-7 | Health and Fitness Business

Venue Denver, Colorado, US
Summary

Free conference attracting manufacturers, suppliers, retailers, fitness professionals, media and industry influencers.
Tel +1 949 226 5712
Web www.healthandfitnessbiz.com

12-16 | IDEA World Fitness Convention

Venue Anaheim, California, US
Summary

An event for fitness professionals which aims to "inspire the world to fitness".
Tel +1 858 535 8979 ext.7
Web www.idealift.com

18-20 | 28th Annual National Fitness Trade Show

Venue Reno-Tahoe, Nevada, US
Summary

Annual trade show for club owners, managers, fitness directors and PTs.
Tel +1 541 830 0400
Web www.nationalfitnessradeshow.com

SEPTEMBER

1-3 | BASES Annual Conference

Venue Leeds University, UK
Summary

Sharing of knowledge and ideas to promote the spread of evidenced and innovative practice in sport and exercise sciences.
Web www.bases.org.uk/annualconf.asp

10-13 | SIBEC North America

Venue Pasadena, California, US
Summary

A one-to-one meeting forum between owners/operators and suppliers.
Tel +1 954 942 8143
Web www.mcleaneventsinternational.com

22-24 | Leisure Industry Week

Venue Birmingham NEC, UK
Summary

Europe's largest exhibition for the leisure industry, with representatives from fitness, health, spa, sport and attractions.
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Web www.liw.co.uk

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fitness benefits

Fitness helps improve our health as well as having social, mental and spiritual benefits. But are clubs selling these advantages or is there still too much of a focus on going to the gym just to look good?

Let's face it: we live in an image-conscious society and the number one reason why most people go to the gym is to look good. For years, health clubs have sold fitness on this basis – 'get the beach body look for summer', 'shape up for your wedding' and so on.

Yet regular physical activity has so much more to offer. There's a wealth of scientific evidence highlighting the broader health benefits of exercise, providing a compelling argument to be 'more active, more often'.

First and foremost are the physical benefits. The most obvious advantage is in the treatment and prevention

of medical conditions such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and even some cancers including colon and breast cancer. It has also been shown to help with conditions such as osteoporosis, and addictions to smoking and alcohol.

Studies have also shown that regular exercise can add 14 years to your life and delay ageing by up to 12 years (see *HCM* March 09 p59) – particularly pertinent considering our ageing population.

Then there are the mental benefits, which are linked in part to the more obvious physical benefits: if you look good you feel good. It's proven

that regular exercise is as effective as medication in treating mild to moderate depression, as well as helping with anxiety-related disorders. It can also boost brain function in older adults (see *HCM* April 09 p44) as well as children (see *HCM* May 09 p38).

Socially, fitness can be a gateway in to meeting new people and trying new things, while spiritually, all the above benefits combine to increase our sense of wellbeing and help us feel at one with ourselves and our bodies.

The question remains though: are health clubs really tapping into all of these benefits, or could they be doing more? We ask the experts.

ARE OPERATORS MISSING A TRICK BY NOT SELLING ALL FITNESS BENEFITS? EMAIL US: HEALTHCLUB@LEISUREMEDIA.COM

dr john ratey

associate professor • harvard medical school



The mental benefits that come from exercise are huge. As we work out, our mind and spirit improve, and become more capable of dealing with changes in life.

When we exercise, our brains release chemicals that are responsible for our moods, which helps us regulate stress and anxiety. Exercise also helps our cognitive function and has the added advantage of preserving mental function as we age. Our self-esteem is definitely greater too, because of the many chemicals that make us feel better about ourselves – and, perhaps most importantly, because we feel we have been the agent of change. Clubs could tap into this just by explaining to members what it is they're experiencing.

I don't know any clubs that emphasise any of these benefits, although some have approached me for advice on how to. Giving new members a copy of my book on how exercise enhances brain health would teach them the advantages and give them a reason to keep exercising. Clubs should also help them to lower body fat percentage, as it is bad for the brain in so many ways. Finally, they should focus on cardiac fitness: the better the cardiac fitness, the more stable the mood and the better we perform intellectually.”

jon johnston

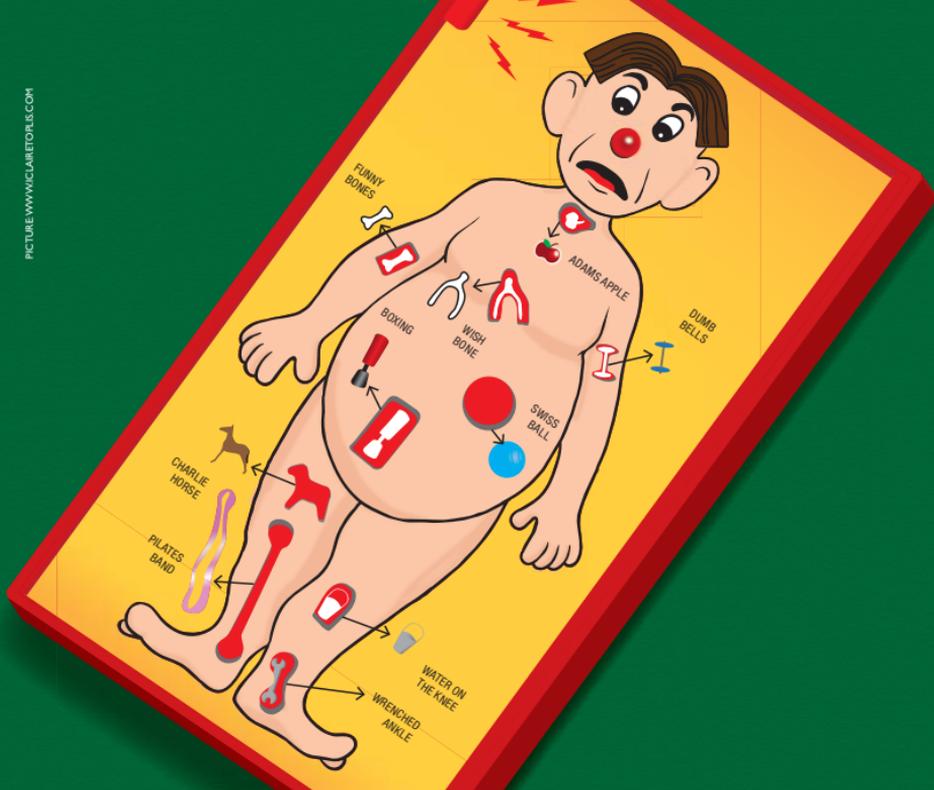
managing director • matrix fitness



Elements of the modern fitness industry emerged from the body-building culture, but gym exercise isn't just about bulging biceps or washboard abs. The main benefits for anyone, of any age, are systemic – the positive impact of exercise on our internal systems.

Exercise improves the function of the musculoskeletal, cardiovascular and endocrine systems and burns off stress hormones: studies have suggested stress could be a possible major factor in ageing. In addition, intense strength training, especially compound exercises, cause the release of beneficial hormones, such as human growth hormones and testosterone, which again helps off-set the physical decline associated with ageing. With our ageing population, rather than focusing on external appearance, we should be promoting inner beauty and exercise's anti-ageing benefits. Clubs looking to 'sell' these benefits might combine this with confidence-building programmes.

But the industry is already changing for the better, especially with the emergence of the trust sector, which heavily promotes GP referrals. Nuffield Health is also taking a bold stance in its marketing, rebranding its gyms as health and wellbeing centres.”



Are we properly selling all the benefits of fitness, such as the positive impact on our body's internal systems?

dr tim anstiss

medical director • the academy for health coaching



“Not everyone seeks improved fitness, and those who do may not seek fitness for its own sake, but for the sake of something else: wellbeing. So is the industry missing a trick? Maybe.

The big opportunity is to get more involved in the health and wellbeing industry, with fitness improvement services playing a role but not the major one. For instance, by 2010 the 15.4 million people on the NHS with a long-term condition will have personal care plans. But where will these people go to get the lifestyle change elements of these plans? The local health and wellbeing centre perhaps?

Yet evolving health and wellbeing centres out of fitness centres will need to be more than just a rebranding of exercise. Strategies and processes will be needed, local partnerships formed and strengthened, workforces developed, new quality control procedures adopted and new data captured – including health and wellbeing outcome measures and not just sales figures. Fitness professionals need to evolve into properly trained health coaches too.

Don't get me wrong, fitness services are important, but people want value for money and the industry needs a new model.”

tony majakas

managing director • technogym uk



“There's a big opportunity for clubs to use exercise as medicine, yet this should be done using a structured approach.

To help assess and set out exercise parameters for patients in different phases of Type 2 diabetes, for example, Technogym partnered with the Italian diabetes association in the Italian Diabetes Exercise Study (IDES). This study, published last November, was based on 600 patients, and showed that the higher the intensity of cardio and strength training that we can work a patient at, the better the outcome.

The study also proved that a prescribed, supervised exercise programme was much more effective at reducing risk factors in patients with Type 2 diabetes than a conventional method where people are given exercise guidelines and left to get on with it. It's now agreed in medical/scientific circles that structured exercise is needed to maintain and change quality of life. What better way to do this than visiting a gym three times a week?

Yet it's important, when moving forward with exercise as medicine, to consistently track data to provide people with evidence-based outcomes.”

RICHARD MILLMAN

The new CEO of Leisure Connection talks to Kate Cracknell about innovation, driving the member experience, and tapping into members' needs and motivations



"I'm just 70 days into the job" is the caveat to several answers when I interview Richard Millman, the new CEO of Leisure Connection. That might be true, but his answers suggest a finger already firmly on the pulse of his new job and the company of which he is now in charge.

Millman joins Leisure Connection from parent company Danoptra, where he was group strategy director, also working on some specific projects in the gaming sector. "Then the opportunity came along to run Leisure Connection, and for me to get back into being the CEO of an operating business, which I grabbed with both hands," Millman explains. "It's a great business, with some really exciting things going on in a really exciting market, with lots of great people and opportunities. And I'm into health and fitness myself, which is always a good thing because you can be passionate about the business."

a fresh perspective

Millman's background is in marketing, working for the likes of Coca-Cola,

Guinness (now Diageo) and Allied Domecq. So has he worked in health and fitness before? "No, I haven't. But when you look at the Leisure Connection business, to a large extent it's a people business, and a retail business in its broader context, and I have a lot of experience in both those areas". Prior to joining Danoptra, Millman was MD at BSG, which owned companies such as PC World, for which he was marketing director for four years. He then went on to become MD of the group's business-to-business mobile phone company.

So will that experience lead him to do things differently at Leisure Connection? "Coming in with a fresh pair of eyes, with insight from other marketplaces, is always of value. But there's a balance to be struck. One thing I won't do is dismiss all that's gone before. If people tell you your ideas aren't going to work for a certain reason, you have to step back and listen. Yes, there's learning you can bring from other markets – different insights into opportunities and challenges – but there also has to be the recognition that it doesn't work every time.

"It's about getting the right blend between people who understand the industry inside-out and bringing in a new perspective from outside. I think we have that blend in our team here. I'm amazed by the passion that our people have for the industry and the business and what we're trying to achieve; it's one of the most energising things I've ever experienced.

"And there's some great stuff going on. Our fitness membership sales are 5 per cent up on last year. We're also seeing a continuing decline in the number of people leaving us every month. Is it improving at the rate that I'd want it to be? No, of course not, but we're working hard to make that even better. And at the root of that, we've brought in some things that are making a big difference to our members.

"Our offering gets better all the time. We're continually investing in the estate, upgrading our facilities and buildings, doing everything we can to keep up with trends in new equipment – and where we can't, refurbishing and upgrading existing equipment. Wherever we've invested



Continual innovation Harpers Strike, a martial arts-focused workout for kids, is just one of Leisure Connection's new offerings



Investing in the estate Refurbishments at clubs such as Dorking (above) have, in many cases, resulted in a double-digit growth in membership sales

in refurbishing the site, we're seeing the benefits coming through in terms of increased membership sales – double-digit growth – and decreased attrition.

"And people are buying into the Harpers Experience programme [five personal training sessions for £20 in the first eight weeks of membership] which was launched last year. It's helping with attrition as well as with sales of personal training – the magic number kicking around is that our PT sales are 465 per cent ahead of where we were this time last year. I think we're on the third re-forecast of our expectations for the financial year – and we've only just reached the half-year point – because Kevin [Yates, national health and fitness manager] keeps breaking all the targets."

"Harpers' Heroes, which is going live as we speak, is also something I'm excited about as a way of enhancing the member experience and improving retention. It's a programme where we ask our members to recommend another member who's a hero – somebody who's achieving some

"THERE'S ALWAYS MORE THAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE MEMBER EXPERIENCE. I'LL NEVER SIT BACK AND BE CONTENT"

fantastic personal training goals, perhaps, or who's trained really hard to run their first marathon, all the way through to people who are simply heroes because they're the life and soul of that particular gym, or because they've raised money for a local charity. It can be anything where people have done something extraordinary, and we're going to cascade it up to national awards with prizes and a gala dinner. It's a way of creating a feeling of community among the members and making people feel special."

ongoing innovation

But the willingness to try new things doesn't stop there. The company is, for example, experimenting with niche offerings: a weights-focused gym concept called Harpers Steel is currently in development in response to an identified need among members – both those

wanting to focus on strength training, and those who'd rather their gym wasn't dominated by the grunting and groaning of weight lifting. "We're looking at some potential sites to trial the concept at the moment," says Millman, "but we're taking the time to correctly evolve the offering; lots of new ideas keep coming out when we bounce the idea off people."

Are they likely to introduce other niche concepts – women-only gyms, for example? While not detailing any specific plans, Millman acknowledges: "We're continually looking at different initiatives. These provide more ways for us to make money, obviously, but more importantly they further the experience and the offering we bring to members and potential future members."

"We're always looking at new ideas across the whole business. For example, the other day we were asking ourselves ▶

Packing a punch Refurbishments have included boxing rings where appropriate, with much of the demand coming from women

► how we can be talking about health and fitness, working with local authorities on meeting their goals for health and exercise in their local community, and yet when you go to the vending machine it's full of Mars Bars and full-fat milk. Why can't we think about vending in a different way? Could we be talking about hydration, for example? Should we be offering energy drinks and healthy food?

"So it's asking questions of each other and ourselves, point number one. Point number two, it's looking at what else is happening out there. For example, I've just come back from a two-week holiday in the States, and much to my wife and kids' disgust, every other day I was disappearing off to look at the local gyms. But not just the gyms; at the way they sell health food generally there, which is completely different from the way we do it here. So it's continuing to ask questions. That's where the innovation comes from.

"There's always something more that can be done to better drive the experience for customers, to get more members in the front door, to stop people leaving. I'm never going to sit back and say: 'We're content with that'. The biggest challenge is keeping the offering to our members refreshed and not resting on our laurels for one minute."

Looking at the broader industry, can this sort of innovation in the member experience take us beyond the 12 per cent penetration level? "Again, my answer is based on 70 days in the job, but yes – I think it's about continually making yourself relevant to the customer. In any market, you have to look at why you're asking people to part with their money – what are their needs and wants in doing it. If I were to ask you now to sign up for a two-year mobile phone contract that was going to cost you £30 a month, with so many minutes and so many texts, the real reason you'd go for that wouldn't be about the phone or the texts or the minutes. It'd be because you wanted to be able to communicate with your friends



and relations. The phone will be a vital tool in your life. Needs and wants are key.

"I don't think our industry is any different. People aren't coming to the gym and spending £30, £40, £50 a month on membership for any other reason than that they have a specific need or want or desire – a goal in their life that they're working towards – and we need to make sure we continually tap into that. It could be to get fit for a marathon, it could be to recuperate from an operation, it could be to look good in a wedding dress.

"I fundamentally believe that people use our facilities for a reason, and to drive that 12 per cent figure up, we have to work hard to understand what those needs and wants and true motivations are, and make sure that what we're offering, and how we're talking to them about that offering, is relevant."

forwards, not back

Going forward, then, what are his plans for Leisure Connection?

"Short-term it's to continue to do what we're doing: driving the business forward by growing revenues, growing

the membership base, offering the right experience to members, working in close alignment with our local authority partners on common objectives and goals.

"Also it's continuing to work on reducing our carbon footprint by becoming more energy-efficient. We've introduced a whole programme of regional energy champions across the business and, in some sites, we're more than 20 per cent down year on year.

"Longer-term, there will be opportunities for further growth. I've no doubt there'll be further consolidation in the market and we'd like to look at our opportunities within that. But I think right now, with the economic slowdown, it's a difficult call to know exactly where everything will be in 10, 15, 20 years. One thing is for sure though: we'll still be here. Our longest-running local authority contract doesn't expire until 2031, so we're in this for the long haul.

"I look forward to Leisure Connection being always at the forefront of driving things for the industry, and driving things for the communities it works in. We need to be at the leading edge of taking the market and our business forward.

"I think that, in life, you either move forward or you move backwards. You never stand still, so by definition if we're not moving forwards then we must be moving backwards, and that would be a bad place to be."



kate cracknell
healthclub@leisuremedia.com

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¹ Source: Euromonitor Sports Nutrition 2008 + AC Nielsen Sports Drinks 52 weeks to 27/12/08.

DRINK UP

Nick Morgan talks about sports nutrition and the evolution of sports and exercise drinks

To reach our full potential, no matter what our goal, nutrition needs to be a partner. A well-balanced diet should provide macro-nutrients, carbohydrates, fat and protein in the right quantities. This will ensure we are adequately prepared prior to the onset of exercise, fuelled during exercise and, as efficiently as possible, able to recover to gain maximal adaptations from training.

Sports drinks have a place in any nutrition strategy, predominantly through the provision of fluid and carbohydrate – two key factors needed to avoid fatigue. The drinks provide well-researched functionality in a palatable and easy to use format. Research shows that they can help users improve performance or achieve a goal, and it's consequently of no

surprise that they are very popular among those participating or competing in sport and exercise. A key aspect of their use, however, is that they should be incorporated as part of your total energy and fluid requirements for the day – they should not be seen as an addition.

Traditionally, when you mention sports drinks, people will think about isotonic sports drinks. These provide the energy, fluid and hydration for endurance exercise that lasts for 90 minutes or more. In reality, however, the sports drink market is now much more diverse and has evolved significantly to include an increased number of functional ingredients, claims and usage occasions. This article aims to identify a number of these key areas.

THE EVERYDAY EXERCISER

A common goal among gym members is to lose weight. As a result, many exercisers don't drink while they exercise, or only use water. However, in a recent piece of research to come from the University of Bath, it's clear that a large proportion of people begin their exercise session dehydrated. An extension of this work has shown that those who choose to drink a low-calorie hypotonic sports drink maintain their hydration status better than those who just choose water.

Dehydration is known to decrease performance or physical output, but it was interesting to note that those gym-goers who began exercise dehydrated had a greater increase in perception of effort and lower feelings of pleasure/wellbeing compared to those who arrived hydrated. Being dehydrated can therefore negatively affect psychological wellbeing. The research indicated that using a low-calorie hypotonic sports drink could increase feelings of wellbeing

and, consequently, the potential to do more in the gym, ie burn more calories.

As a result, despite clear perceived barriers to using a low-calorie sports drink at the gym, it may be the best drink for many people; the consumption of 50 kcals becomes largely irrelevant, as the end gain is potentially much greater.

THE CENTRAL EFFECT

The consumption of carbohydrate is well known to improve performance in sports, while depleted stores of glycogen (carbohydrate) in the muscle may limit performance, especially when exercise is so demanding from an intensity and/or duration point of view. Isotonic sports drinks are therefore regularly consumed due to their carbohydrate content (6–8 per cent), although for the most part are not recommended for exercise of around 60 minutes because carbohydrate stores are not significantly affected.

Interestingly, a number of recent studies have reported performance benefits of 'mouth-washing' with an

isotonic sports drink – swilling and then discarding – during shorter, but quite intense, time trial sports like running or cycling. It's said that the carbohydrate is picked up by sensors in the mouth, resulting in a psychological benefit to the athlete – they choose to run quicker or cycle harder due a reduced perception of effort.

The applied outcome of research is not, however, to start spitting out your drink! What the research indicates is that, contrary to the original belief that carbohydrate drinks might not be relevant to shorter duration, high intensity events or training sessions – because carbohydrate depletion is not a limiting factor – in fact they could be relevant on the basis of the psychological effect.

Of course, actually consuming the sports drink is preferential to spitting it out, because your muscles do need carbohydrate in the overall diet; the key is ensuring that its consumption is factored into the total daily energy intake required for any given individual.



Psychological boost Swilling and then spitting out an isotonic drink can still help you run faster or cycle harder

THE BENEFITS OF CAFFEINE

For some years now, caffeine has been used in sport due to the wealth of research that demonstrates its ability to improve performance in endurance events, such as running and cycling, and high intensity repeated sprint-type sports such as football. These physical performance benefits are largely linked to the ability of caffeine to reduce the perception of effort, thus allowing an athlete to self-select a faster running pace or exercise work rate. Such performance benefits are in addition to the widely acknowledged benefits of caffeine on the mental parameters of alertness, concentration and focus.

Recently, sports drinks have started to include caffeine. Although caffeine may not be for everyone, the potential for mental and physical benefits is certainly there when c.70–210mg is consumed on average 60 minutes before exercise. The drink format means an individual can take care of fuel, hydration and caffeine strategies in one go. There is no evidence that the caffeine would act as a diuretic, as this has also been extensively studied.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOVERY

One final area that has had huge exposure recently is the use of supplements to support recovery from exercise,



Is water enough? Low-calorie hypotonic drinks are better for maintaining hydration

principally focused on the delivery of protein to the previously active muscles to kick-start recovery and aid long-term adaptations. More recent research has focused on the quantities of protein required to promote recovery or, more scientifically, stimulate protein synthesis.

In this area, the attitude of 'more is better' is not necessarily true. Research indicates that there may be a ceiling in the amount of protein to consume in one portion where no further increase in protein synthesis will occur. This ceiling is seemingly around 20g of protein.

In fact, the focus has changed to the timing of protein intake to provide a functional benefit. Current recommendations suggest that you should consume a high biological value

protein as soon as possible after exercise. The two most common forms of protein used in recovery drinks are whey and dairy (casein). Both stimulate protein synthesis and kick-start recovery, although as stated, it seems you don't need more than 20g in any one drink.

SUMMARY

Sports drinks appear to significantly affect psychological wellbeing and a perceived physical exertion. As the drinks market grows, research is expected to delve into more functional ingredients and to find new occasions where the products enhance performance.

 **nick morgan, head sport scientist**
Lucozade Sport Science Academy ▶

SPORTS DRINKS

RECENT LAUNCHES

Whey Refresh from Reflex is a simple and effective way to both hydrate and consume protein either before, during or after exercise. A combination of filtered water, protein and natural flavourings and colourings, it contains 40g of whey protein isolate and virtually zero carbohydrate or fat, making it ideal for maintaining or developing lean muscle mass. Available in three flavours – orange burst, tropical punch and rhubarb – the 500ml bottles come with a sports cap for convenience.

fitness-kit keywords: reflex nutrition

Nutriworld has launched the Lean Body drink. This ready-to-use 40g protein drink has zero sugar, is trans-fat and lactose free, and is fortified with 22 vitamins and minerals. Offering fast- and slow-release proteins for a sustained flow of amino acids, Lean Body aids muscle growth and strength increases. It comes in a range of ice cream flavours: strawberries & cream, bananas & cream, chocolate and vanilla.

fitness-kit keyword: nutriworld



Gatorade, the world's first isotonic sports drink, launched a blackcurrant variant in April. As with the other two Gatorade flavours in the UK – lemon and orange – blackcurrant is free from artificial colours, flavours, sweeteners and preservatives. Delivered in 500ml bottles, Gatorade is a scientifically proven balance of water, carbohydrates and electrolytes designed to re-hydrate, replenish and refuel active bodies. The powder version of Gatorade, launching this year, will follow the same artificial-free formula as the liquid.

fitness-kit keyword: britvic

New energy shot Target launched in April. Manufactured and bottled in the UK by Medichem International, the energy shot contains vitamin B and amino acids. It contains no carbohydrates or sugar, has only four calories, and provides five hours of energy without the 'crash'. Four flavours will be launched in 2009, starting with Life Original in April. Gorgeous Fruit, Sport Citrus and Urban Strength later in 2009.

fitness-kit keyword: medichem

New to the Multipower range this spring is the 55g Protein Shake. A ready-to-use post-training recovery drink, it's been developed to meet the demand for convenient nutrition on the go. With 55g of milk protein peptides for fast absorption, it assists recovery and muscle build-up, as well as providing 53g of energy-giving carbohydrates. It contains only 2g of fat in every 500ml resealable bottle. A bottle provides two servings.

fitness-kit keyword: multipower



The TAUT sports drink brand was successfully re-launched by Barr's in 2008, with an improved recipe, packaging and presentation of the brand. TAUT is made with natural flavours and colours and contains no artificial sweeteners or preservatives. It's available in two isotonic variants – orange & mandarin and cranberry & blackberry – which do not contain salts. A third variant, Taut Endurance Lemon flavour, has been formulated with a higher level of salts for those who engage in high-intensity sporting activities.

fitness-kit keyword: taut



GlaxoSmithKline Nutritional Healthcare, makers of Lucozade Sport, launched a range of 35 sports nutrition products in March. The range caters for all key need states: hydration, fuel, focus, recovery and strength. It includes powders, bars, gels and tablets in a selection of sizes, formats and flavour variants, plus a new chocolate protein ready-to-drink product. The range has been developed alongside top athletes and sports scientists to ensure quality and reinforce credibility among consumers. The new products are expected to drive growth by generating a number of incremental sales through new customers and encouraging consumers who already buy into isotonic drinks and hydration to invest in new sports nutrition products.

fitness-kit keyword: lucozade



In February, Lancashire-based Science in Sport (SiS) launched the world's first fully-certified organic energy and hydration drinks. Organic P22 is a complex carbohydrate energy fuel for high-energy performance, while Organic Go Electrolyte is a carbohydrate energy fuel with electrolytes to give you ultimate performance in the heat. Both drinks allow rapid hydration and aid high-energy performance at all sporting levels. They are available in sachets and tubs. The products meet the Organic Farmers and Growers Federation organic classification standards.

fitness-kit keywords: science in sport



FOCUS, a energy 'shot' drink, was launched in the UK in April. Rich in vitamins B6, B12 and B3, which are essential for improving physical and mental performance, FOCUS is also high in anti-oxidants and amino acids – all in a handy pocket-size 60ml bottle. It's said to provide a sustained boost in concentration, alertness and vitality, with the beneficial effects felt within 10–15 minutes. The energy boost from a single shot lasts up to five hours, and the vitamin-enriched blend of ingredients also means users avoid the 'crash' that can be experienced from consuming sugar- and caffeine-laden drinks – FOCUS has no sugar, no carbohydrates, no artificial flavourings/colourants, minimal caffeine and only four calories.

fitness-kit keywords: focus energy

Slazenger S1 has expanded its hypotonic sports drinks range with the launch, in March, of a powdered format 'stick'. The 31g stick sachets are available in two flavours: raspberry and orange. The portion-controlled sticks are simple to use – simply add 500ml of water, with no need for measuring scoops, shakers and blenders – for quick and easy hydration.

fitness-kit keyword: aimia



kate cracknell
healthclub@leisuremedia.com

research round-up

The benefits of exercising after a heart attack are lost if the patient doesn't continue working out, say scientists from Switzerland. We find out more

don't stop me now

Recent research makes a compelling argument for people to keep up regular exercise after a heart attack. Scientists have found that any type of physical activity helps improve blood vessel health and blood flow in patients who have had a myocardial infarction (MI), but that these benefits disappear within one month if exercise stops.

a closer look

The study, carried out by scientists at the Cardiac Rehabilitation Centre, the Clinique Valmont-Genolier in Glion-sur-Montreux and the University of Lausanne – both in Switzerland – was based on 209 patients who had been referred for cardiac rehab after an MI. The results of the study were published in March in the journal *Circulation*.

The authors knew that exercise benefitted patients with coronary heart disease, but wanted to determine which types of physical activity had the most impact. To do this, participants in the trial were randomly assigned to four groups: aerobic training, resistance training, aerobic and resistance training combined, and a control group that did no training at all.

Those in the aerobic training group had four weekly sessions comprising a 10-minute warm-up, 40 minutes' cycling to take the heart rate up to a maximum of 75 per cent, and a 10-minute cool-down. Resistance training consisted of four weekly sessions of 10 exercises with resistance bands and weights. Each exercise lasted 45 seconds to a minute, with 15–30 seconds' recovery in between.

During the study, the researchers measured participants' endothelial



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If you've had a heart attack, you must keep exercising to maintain the benefits

function (the endothelium is the inner lining of the blood vessels; when it doesn't perform properly, the risk of a blood clot – which can ultimately lead to a heart attack – greatly increases). This was assessed via flow-mediated dilation (FMD) – how much the blood vessel widens to increase blood flow. FMD was recorded before, after the four weeks of exercise, and a month after training stopped.

At the start of the study, FMD was measured at 4 per cent in all four groups. After the four-week training period, this increased to 10 per cent in all three exercise groups, but only increased to 5 per cent in the control group.

While cardiac rehab programmes tend to focus on aerobic exercise such as running, jogging and swimming, these findings show that there could also be a place for resistance training too. Lead author Dr Margherita Vona says this gives patients reason to "carry out several types of physical activity to avoid exercise boredom" while still gaining the benefits.

unexpected findings

However, after one month of no exercise, the researchers discovered that all FMD measures returned to their pre-study levels. This stresses the importance of continued exercise to maintain benefits – a finding of clear interest to the health and fitness industry. "Cardiac rehabilitation is cheap," Vona commented to the *New York Times*. "But the price of losing its benefits is high. It's important to educate patients about exercise, and essential that they continue for the long term."

In a separate interview with *HealthDay News*, Dr Johnny Lee, an assistant clinical professor of medicine at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City, suggested that there were also implications for healthy people: "This applies to the sickest patients – if you stop, you are going to lose the benefit. [But] it shows that continuing to exercise can only have a positive effect if you are a normal subject with no heart disease."

new
opening



With bright-coloured kit and graffiti-covered walls, it's clear who the club is designed for

YOUNG AT HEART

Caroline Wilkinson visits a new standalone youth facility owned by ex-professional footballer Mickey Mellon, which recently opened in Blackpool, Lancashire

Having the police visit a facility that hosts a large community of under-18s with a melting pot of behavioural issues wasn't what surprised me; it was the motive behind the visit. The police, along with many other youth-focused organisations including schools and sports clubs, are scrambling over each other to use the new facilities at SHOKK Blackpool.

Whether it's linking with schools to help achieve the government's directive of five hours' exercise a week, opening their doors to the local PCT and care homes, or working with the police to help get disenfranchised youth off the streets, the club is generating high levels of interest in the local community.

The new club, which has been three years in the making, is the first standalone facility developed under the joint franchise venture between youth fitness specialist SHOKK and The énergie Group – a partnership launched in October 2007 – and will be used as a benchmark for future developments.

breaking barriers

The franchisees, ex-professional footballer Mickey Mellon and his wife Jane, were eager to create a facility that got Blackpool kids more active, off the streets and away from their games consoles. But, according to Jane, convincing the kids wasn't the main challenge – the parents were the barrier.

Trying to get the message across that the club is a lifestyle-based multi-activity centre, albeit with a gym – not a place where kids just pump weights – has been a struggle. "At times it's like bringing the mountain to Mohammed," says Kieran Murphy, marketing director at SHOKK. "When you first hear about a kids' gym, most respond with 'what's that?' It's not an easy concept to understand, so instructors have to take the kit out and do demos. That way parents and schools can see what young people get from it, as opposed to telling them or giving them a flyer. You have to bring it to life." ▶



The club has a gym, but the social element is just as important as lifting weights

BY NUMBERS

The entire Blackpool project cost the franchisees around £150,000, which included a standard franchise fee of £15,000 and fit-out costs of approximately £35,000. Murphy expects the club to get approximately a 75 per cent return on its investment in year two, and a 150 per cent return in year three. Like all SHOKK énergie franchises, the owners will pay a 6 per cent annual royalty fee and a 1 per cent levy



An exercise studio hosts a range of alternative fitness classes, catering for all ages and interests

- Essentially SHOKK and énergie were building a business from scratch, with no natural footfall, standalone template or SHOKK brand awareness in the local area. The most effective way of getting kids into the facility was by offering free demo sessions during the soft launch, which had been spearheaded by a three-week pre-sale campaign of demos and information sessions within the community.

standalone challenges

Most members can only use the gym after 3.30pm, when school ends, so it was important to maximise daytime usage with schools, as well as making it accessible for kids out of school. Having scoured Preston and Blackpool for commercial units, SHOKK and the franchisees chose a 446sq m (4,800sq ft) space on an industrial estate, away from central Blackpool. Despite not being on a main thoroughfare, the club is ideally situated near two major supermarkets, schools and a large residential area, so kids can make their own way there.

With walls covered in graffiti, vibrantly-coloured SHOKK kit, Dance Mats, a Target Wall, 'no-adult' signs and large neon-coloured, hand-shaped seats, it's clear who the club has been built for. But the fitness element has been integrated into the youth club

environment, so it also acts as a drop-in centre for young people to socialise and learn about positive lifestyles.

Although kids aren't encouraged to do more than one hour of exercise per session, they're free to socialise in the 'chill out' area after exercising, allowing parents more flexibility in pick-up times. The area is decked out with games, such as pool tables, encouraging secondary spend. An adult coffee area also generates additional revenue, while a currently unused therapy room, and plans for a new mezzanine floor, offer opportunities for further expansion.

In addition to 23 stations of SHOKK-branded kit – including X-ertain products such as SHOKK MOTIVATRIX, Wireless Dance System, IGNITION CV and FLT resistance equipment – the club has a 4.65sq m (50sq ft) exercise studio to host a wide selection of 30-minute to one-hour alternative fitness classes. Sessions include breakdancing, cheerleading, kombat, ju-jitsu, footie-cise, balance boarding and circuits, at the end of which the kids complete a PMR (progressive muscular relaxation) session to learn how to relax their body and mind.

The club, for five- to 18-year-olds, also offers evening sessions for over-14s (7.30pm-9pm) with dance music and strobe lighting, and there are special

classes for five- to seven-year-olds. For a £25 month-by-month contract (minimum three months), each member completes a six-session Tactics induction over three weeks covering themes from nutrition to mental health – to orientate them before they begin any set programme.

Young people are great at referrals, so the club offers a 'buddy hour' for a friend to use the facility for free. Non-members can access the classes for £3.50; once kids use the club, Jane says the conversion rate is high. An 80 per cent retention rate is also being achieved.

With a target of 500 members in the first year and 300 members to break even, Mickey hopes the focus on group memberships will continue: "I prefer the big daytime contracts from the PCT and schools, rather than individual members, as they keep your income coming in and reduces the demand after school – which means we know more of our kids at night, creating a family feel and maintaining a higher level of personal service."

Blackpool SHOKK has six school contracts which, in any one session, could fill the club with 90 kids – just short of its 95-person capacity. It also has links with local youth sports clubs, offering corporate discounts to players who don't want full access to the classes but want sports-specific programmes; this is where the demand for personal training is expected to grow. The club similarly offers special rates of £18 a month for young people in low-income families, tax credits and sibling discounts, so no-one who wants to get fit is excluded.

You need to create an area that has a balance between fitness and fun, and train and enthuse your staff



"The kids will do anything if you make it fun and competitive," says owner Mickey Mellon

keep it fresh

Although some of the club's 240 members are obese, a lot of the children are simply getting away with not doing PE at school; it's more of a fitness problem, says Mickey: "Most kids can't lift 1kg above their heads or run on a treadmill for more than 90 seconds."

When working with kids to get them active, at a basic level you have to "keep it fresh and keep it moving", advises Murphy. Mickey agrees: "For this generation of kids, fitness isn't a main goal – entertainment is – and a youth gym has to strike this balance."

Blackpool SHOKK does this in a number of ways, from rotating the equipment each month to delivering member feedback and fitness tests every eight weeks, as well as through a range of incentives and competitions that add that key element for engaging youth: variety.

"We have some young people who will never win a running competition, but who are great on the interactive equipment. One girl in particular can beat anyone hands-down on the Dance Mats and it's a huge confidence boost for her to win something physical against a guy that runs for Lancashire," says Jane. "The kids will do anything if you make it competitive," adds Mickey. "Whether it's competing on the Dance Mats or running on a treadmill in teams or relays."

Incentives include awards and a points-based system designed to encourage participation and control behaviour. Kids are expected to misbehave but, to minimise anti-social behaviour, SHOKK has a 'three strikes' policy whereby youth can lose their membership. Points, normally be saved up and exchanged for smoothies and SHOKK-branded sportswear, would also be taken away.

The club has three REPs-accredited instructors: a full-time duty manager, a class instructor, and a part-time freelance trainer who teaches street dance and breakdancing. All have completed SHOKK's core training and development workshops, teaching them how to manage young people in a gym setting, communication styles, child protection, and health and safety. "Instructors can make or break a club", insists Murphy.

Murphy is happy that, with the SHOKK standalone model, they have a winning formula. "It's the balance of all the different aspects: training, enthusiasm and brand," he explains. "You could have all the equipment in a room you want, but it's not going make a facility successful. You need to create an area that has a balance between fitness and fun, and then train and enthuse your staff."

 caroline wilkinson
healthclub@leisuremedia.com

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The Youth Activity People

BUYING INTO INCLUSION



Chris Easton reports on the progress made to date by the UK health and fitness industry towards achieving IFI standards

Ten years ago, using a fitness suite presented at best a challenge and at worst an impossible task for many disabled people.

The situation today represents a significant change. Largely thanks to equipment manufacturers that have adopted new technologies and innovative product developments to take into account the needs of disabled users, expectations of these users have now risen above being offered a 'minimum' service to one that's on a par with their non-disabled counterparts.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) relies heavily on 'reasonableness', but it's sensible to assume that what is reasonable varies subject to what's available at the time. This is no different with fitness equipment, and operators

must be aware of the needs of disabled people when making purchases of products that will inevitably be in situ for a considerable length of time.

Equipment standards developed by the Inclusive Fitness Initiative (IFI) have underpinned the progress made in this area, ensuring that leisure operators now have a choice of high quality providers and inclusive fitness equipment. Not only that but, given the fact that inclusive fitness equipment is rarely different in terms of overall functionality, cost or aesthetics, there seems to be little rational argument for not making sensible, inclusive procurement decisions.

OFFERING CHOICE

IFI Accreditation – currently based on the IFI Equipment Standards Stage 2 – is the only formal frame of reference for

The spice of life Variety is becoming increasingly important in the types of equipment offered to disabled members

purchasers and users to determine whether equipment is designed inclusively. There is no doubt that the IFI's Provisional Level package – the minimum amount of inclusive equipment required to allow the vast majority of disabled users to access a cardiovascular and resistance-based workout (see table p44) – can ultimately satisfy disabled users' physiological training needs. However, disabled people will increasingly demand greater choice, variety and flexibility in their workout. More than ever, they are aware of the availability of inclusive fitness equipment, which is in turn raising their expectations. Today's users realise that it's possible to get a full body ▶

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IFI MARK EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

Clubs must provide the following inclusive equipment to achieve IFI Mark Accreditation at the different levels:

	IFI MARK PROVISIONAL LEVEL	IFI MARK REGISTERED LEVEL	IFI MARK EXCELLENT LEVEL
CV equipment	Treadmill, upright or recumbent cycle, upper body ergometer	30 per cent of total treadmills and 30 per cent of total bikes	Analysis of the size of the gym will determine the percentage of IFI-accredited equipment required
Resistance equipment	Leg curl, leg press or leg extension, upper body multi-station (high-low adjustable pulley) or equivalent upper body resistance single stations	Same as the Provisional Level package	Provisional Level package plus additional wheelchair-accessible upper body resistance equipment (including chest press, shoulder press, seated row, lat pulldown)
Additional	Range of small equipment, dumbbells, Dyna-bands etc	IFI-accredited small equipment package	IFI-accredited small equipment package
Additional desirable	Additional products that add value and variety to the fitness offering including cross-trainers, vibration and balance training equipment	Additional products that add value and variety to the fitness offering including cross-trainers, vibration and balance training equipment	Additional products that add value and variety to the fitness offering including cross-trainers, vibration and balance training equipment



Accessible environment

Considerations include clear colour contrast between the equipment and the floor (above and right)

commercial and voluntary sectors. Additionally, a number of capital funders – for instance, Sport Scotland and the Sports Council for Northern Ireland – place specific conditions on the installation of inclusive fitness equipment as part of their funding criteria.

In terms of accessibility of fitness equipment, there are a number of questions operators should consider when selecting a provider:

- Are items of equipment IFI Accredited (to Stage 2 standards)?
- Can the equipment supplier provide the full Provisional Level package required to offer the majority of disabled people a full body cardiovascular and resistance-based workout? If not, are you prepared to use multiple suppliers to achieve this? (see table, p45, for details)
- Can the provider offer your users choice above and beyond the Provisional Level package?
- What is an appropriate complement of inclusive fitness equipment for the size of your gym?

Clearly the wording of equipment tenders is as significant as the response to them in terms of facilities being able

workout, irrespective of impairment, and rightly demand that operators make this opportunity available to them.

However, too often the notion of minimum provision is applied when it comes to including disabled people. In the context of fitness equipment, this approach seems to make little sense given the range of quality inclusive fitness equipment that's now available. For instance, why install one inclusive treadmill in a run of twenty when fundamentally they are functionally the same piece? Perhaps this is justifiable when replacing one or two equipment items, but must be questioned when undergoing a full refit. Inclusive equipment can be used by both disabled and non-disabled gym members, and it makes sound financial sense to purchase one product that will serve the needs of the widest range of customers.

This is reflected in the IFI's approach to accrediting facilities, with those facilities attaining Excellent Level on the IFI Mark Accreditation framework not only evidencing a minimum provision, but also paying due credence to the importance of choice as part of their fitness offering.

As important as the quantity of inclusive fitness equipment in a gym is the profile and range of equipment available. Certain impairment groups may only be able to exercise in certain ways so, for instance, having CV equipment

that's readily accessible by wheelchair users is an important consideration.

The current industry situation is considered by Dawn Hughes, IFI equipment manager: "The IFI is delighted with the increasing level of choice available to purchasers when selecting inclusive equipment. In gaining IFI Accreditation Stage 2 for their products, equipment suppliers have made significant progress in delivering an inclusive package that will work for a wider range of consumers, regardless of impairment. The need now is for facility operators to educate themselves and work with equipment suppliers to make informed and appropriate procurement decisions."

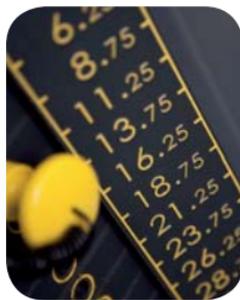
How equipment is laid out is also fundamental to creating an accessible environment. Considerations include good circulation space, clear colour contrast between the equipment and the floor, and making sure that auxiliary services such as towels and water dispensers are accessible. Sport England currently publishes two documents that are relevant in this respect: *Access for Disabled People and Fitness and Exercise Spaces Design Guidance*.

PROCUREMENT CONSIDERATIONS

What's encouraging is the fact that the provision of inclusive fitness equipment forms a critical component of refits for numerous operators in the public,

SCIFIT

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**SUPPLIER SUPPORT**

This table details which suppliers can provide the equipment to help a health club attain the different levels of IFI Mark Accreditation:

EQUIPMENT SUPPLIER	IFI MARK PROVISIONAL LEVEL	IFI MARK REGISTERED LEVEL	IFI MARK EXCELLENT LEVEL
Cybox®	✓	✓	✓
HUR	✓ _R	✓ _R	
Leisure Lines	✓ _R	✓ _R	
Life Fitness®#	✓	✓	
Matrix Fitness Systems®	✓	✓	
Pulse Fitness®	✓	✓	
Precor®	✓	✓	
Technogym	✓	✓	
BalanceMaster	Supplier of IFI-accredited balance training equipment		
Concept2	Supplier of IFI-accredited postural support seats for rowing machines		
Escape Fitness	Supplier of IFI-accredited small equipment package		
Octane Fitness	Supplier of IFI-accredited elliptical trainer		
Power Plate	Supplier of IFI-accredited vibration training equipment		
SCIFIT	Supplier of IFI-accredited upper body ergometers		

R – resistance only

* In order to achieve the minimum package, an upper body ergometer must be obtained from an alternative supplier
Leg curl and leg extension currently sourced from Leisure Lines.

Please note that some of the suppliers outlined above can supply equipment in addition to that specifically referenced in the Provisional, Registered and Excellent Level packages. For a comprehensive list of IFI-accredited equipment (Stage 2), please visit www.inclusivefitness.org

to achieve an inclusive offering. The IFI is quite explicit in the way in which it recommends that tenders should be worded to ensure that an appropriate range of fitness equipment is installed.

With the vast array of products available, the IFI recommends purchasers work closely with their equipment supplier to ensure that the correct models are ordered and subsequently received. Detailed guidance notes are available to purchasers on the IFI website – www.inclusivefitness.org. The IFI also offers a free telephone advisory service to all facilities considering the purchase of new equipment to discuss and review their tender documentation.

PASSING THE BATON

In a climate where the fitness industry is becoming inextricably linked with the public health agenda, it's more important than ever to consider all sectors of the community. Technology, sensible decision-making, an ethical approach and a recognition of the value of the disability market means it's possible to deliver fitness equitably.

Disabled people have a right to participate. Equipment manufacturers are making the changes required to facilitate this; now it's up to operators to do their part and make the right decisions.



chris easton
healthclub@leisuremedia.com

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ACTIVITY PARTNERS

Lisa Taylor looks at the leisure sector's ability to deliver prevention and intervention strategies to improve health

Obesity is unquestionably one of the biggest health challenges facing the UK at the moment, and strategies to tackle expanding waistlines are topping the list of health interventions. But how can the leisure sector play a key role in the reduction of obesity levels, over and above its existing work to increase participation in physical activity and encourage healthier lifestyles?

progress to date

The cross-government obesity strategy, 'Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives', underwent a progress review one year in. The resulting report, published earlier this year, shows that tackling childhood and adult obesity "requires a large network of organisations, central government, the NHS and private and third sectors...". The phrases that crop up again and again throughout this and numerous other government reports are 'local', 'working in partnership' and identifying and

delivering 'effective treatment'. A starting point to understanding how the leisure sector can be involved is to outline what qualifies as 'effective treatment': delivery-ready solutions from organisations such as social enterprise MEND, for example – one of nine specialist providers identified as part of the government's framework for PCTs considering commissioning child obesity intervention programmes.

Although PCTs often have the funds – £69m was allocated to local areas to combat obesity in 2009/10 – and are being encouraged to commission weight management services locally, they often require facilities and staff to help them deliver directly into their local communities. Under the 2008/09 World Class Commissioning Programme – a process by which PCTs commission services – a fifth of PCTs chose child obesity as a priority. This is therefore an excellent opportunity for the leisure sector, which is ideally positioned to

assist in the delivery of programmes such as those created by MEND.

So why is this the case? What do we have to offer and where do the openings exist for leisure providers to optimise their position as prospective partners? There are three fundamental advantages when delivering this sort of programme.

1. Location: most leisure facilities operate in the heart of their community, offering easy, convenient access for local families. They often have existing links with primary and secondary schools too.

2. The ability to sustain outcomes: once a course is completed, long-term change can only be achieved by sustaining habits and activity; introducing families to a leisure or fitness facility means they can continue to exercise at the end of the course in an environment they know and have become comfortable with. Leisure centres can offer a huge variety of activities and sustainable pathways.

3. Staffing: effective childhood obesity programmes are group-based and engage parents or carers and children together. The leisure sector has a wealth of instructors who have vast experience in this area, including sports coaches, group exercise instructors and fitness instructors with Level 2 qualifications and above, as well as excellent interpersonal communication, coaching and facilitation skills.

Fully-manualised programmes allow complex subjects to be delivered cost-effectively by staff with diverse backgrounds and a variety of qualifications – MEND's childhood obesity programmes, for example, have been written by specialists in their field for delivery by non-specialists with appropriate training.

Easy does it Organisations such as MEND provide delivery-ready programmes to leisure centres



Getting kids active A leisure centre can become a familiar environment, meaning kids are more likely to continue exercising after the course

optimising the sector's performance

While the leisure sector is ideally positioned to be a delivery partner, there remain areas where the sector can improve its credentials. A key consideration is professionalism. Although a large number of operators achieve incredibly high standards, the sector as a whole does not necessarily have the respect and understanding of some commissioning organisations.

Obtaining nationally-recognised quality marks can be very helpful in this regard, including the FIA Code of Practice, QUEST, ISO 9001 and Investors in People.

Another issue is staff qualifications. REPs is well supported, but only an estimated 60 per cent of instructors are registered, meaning that quality of instruction can be uncertain. A number of important additions are being made to REPs that will enable the leisure sector to become an even stronger delivery partner:

- * The introduction of a children's fitness qualification at Level 2
- * The re-introduction of nutrition as a core module at Level 3
- * A number of specialist modules at Level 4 including obesity and diabetes
- * An emphasis in the National Occupational Standards on what a qualification does *not* enable an instructor to do, preventing young, keen staff from going beyond their knowledge limit to try to impress the customer

Other practical measures that can help leisure providers improve their partnering prospects include:

- * Gaining a better understanding of local government commissioning
- * An increased focus on data protection
- * Accurate outcomes measurement, records of attendance and benchmarking. MEND offers its delivery partners an online operations management and monitoring tool. ▶



Maintaining change For campaigns like Change4Life to have long-term benefits, they must be accompanied by grassroots community strategies

- ▶ developed specifically for these tasks, which allows automatic report generation locally
- * Reduction of staff turnover, which can affect credibility
- * Clear referral pathways to other instructors and healthcare professionals in the community

forging relationships

So should your organisation consider becoming a delivery partner?

If you already have an existing relationship with your PCT, however small or large the contract, ask yourself whether you can do it better. Have you given your staff the training and support they need? Are they processing data and paperwork efficiently and accurately to free up as much of their time as possible for face-to-face customer contact? Do you measure this? Are customers being encouraged to continue exercising at the end of their programme? Are you in regular communication with your PCT, feeding back programme outcomes?

If you need to build a relationship with your PCT, there are two main routes:

- * **Reactive:** For larger projects, PCTs advertise their commissioning requirements. There is no reason why leisure centres and clubs cannot directly tender, but the process is detailed and requires expertise, time and consideration. Lack of previous experience shouldn't deter you, but it may be better to partner as the delivery arm with an organisation such as MEND.
- * **Proactive:** The offer of your facilities may be very useful for the delivery of existing programmes run by the PCT and will help you start a dialogue.

Whatever your situation, take a good look at your current operation before taking on more work and ensure that your standard operating procedures are watertight. For example, within your fitness department, review your normal operational procedures for new customer/member inductions and address any necessary improvements first before considering taking on additional programmes and responsibilities.

Although most work in this area is currently delivered in public leisure centres, there is absolutely no reason why the private sector shouldn't get involved. Total Fitness is leading the

way in the private sector, for example, running GP referral successfully at a number of its facilities.

government input

Helpful advice is also provided in the government's Foresight Report, where the top 10 tips for local action include:

- * **Don't go it alone:** Local strategic partnerships already exist with the purpose of bringing partner agencies together to work on local issues such as obesity prevention. Each local authority and its partners are required by law to prepare a Sustainable Community Strategy for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their area. Local Strategic Partnerships bring together varied public sector agencies to develop local area agreements (LAAs), which offer the potential to pool funding at a local level for programmes that can best address local needs
- * **Practise what you preach.** Be a model employer and develop healthy workplace objectives

* **Don't re-invent the wheel.** There's a lot of evidence to show what works to combat and prevent obesity. Don't try and write your own programmes – partner with those who are experts in their field, offering evidence-based programmes proven to get results

Last but not least, this year the government launched Change4Life, a £275m social marketing campaign designed to inspire families to change their behaviour. Initial findings have suggested that the campaign is succeeding in reaching out to families and children who are most at risk.

However, the campaign needs to be supplemented by grassroots, locally-implemented strategies to create long-term sustainable change in communities – locally-implemented strategies such as the FIA's MoreActive4Life campaign,

in which leisure providers are strongly encouraged to participate. Details of the campaign will be announced at the FIA FLAME Conference this month.

concluding thoughts

It's clear that, over the next few years, the leisure sector – and particularly the health and fitness industry – will be uniquely positioned to become a true and trusted delivery partner for the Department of Health's overarching strategies. During this period it can demonstrate its ability to professionally deliver prevention and intervention strategies to improve health, thus playing a key part in improving the health of the nation. Alternatively it can squander this opportunity and miss out on the chance to make a tremendous difference.

Which will it be? The environment is right and the government is more aware than ever of the role that our sector could play. Interestingly, the answer now lies directly in the hands of operators. Get it right and this is an investment with a long-term payback for both the sector and the nation.

FIA Flame 2009 Conference

Lisa Taylor will be sitting on a panel of experts at the FIA FLAME Conference on Tuesday 9 June, asking: "Have we got what it takes to become a delivery partner for the Department of Health?" Joining her will be other leading industry figures including Carol Weir, health promotions manager and commissioner for Rotherham PCT. Details: www.fia.org.uk +44 (0)20 7420 8560



lisa taylor
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FULL STEAM AHEAD

There may be an economic crisis, but funding is still available for the right projects – especially in the public sector. Claire James investigates

The current economic situation is having an effect on all areas of everyday life. The public are looking at their outgoings to see if they can make savings by downgrading memberships, businesses are analysing how they can make space work harder, and finance companies are shutting up shop – or are they?

In fact, there are a number of projects still going ahead, even in this difficult financial time. The availability of funding to public-owned facilities seems to be largely unaffected by the downturn in the UK economy. Funding has been secured through a variety of different channels – whether through private-funded partnerships with specialist operators or other avenues such as

Prudential borrowing – and the demand for the new facilities certainly seems to be there, with plenty of new members walking through the door.

Interestingly, figures from the State of the Industry audit by The Leisure Database Company reveals that 56 per cent of the 114 new centres opened in the past 12 months were private clubs. However, in redevelopment terms, it would seem to be the public sector that's particularly buoyant.

But even with opportunities open to them, public sector operators still face challenges in securing the correct funding for developments. According to Sarah Watts, managing director of Alliance Leisure: "It's not necessarily the availability of funds that's under pressure, but rather that the security lenders require has now increased.

"There's a limited supply of money due to the economic climate, and authorities and trusts are struggling to demonstrate fitness development record [a track record of developing successful, profitable facilities].

Exceeding targets Crystal Leisure Centre sold 112 memberships in just two weeks after it underwent redevelopment

"However, the City is happy to provide funding for projects that can demonstrate their commercial viability." Companies such as Alliance Leisure, she says, are likely to be seen as low risk by the funding companies, whereas a local authority with little or no track record in development may struggle to prove its ability to build and sustain a profitable centre.

public benefits

With security and funding key issues at present, how are some of the myriad of new developments being funded, and what makes them successful?

Private companies like Pulse Fitness and Alliance Leisure can help authorities and trusts obtain the funding they require. Both companies have extensive experience and are experts at providing the right solution, particularly in the

TYPES OF FUNDING AVAILABLE

- **Prudential Borrowing:** Government funding available to local authorities for capital finance projects
- **Private self-financing funding:** Partners such as Pulse Fitness, Alliance Leisure and LDP offer funding direct through partnership deals that can include a wide range of services
- **National Service Framework:** Linked to the Department of Health and designed to improve key areas of

health, in particular children's health. Funding here may be provided through a third party such as the IFI

- **Primary Care Trusts** have funding available for projects that meet key objectives such as tackling obesity
- **Regional Development Agencies** can fund elements of projects such as initial site clearance and highways. This is classed as urban regeneration and can therefore be offered support funding

- **Other public bodies** may have local funding for specific projects
- **National Governing Bodies** of sport, in partnership with Sport England, have a budget of approximately £50-60m to develop sport in England
- **Department for Children, Schools and Families Co-location Funding:** A cross-government fund to support capital projects that enable the co-location of local services



public sector. The solution can be anything from working with clients to source funding, to Alliance Leisure and Pulse obtaining the funding for the project themselves and entering into partnership agreements.

Pulse recently completed the redevelopment of The Parks Leisure Centre in Barrow at a cost of £1.7m – £1.5m of which was secured through Prudential borrowing, with the remaining funded directly by Pulse. The design of the new facility was specifically centred around the introduction of a second floor to house a dedicated children's gym, as this was seen as an essential element of the redevelopment by all parties. The children's market is growing rapidly and it was vital that The Parks offered a solution that would suit the whole family, not just the local adult population.

Since the refurbishment, and despite a new competitive facility launching just down the road, membership has risen from around 350 before the development to 1,210 members. This success has been attributed not only to the new building, but also to the affordable membership fees on offer at the refurbished facility.

Chris Johnson, MD at Pulse, believes that the public sector is ideally placed to flourish in the current climate: "If public sector facilities can match the private sector when it comes to the offer, they

will certainly be able to beat them on price, and this is what people are looking for at the moment."

Watts agrees that the public sector is well positioned to benefit. "The increase in the number of large projects coming from the municipal sector is largely down to the significant number of customers trading down from more expensive clubs, but still having high expectations of what's provided.

"Local authorities are concentrating more on delivering appropriate facilities for the demographic profile of the area and are not as restricted by corporate guidelines as the private sector."

successful solutions

A recent project undertaken and gap funded by Alliance Leisure was for Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council – gap funding being where the private company makes up the shortfall in the funding from other sources. The £1.2m contract covered improvements to Halesowen, Crystal and Dudley Leisure Centres and included the creation of a family fitness centre and a children's soft activity area.

Watts says: "These developments have been extremely successful, with Crystal far exceeding the targeted membership; a staggering 112 memberships were sold in just two weeks. This demonstrates the point that, if you understand your target audience and deliver the

right facilities in the best possible environment, you will be successful."

Meanwhile the Leisure Development Partnership (LDP), a joint venture by Precor and Inspirit, has recently commenced work on the redevelopment of Padiham Leisure Centre for Burnley Council. The £1.35m development is a 32-week project that will see the refurbishment of about half of Padiham Leisure Centre's existing facilities, as well as an extension to include new features such as a dedicated children's



All-embracing Pulse has created an offering that's suitable for the whole family, not just the adult population

► gym. Funding for the project came from a number of sources, including a significant investment of £250,000 by Sport England and a further £30,000 funded through the government's free swimming initiative.

Richard Taylor from Inspirit says: "It's vital that private companies such as ours offer sound advice to our customers, and this includes advising them as to how they can secure funding. Using our wealth of experience in financial planning within the public and private sectors, we can help find a financial solution for most projects."

securing funding

These projects clearly show that funding is still being granted to viable schemes, but what are the boxes that operators need to tick to improve their chances of securing funding? The answer to this is really quite simple: look at the government agenda on health and welfare and understand how your project could provide solutions for your local community.

The installation of 13 Dance Machine systems by Pulse at Balby Carr Community Sports College in Doncaster, funded by the local PCT, is a good example. PCTs can work closely with local authority sites to provide better fitness provisions and sporting activities to improve the health and wellbeing of the local community, especially in



Meeting local needs Pulse has converted under-used squash courts into gym facilities



Family fun Soft activity areas are among the facilities being funded

relation to the obesity targets set by central government (see p46).

Meanwhile, if projects are designed to address specific local targets such as extended school hours and tackling anti-social behaviour, they can receive funding for new equipment. For example, Barnsley Premier Leisure recently converted an old squash court into a youth activity room containing an Active Wall, a 16-mat Dance Machine system and Vibe children's circuit that was funded by the Youth Sports Trust.

A similar project at Halesowen Leisure Centre in Dudley saw the PCT part-fund a ZigZag interactive gym to help combat the borough's rising obesity problems, while West Midlands police provided a further £12,000 towards equipment which it hopes will help combat crime and anti-social behaviour in the local area.

The fact that the economic climate is making operators think harder about their objectives for new equipment and redevelopment is a good thing according to Adrian Hill, leisure sector manager at Willmott Dixon. "The public sector is now looking at sport as part of the wider picture, and how it fits with primary healthcare and other related areas," he says. "Facilities must be developed on a needs-led basis, with the finished

facility providing services that the local community actually wants to use. This is how sustainable facilities are developed." Watts agrees: "It doesn't make good business sense to start with a design and try to make it work commercially for you. It's more beneficial to deliver appropriate facilities for the demographic profile of the area. Feasibility studies are paramount, as nothing tangible will be achieved without one."

According to Watts, the economic climate clearly presents an opportunity for public leisure operators. "With booming sales of cosmetics, affordable fitness should slot into the same category and should be similarly buoyant as consumers look for cost-effective ways to look and feel better about themselves in these challenging times," she says. But the dominance of local authorities and leisure trusts won't last forever, says Hill: "Long-term the private sector will have a role to play as the government develops its Commissioning Framework that will see private and public sectors working together to provide leisure facilities at grassroots level."

Johnson agrees: "Just because the current climate favours the local authorities doesn't mean that the private sector will lose out entirely. This type of situation has happened before and the private sector will fight back when circumstances favour them again. Local authorities need to be ready for this with the best possible facilities targeted at the right people."



claire james
healthclub@leisuremedia.com

TOP TIPS ON PROCUREMENT

- Always carry out a feasibility study, no matter what type of funding you're looking for, as this will almost always be required
- Ensure there is a demand for the services you want to offer: know your audience and what they will want. This information should form a part of the feasibility study
- Think about the different areas of funding available to your facility. For example, tackling anti-social behaviour may present new funding avenues
- Be realistic – you will only be able to secure funding for a realistic plan
- Talk to people who have done it before to get advice from those who have managed to secure funding

Checking in Booking technology can be used for classes, making them a viable option for budget clubs

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MAKING THE SWITCH

Sean James looks at how and why full service operators might switch to a budget model

We should first define what we believe constitutes a budget club in the UK at the moment. A budget club is a health club where fees do not exceed £19 a month at most. It has minimal staffing levels, is low maintenance (which means no pools) and has technology-driven membership management, joining and billing systems.

Though proven to be very successful abroad – mainly in the US and Germany – the budget club model is still viewed with some scepticism in the UK. Many operators I spoke to initially wanted to see a full year trading in the UK before they were prepared to draw any conclusion as to the viability of this new type of ‘fast fitness’, despite the results from the model abroad. But it’s been well over 12 months now since the first UK budget club began pre-sales, and

there are quite a few of these types of club now open for business. None that I have spoken with have failed. On the contrary, most have proven very successful, with more than 2,000 members having joined each club – some a lot more.

Of all of the budget clubs now in business, from groups such as FitSpace and The Gym Group to independent budget clubs, they all have one thing in common: they don’t obey the rules that

we as an industry have been used to. For example, they have no sales team, no tours, no direct sales cost. Marketing does it all, with consumers joining online or at a kiosk in-club. And there’s no service beyond front desk – new members receive an induction and are then left to themselves. That’s not to say service is unavailable though – they can pay extra for personal training with an in-club trainer.

Has it made a difference to members in terms of service experience? No, it hasn’t. Members come in, they exercise, they go home. If they want assistance they ask for it. If they want tuition and guidance they pay for it. Attrition rates are not significantly different than those of a full service club, members aren’t complaining, and they’re joining self-service style en masse.

The budget model is closer to retail than to hospitality. It’s about volume, turnover, fast sales and efficiency

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Keeping it simple Budget clubs have no sales team, tours or direct sales cost. Marketing does it all, with members joining online

► why change?

The most effective comparison that everyone seems to agree with is that the budget model is much closer to retail than it is to hospitality. The latter is about service, experience and pampering. In retail it's about volume and turnover, demographics and speed. Low cost fitness clubs are also about volume, turnover, fast sales and efficient operations. Service is no longer key to operating a successful health club.

If full service works for you now, there's no need to change. But if profit is hard work each and every month, with some months incurring a loss and hopes always pinned on a good January, maybe it's worth thinking about changing your business model.

The current economic climate is also a very good reason to consider a change. Though many operators are not being affected as they had perhaps expected they would be, times are still tough for the consumer and there's definitely a more conservative approach to spending.

I believe full service just doesn't work. This is a very controversial point of view, I know, but so many clubs are still scratching for answers, with so many statements still made about 'shutting the back door', 'plugging the hole' and so on, that I do believe it to be true. No doubt, certain systems work very well,

but retention at best is about stemming the tide, not halting it. There will always be a place for sector clubs: spa clubs, racquets clubs, leisure clubs. But where there are people, where there is hustle and bustle, where there is fast food, the territory is also perfect for fast fitness.

full service to budget

Jon Wright, owner of Xercise Health and Fitness in Castleford, Yorkshire, has been watching the growth of the budget club model for some time. In August 2008, when the first signs of the recession were showing, Wright decided to trial a low-cost price in a marketing exercise among expired members. That month was the second biggest sales month of the year, with more than 5 per cent of his expired members joining at the new, low-cost price.

Following careful planning and research, and with the assistance of his providers Fiserv Club Solutions and Harlands Services, Wright rolled out the model in January. As he already had a successful club, he took a phased approach, gradually introducing new pricing with an option for members to join either a low-cost 'gym-only' membership or take a full service membership not dissimilar to the one already available. January's sales were double those of January 2008, February was the same, and more than



Full service just doesn't work... retention, at best, is simply about stemming the tide

100 memberships were sold over the two-week Easter holidays.

Wright is now providing consultancy and advice to other owners and operators about making the change. He says: "In retail, self-service is growing fast. We sought to make that work at Xercise. Our budget model could not be achieved without a technology upgrade. Initially we did this to get our online joining and payment processing integrated with our management system, but now we've applied it to access control as well". Instead of traditional membership cards to access the club, Xercise members use a combination of PIN code and fingerprint to open the turnstile. "Just PIN on its own still presents, we feel, a security risk, so a fingerprint is used to verify the member's ID," adds Wright.

Helio Fitness in Blackpool, Lancashire, was a successful independent town centre health and fitness club with a lot of competition. Owner Neil Henshaw says: "For eight years we ran a normal health club, emphasising service and trying everything to maximise retention. But it was always hard work. Sales were difficult to make and resource-heavy. Retention was equally hard work and even more resource-heavy.

"We saw the launch of McFit in Germany, and Planet Fitness and 24 Hour Fitness in the US, and we watched. The clubs thrived, the businesses grew and the budget club model seemed to work. We studied the demographics

around us, we crunched numbers and planned hard. We worked hard with our technology partners – SDA Solutions, Harlands Group and Technogym – and we made structural alterations to the club to allow us to better run a less staff-intensive business. We streamlined our staff structure and made energy alterations to ensure the business was as cost-efficient as possible. In January we launched and, in four months, we've doubled our membership base."

Unlike Xercise, Helio Fitness moved straight across to the new model, writing to all existing members inviting them to rejoin at the new price. Helio was previously a Technogym Wellness System user and elected to keep the system in the model. Henshaw explains: "For the budget club, Wellness System is even more effective now than it was before in a full service gym environment: it's our fitness instructor and provides members with instruction, information and tracking."

how to change

If the business conditions are right and you want to change, you first need to change the rules. Throw the hospitality rule book out of the window. Think retail, think efficiency. These are the areas you should consider: **technology:** Integrated technology in particular aids cost savings and efficiencies that allow a budget club to be run. There are two main technologies – membership management and

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► membership payment processing – which allow significant savings to be made in both time and effort. Membership administrators can then better manage their time and turn to more proactive activities like managing member relations. Internet-based systems are also an advantage, allowing you to monitor your club without even having to be there. A third factor in the technology mix is fitness management, which can also be automated and integrated.

access control: Staffed check-in provides an element of 'meet and greet', and some budget clubs run manned receptions. However, others are completely automated, with turnstiles and barriers that manage access to the club. Controlled by the membership management system, non-payment of membership dues locks a member out of the club; only when the payment has been settled can they gain access.

join online: This is a must, and the correct marketing must be put in place to ensure that customers choose to join from home or from work, and without influence or persuasion from a sales team.

space: A budget club means more traffic, so your number of machines may need to be increased to accommodate higher volume. Your membership capacity is ultimately limited by available space in your club. If you move to a budget model, you will need more members to make profit and that means your club will be busier.

classes: Some of the budget club operators have no studio, while some offer 30-plus classes a week. Xercise retains classes within its full service membership option but 'gym-only' members have to pay a fee to join a class.

PICTURE: WWW.STOCK.COM



No reception Some clubs are automated, with turnstiles to manage access

Helio runs on a pay-per-class basis. Another highly successful budget club operator is adamant that inclusive classes are a critical element of the club's success. Technology can allow members to log in and book classes as well as personal training, eliminating the cost of bookings administration and making it a viable option for budget clubs.

contract: The contract debate still rages. Some budget clubs have contracts, others don't, and some clubs believe in easy-in, easy-out memberships. Consumers are accustomed to contracts: mobile phones, broadband, digital TV... all are based on 12-, 18- and sometimes 24-month contracts. And so far, contracts don't seem to be a barrier to joining.

demographics: It's worth looking at the numbers, getting a health and fitness marketing company to analyse the population mix within five, 10 and 15 minutes' walk and drive time of your business. A budget club is not going to work for a rural location with only

10,000 people in a 15–20 minute drive time, for example. There are a number of specialists that can provide this service, such as The Leisure Database Company, Hatrick Marketing and Your Management Solutions.

Switching to a budget club is not something that can be done in a day. There is a lot to consider, a lot to plan and a lot to change. But if the business conditions are right for you to be able to change, then the rewards may be worth it for your long-term business success. I know of at least one club that was making a loss as a full service club, to the point that the owner was considering closing. Switching to a budget club was the last throw of the dice. Since changing, this club has thrived and is now profitable, and the owner is currently in the process of moving other clubs over to the budget model as well.



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healthclub@leisuremedia.com

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COMINGS & GOINGS

Kath Hudson asks our panel of experts for their best practice suggestions on dealing with membership cancellations



As the recession-enforced tightening of belts grips the nation, will the health club industry lose clients as people decide they can no longer justify their membership? Or will Friday nights at the gym become the norm as members visit their health club to avoid spending money elsewhere?

Duncan Bannatyne was recently reported in *The Daily Telegraph* as saying: "Just to be clear, my members are using their local clubs more not less. I think it's because they want to get more for their money. Usage is up on average from 1.78 visits per week to 1.95 visits per week and our company turnover is up on a like-for-like basis compared with last year." However, when people across the country are looking to cut costs, this sort of performance cannot be taken for granted.

Ideally clubs should make themselves indispensable to their members, working proactively to prevent anyone getting to the point where they would even contemplate leaving. Use your staff to engage with customers and drive home the message that exercise is vital, not a luxury. Keep quality and service levels high at all times as, in a recession, people look for value whenever they part with their cash – and this means raising your game even further.

But there are a growing number of people – those faced with unemployment, for example – who are genuinely struggling to make ends meet at the moment. Should clubs stick rigidly to their contract, or should they let them go with a blessing in the hope that they will return when economic times are better and their fortunes have improved? ▶

contributors

Richard Apps, corporate health and fitness manager, Sheffield International Venues

Stephen Aucott, operations director, Odyssey

Barry Cronin, executive director, Central YMCA

Terry Gibb, national sales manager, Harpers Fitness

Eric Keller, VP franchise support, Anytime Fitness

Paul Ramsay, operations director, 3d Leisure

Carl Wood, owner, Courtyard Health and Fitness

Proactive approach Drive home the message that exercise is vital, not a luxury, to help prevent members from leaving

Returns policy As with a financed car, you still have to pay your membership, even if you're not using the gym

► We ask our panel of experts (see 'contributors' box, p57) for their thoughts on the likelihood of membership cancellations in the current economic climate, what you can do to avoid the situation arising in the first place, and how to handle them should they occur during these tricky times.

luxury or necessity?

Paul Ramsay: "We've seen an increase in attrition over the last few months, which we put down to the current climate. However, we're launching a new member integration programme to reduce attrition. This will see all members inducted to the club over three separate sessions to try and establish exercise as part of their weekly routine."

Carl Wood: "Unfortunately, for the first time in 12 years, due to the current economic climate, some members have felt the need to cancel their membership, making us realise that, no matter how good our products and services, they were at risk during a recession."

Stephen Aucutt: "Gym membership is a vulnerable part of personal expenditure, especially for those not getting value out of it. For them, [the economic crisis] could be the excuse they need to justify dropping it to themselves."

Eric Keller: "I think that, regardless of economic times, fitness club memberships have always been vulnerable to the 'payment with usage' mindset – people feel they should be allowed to cancel if they're not using their membership. However, more and more, people are seeing their fitness club membership not as a luxury, but rather a necessity for both their physical and mental health."

Barry Cronin: "There was a time when many would see gym membership as a luxury, but I don't believe that's still the case. The idea of staying healthy is so ingrained in a lot of people's psyche that they will go without something else rather than part with their memberships."

Terry Gibb: "We're talking about people's health and wellbeing, which I hope is something they value."

flexible options?

Stephen Aucutt: "In recent times, we've had several construction workers cancel due to the downturn in their sector. In response, we've kept their membership open and used their skills to work on the presentation of the club in a short-term 'artisan' membership scheme – free membership in return for their work. Many have now found alternative employment and we've kept them as members."

Eric Keller: "Some of our club owners offer options to



People are seeing their fitness club membership not as a luxury, but as a necessity for both their physical and mental health

either freeze membership or payments for a period of time, so that the member can get back on his or her feet."

Richard Apps: "In this economic climate, you have to offer more choice and work with customers to provide the service they want and can afford. We've started a new campaign offering three- to six-month contracts and a 'pay as you go' option; not tying people in for 12 months gives them more security. We listen to our members and would look at transferring them to a different contract or freezing their membership if necessary."

Barry Cronin: "We offer payment holidays for three months in certain circumstances to help people who are struggling financially. Although we have various strategies in place to

retain memberships, for us it's really about adopting a fair and ethical attitude to benefit our members."

Carl Wood: "We've taken the unprecedented step of protecting ourselves by offering members a discounted long-term contract, while improving the quality of provision for our loyal members."

Stephen Aucutt: "We're experiencing more enquiries where people are bartering off the back of the economic conditions. We have to be strong and believe in our product, which has cost us some sales, but I think it will pay dividends later."

let them go: they'll come back

Stephen Aucutt: "Retention is not about how many members you turn around at the cancellation stage – it happens from the enquiry and at every point where the member has contact with the club and the team. Cleanliness, maintenance and good service go above and beyond expectation whenever possible. If they do decide to cancel, finish their membership on a high note and give them every opportunity to want to come back to you when their circumstances change."

Barry Cronin: "If people lose their job, move house or have difficulty paying, then as long as they have confirmation of this from an independent source, we will allow them to walk away from their 12-month contract at a moment's notice. This approach works well for us: currently around 75 per cent of joiners are returning clients."

tough but fair

Terry Gibb: "We're very clear in our sales advisor training, which says they should never sign someone up to a 12-month agreement if they're not fully committed to exercise and physical activity. I would refer to Sky and cellphone providers: they make it clear the agreement is for 12 or 24 months and, as everyone is aware from day one, there are no problems.



Exchange rates Some clubs have kept construction workers' memberships open, for free, if they help out with jobs in the club

"I think it's also important that we as an industry make it clear what a 12-month agreement is. The member is buying a 12-month membership and is just choosing to pay for it monthly rather than as a lump sum. If you bought a car and paid for it on finance, but didn't drive it any more, could you take it back and cancel the finance payment? Of course not."

Eric Keller: "We've always encouraged our club operators to have a tough but fair policy with cancellations. We encourage them to first take the approach of the fitness advocate – meaning they really should encourage the member to reconsider fitness as a priority that all other things in life feed off, especially during a time of stress and uncertainty. If you're taking care of your body and your health, then you're better equipped to cope with stress in other areas of your life."

Stephen Aucott: "We've always taken the approach that long-term relationship building is a better strategy by far when it comes to dealing with members' cancellations. We have our terms and conditions and a contract is a contract. However, we

Some club owners freeze memberships or payments for a period of time to help members

do overlay this with a common sense approach to personal circumstances."

Eric Keller: "This really comes down to making your policies fair and clearly defined in your membership materials, and then sticking to your policy. Nothing can destroy a club's reputation faster than cutting deals for some

members while sticking with others. So the key is consistency, compassion, but ultimately understanding that you as a club operator also have obligations in the business."

Terry Gibb: "It's not a matter of reacting, but being proactive. As service providers, we should see ourselves firmly in the hospitality industry and ensure all our customers are fully aware of all our contract agreements before they commit to signing up. At the time of purchase, it's important that the sales person reiterates that a 12-month agreement or a no contract option is available."



kath hudson
healthclub@eisuremedia.com

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The XCO-Trainer is a silicon granulate-filled aluminium tube that can be used for a variety of core strength and power exercises, as well as to make walking and running more challenging.

The patented design means the XCO-Trainer can aid the strengthening of core muscles while toning the upper body.

The equipment can also be used to aid weight loss; it's claimed that adding the kit to workouts can burn up to 33 per cent more calories than without.

fitness-kit keyword: **xco**

BALANCED BODY DEBUTS EXO CHAIR

Pilates equipment manufacturer Balanced Body has unveiled its latest piece of core training equipment, the EXO® Chair.

Featuring an innovative padded pedal, which offers both rotational and reciprocal movement of a user's extremities, the EXO® Chair provides users with a full-body pilates workout. There is also a range of options for exercisers, from beginners up to advanced with eight different settings that strengthen the core.

Boasting an economical footprint, the product also has multiple attachment points where Functional Resistance Kits can be added to expand the user's workout. These use either a split or a single pedal.

The chair is lightweight, easy to adjust and carry, and is also available in a single-pedal version – the package includes a dowel rod to convert the chair from a split to a single pedal if so desired.

The package also includes a workout DVD.



fitness-kit keywords: **balanced body**

PROACTIVE HEALTH LAUNCHES ABDOFIT

ProActive Health has boosted its range of core training products with the AbdoFit. A lightweight, cost-effective piece of kit, the AbdoFit comes with an adjustable strap and a choice of three settings to provide bespoke exercising options. The product can be used to aid a comfortable abdominal-based workout session, while the use of foam on the seat area means longer workout sessions can be achieved if required.

The board is made of composite material which supports and helps in lifting the upper body, while the spring effect increases the efficiency of the workout. The product stores flat and is both quick and easy to assemble.



fitness-kit keyword: **abdoFit**

fitness-kit.net

For more information, or to contact any of these companies, log on to www.fitness-kit.net and type the company name under 'keyword search'



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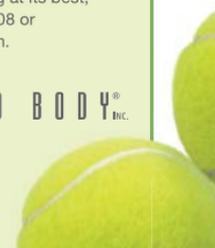


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bucking the TREND

Andrée Deane, CEO
of the FIA, looks at the
findings of this year's FIA
State of the Industry report

On Thursday 7 May 2009, the BBC News told us to make a note of the date, because it was (probably) the beginning of the end of the recession.

The reason for the optimism was the fact that Barclays and Lloyds TSB had finally turned the corner and made a profit. Rejoice. But the really good news for us is that the health and fitness sector is officially at the vanguard of that. According to the annual industry survey, compiled by independent market analyst The Leisure Database Company (TLDC), the sector grew by 3 per cent in the 12-month period ending 31 March 2009.

Not only that but, in spite of the economic climate, revenue was up to an all time high of £3.77bn. Like-for-like membership was also up 0.8 per cent over the 12-month period, leading to a population penetration rate of 12.1 per cent. This means that more than one in eight consumers are now members of a health club or leisure centre, and compares favourably with the penetration rate for the previous two years: 11.8 per cent (2008) and 11.9 per cent (2007).

creative buzz

Given that the leisure sector has been so badly hit in the last few months, these are truly remarkable figures. Hotel occupancy rates are down, around 39 pubs have been closing every week – and yet, in 2008, 114 new health and

fitness sites opened in the UK, and the forecast is for a further 155 to open in 2009.

So what's the reason for such a remarkable sector-wide performance? Having spoken to FIA members during my travels up and down the UK, I'm not surprised by the figures. Despite rocketing energy and utility costs, the implosion of the financial sector and the subsequent impact on all sectors of society, I witnessed quiet, almost nervous optimism among operators. There seemed to me to be an unprecedented level of creativity and application among those I met, accompanied by an unshakeable belief that 'retention is king'.

As for lead generation, we're seeing everything from stunning shop window graphics to clever PR spins and innovative promotions – right up to knocking on the doors of local retailers, using Change4Life to persuade them to play their part in the national public health strategy by allowing the club to hold exhibition performances at peak shopping times, handing out promotional literature to shoppers and passers-by.

This creativity has not been the exclusive domain of the large national multiples, or the prerogative of the nimble single site operators, but witnessed across the board. One single site owner, for example, created a Wellbeing Awareness day that took her club out of the "exercise ghetto" (her words) and into the health and wellbeing arena. A major private multiple, meanwhile, famed for

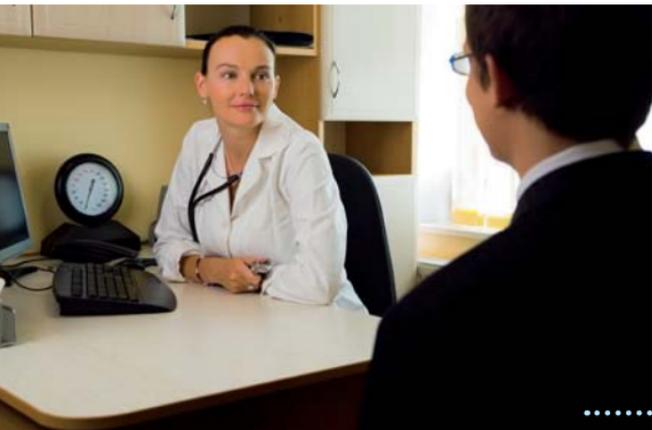
its commercial acumen, has invested time, money and resources in a very innovative CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) programme.

It's this sort of innovation and lateral thinking that has led to an almost 1 per cent increase in like-for-like membership across the industry, with total membership now standing in the region of 7,335,569 members.

government impact

No end of financial year review can ignore the beneficial impact the government's public health strategy – and in particular Change4Life – has had on our sector. Nor can we underestimate the influence it has had in

Encouraging signs: The number of organisations now working with PCTs and GPs on referral programmes is a positive trend





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acting as a catalyst to help us evolve from a health and fitness provider – and that awful image of gym-jockeys and leotards – towards a contemporary health and wellbeing partner. With numbers of qualified Level 3 and 4 fitness instructors at an all time high, we now have the credibility to grow into that role for the first time in our collective history.

It's also heartening to note the increasing number of organisations now working with PCTs and GPs on exercise referral programmes. The industry has certainly benefited from government's respect for, and desire to work with, our sector. This has had the dual impact of consolidating our position as a public health delivery partner and investing in our future, with funding now available for activity-led programmes – such as Fit for the Future and Sweat in the City – designed to underpin the government's national wellbeing agenda.

robust model

I'm constantly asked by people outside the industry if membership has suffered in the recession – especially after Mintel recently reported that consumers would “trade down from private clubs to local authority-run facilities”, concluding that there would be “an extra eight million admissions to public leisure centres and a 100,000 fall in private health and fitness club membership”.

Bold move: Operators are using Change4Life to approach local retailers and gain permission to hand out leaflets in shopping areas

Many consumers view exercise as the best sort of investment in the current climate

We refuted Mintel's conclusion and now have the facts to prove us correct. Their total universe figures are wrong, their private sector membership growth figures are wrong, and the assumption that consumers would ‘trade down’ to public-

owned facilities was both insulting to some of the attractive operations available in the public sector, and inaccurate in assuming that all private sector clubs are more expensive than their public sector peers.

Commenting on the figures of this year's survey, David Minton, director of TLDC, says: “It seems many of those consumers who are participating are now viewing exercise as an investment – possibly the best sort of investment in the current climate. The government's health messages are having an impact and the fitness industry is to be

applauded for maintaining performance levels and gaining new members despite the difficult trading conditions.”

So are we robust enough to withstand the impact of a sustained economic downturn? The evidence proves that we are. Our business model has proved robust enough to weather the worst economic storm in our lifetime and the future looks promising, so perhaps a mild sense of optimism is allowed – but maybe prudence should continue to be our watchword.



andree deane

healthclub@leisuremedia.com

jonathan williams

Kath Hudson talks to the CEO of youth fitness specialist SHOKK about addressing youth on their terms, developing a franchise offering, and global expansion plans



Q When and by whom was SHOKK founded?

I founded the company in 1999. It came from an idea a friend and I had at college to develop a youth activity business, dedicated to getting young people interested in a positive lifestyle. The SHOKK brand was born some years later on a Sunday afternoon in a pub.

Q What's the company's mission statement?

To continually strive to make SHOKK an iconic brand of youth activity. To ensure SHOKK stays true to its roots as the youth activity people, while symbolising professionalism.

Q Why did you decide to focus on the teenage market?

After spending a lot of time travelling and coaching in the US, I noticed the negative impact youth inactivity was having and realised well-structured youth-focused activity would help address these issues.

Q What challenges have you met along the way?

It was a difficult idea to get off the ground. I had every door slammed in my face. Operators' views were "yeah, well we'll stick them in the pool, give them a tennis racquet and charge them a tenner less than their mum and dad". But I wanted to give young people the same experience that anyone else would get, because if you get them at this age then it solves the problem of trying to attract them when they're 17 or 18.

Q Did you get anything wrong along the way?

Yes! I started off by calling the company Kid Co Fitness, but changed it within two years as anyone over the age of nine considers themselves a young adult.

Q How does your concept appeal to this market?

As the savviest of all consumer groups, young people recognise quality and want the most up-to-date concepts.

We listen and never patronise. Our brand offers a funky, enjoyable and safe environment where young people can have fun, meet friends and get active. We also offer a wide selection of training courses that give fitness instructors the essential tools to offer new and innovative workshops, so there's always an activity for everyone.

Q What do SHOKK gyms offer?

Each SHOKK site is completely safe and tailored to kids aged five to 16 years. They're given the best hands-on guidance by fully-trained fitness professionals, using equipment specifically developed for this demographic.

We're constantly looking for new products, training ideas and merchandise to engage young people. A lot of this development is driven by our facilities and training team on the ground, and we run regular focus groups with young people across the country. Also, through a Dragons Den-style process, we encourage companies to pitch new product ideas to us, and we have a strong product design and manufacturing process that helps bring relevant ideas to fruition.

Q What are your latest products?

Over the last 12 months, we've launched a number of key products. SHOKK Tactics is our revolutionary web-based activity management, health assessment and retention system, which won Innovation of the Year at the Leisure Report Awards 2008. Designed specifically for monitoring young people exercising in facilities, or as part of partnerships or projects, it's the most significant and exciting SHOKK development to date.

WHO'S WHO?

CEO: Jonathan Williams
Sales director: Justine Williams
Marketing director: Kieran Murphy
Head of finance & operations: Steven McKiernan
Creative director: Paul Williams
International training & HR manager: Jean Sullivan
International sales manager: Matt Mozley
Business development manager: Shawn Clarke



Fun fitness
Each site is specifically equipped for five- to 16-year-olds

SHOKK Wireless Multiplayer Dance System was developed in conjunction with Game2move, combining our paediatric exercise science knowledge with their interactive know-how. Meanwhile, SHOKK Motivatix is best described as a commercial standard Wii with top-end graphics. By making exercise into entertainment, it's designed to motivate the user to get active and achieve their fitness goals. Although based on gaming, it helps children develop kinesthetic awareness and sharpens visual and audio responses.

Are fitness instructors trained in-house?

Yes. We now have 22 different courses. The core module introduces instructors to working with youngsters in gyms and takes three days. From there, they move on to qualifications that are on the national qualifications framework and funded through the Learning and Skills Council.

I believe it should be your best staff who work with young people. These are the staff who will get the most from it, and they become very loyal to you. ▶

COMPANY BY NUMBERS

Head office: Manchester – proud to be a UK-founded concept and company
Year-on-year growth: Over 75 per cent growth in turnover each year since inception in 1999

Number of UK employees: 30 with SHOKK UK

International network: A further 40 employees are now involved with the growing international network which includes: Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Israel, China, Australia, US, Holland and Belgium. Six more territories will be added this year

Constructive playtime Interactive gaming is one way of engaging youngsters and also develops specific skills such as co-ordination and visual responses



Breakdancing Activities to appeal to the savvy teenage market

FAVOURITES

Book: *Danny Champion of the World*
Film: *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*
Music: Just Jack / Sneaky Sound System
Place: Central Park, New York
Food: Chinese
Season: Summer
Leisure activity: Football, drumming, clubbing with my mates and the Mrs!

Q Will existing gyms be put retrospectively into the SHOKK énergie format?

A small percentage will be converted into franchises but, as many of our current customers are in the public or education sector, our main focus will be on new facilities.

Q What plans do you have for the next year?

We plan to open a new franchise site and two to three other facilities each month across the globe. We're also planning to launch a number of key product, programming and training innovations over the next 12 months. These are under wraps at the moment!

Q And for the next five years?

To become an iconic household brand for young people around the globe.

Q What are you most proud of?

My people. They're a genuinely passionate team, and I've still got about 80 per cent of the faces who were here five years ago.

Q What trends do you predict in the next few years?

The initiatives we've helped to construct, pilot and support, such as the NICE guidelines to promote children's activity and Change4Life, will be seen for what they are – a positive step forward. And the leisure industry will recognise the role it has to play in helping the healthcare industry develop a message about prevention rather than cure.

Hopefully the leisure, fitness, healthcare, education and sport industries will start working together instead of in isolation. Local government authorities such as Birmingham City Council and Rochdale Borough Council are shining examples: all parties, including the local PCTs, are working together to spend the right money where it's needed most.

 **kath hudson**
healthclub@leisuremedia.com

▶ Q How many SHOKK gyms are there?

We have more than 165 sites in the UK, from Plymouth to North Yorkshire in Scotland. SHOKK is also the first UK youth activity company to expand internationally, with 200 SHOKK gyms established in 20 territories across the globe. This expansion has been aided by the launch of the SHOKK énergie franchise in October 2007.

Q How did your partnership with énergie come about?

We were 75 per cent of the way down the line to launching our own franchise when I met Jan Spaticchia at SIBEC

07/08. He was looking for a youth offering to add to his portfolio and we were looking to franchise. It made perfect sense to form a partnership – the industry leaders in youth activity with the industry leaders in franchising, offering each other shared company resources and expertise. SHOKK provides the consumer-facing brand, expertise and programming, while énergie supplies the back-end franchise systems and support.

Q How do the new SHOKK énergie gyms differ from the standard SHOKK gyms?

All franchise sites display the black SHOKK youth gym logo, rather than the orange logo used for our licence sites. However, they have all the latest elements of our concept, as well as the standard back-end integrated front desk systems and member management processes. Additionally, members at franchise sites undertake our SHOKK Tactics Lifestyle Guarantee Impact Programme – an induction programme designed to help young people achieve a more active and healthy lifestyle. It's been proven to help with retention and means young people get the most from the SHOKK experience.

Q Are SHOKK gyms membership only, or pay and play?

Our franchises are pretty much membership only, while the local authorities and trusts have to offer a 'pay as you go' option, or a combination, with concessions based on social demographics.



Target wall Physical activity appeals to kids when it becomes entertainment

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HOME DELIVERY

ANDREA BICKFORD LOOKS AT THE LATEST
INNOVATIONS IN DISTANCE LEARNING

Easy internet access and developments in technology are bringing learning to life and giving people access to some of the best trainers in the world. But as the popularity of online education continues to grow, there are still issues – such as the challenge of assessment, the absence of class discussion, the lack of timely feedback and the need for self-motivation – which have to be considered if this form of training is to continue to enjoy success.

E-learning is undoubtedly a valuable and cost-effective resource. Perhaps the biggest benefit for employers is the significant cost saving compared to classroom-based training. "To take staff

out of the workplace for training, which sees them away for extensive periods of time, costs the employer in terms of absence from work as well as travelling and accommodation costs," says Nic Jarvis, online presenter for PTontheNET, which is owned by Fitpro. In fact, a study reported in *Training Magazine* indicated that organisations save 50–70 per cent on training costs when they use e-learning programmes instead of classroom courses.

Accessibility and convenience are key attractions for the student; learning can be done anywhere and at any time. "An ever-increasing number of our students now opt for online learning," says Heather Frankham, CEO of training provider Lifetime. "The opportunity to study at their own pace is key – students with a prior level of knowledge can fast-forward through selected topics – while different learning styles can be catered for via video presentations, workbooks, online lectures and so on."

pros and cons

Some argue that online learning is more effective than traditional forms of training. According to a variety of published studies, individuals taking e-courses retain more information than if they studied comparable courses in the classroom. Florence Orban, CEO of The National Skills Academy for Sport and Active Leisure (NSA), which has recently teamed up with the Chartered Management



Fast learners Students can study at their own pace, rather than the pace of the instructor, when they do online qualifications

Institute (CMI) and LearnDirect to offer a wide range of online courses, explains: "Individuals who engage in e-courses experience significantly higher rates of retention than those taking classroom courses. Learning is quicker too – e-learning programmes typically require 30–60 per cent less time than attending a comparable classroom course, allowing individuals to learn at their own speed and not the pace of the instructor."

And as technology develops, so do the benefits for students, as Jean-Ann Marnoch, REPs registrar, explains: "As a tutor I used to spend ages trying to come up with teaching aids that would demonstrate a variety of anatomical and physiological concepts. These can now be portrayed in a moving online image."

Another advantage of e-learning is that it gives the student control over their learning, so they aren't overloaded with information as can occur with face-to-face learning. "People can go back to the workplace and put what they have learnt into practice before learning the next piece of information," says Jarvis.

Despite all these advantages, however, e-learning does have its shortcomings. Some students, particularly those with low motivation or those needing constant guidance, may suffer from the lack of social interaction with the instructor and fellow classmates. Their learning may also be affected by the lack of instant feedback and continuous



EiFitness Students can now learn online using interactive features such as live video conferencing, chat pods and demonstrations



Applied learning Online courses give students the time to practise each lesson at work

evaluation that can be offered through traditional training courses.

making it work

So what are the essential factors for effective e-learning and how can the challenges be overcome?

Lack of interaction, both with the tutor and other students, is one of the major drawbacks of e-learning; it's incredibly difficult to replicate the tutor-learner relationship online. In an effort to overcome this challenge, the European Institute of Fitness (EiFitness) has recently launched the Virtual Classroom. Utilising the latest technology to bring live and interactive education to the user via the internet, essentially this is a classroom in space that anybody from around the world can access. A link is sent to the student, who can then log in at a designated time and hear a live presenter. Full powerpoint displays, live video conferencing, an interactive whiteboard, recorded video demonstrations, breakout rooms and chat pods all promote interaction and allow the student to fully engage in the learning process.

"The content is probably best suited to theoretical material," cautions Darren Tebbenham, director at EiFitness. "However, with the advent of real time video streaming and live interaction with students, skills such as programme writing and technique instruction can be taught really well, as the cyber can essentially

look over their student's virtual shoulder. "Our students have really liked having structure to their distance education – they've enjoyed having much more interaction than they would have done otherwise from a traditional distance learning perspective."

Having said this, Tebbenham maintains that: "Always your first and best way of training – as a fitness instructor or personal trainer – is to use a residential, full-time, intensive study programme. But with such advances in technology, the Virtual Classroom comes a close second."

According to Fitpro, in order for online training to be effective, the training should be vocationally-based and task-focused. In addition, the trainers must be credible and well-respected. So it comes as no surprise that their Certificate in Health and Fitness Management, a 13-week modular programme delivered entirely online via PTontheNET, is presented by three of the most respected names in the industry: Robert Cappuccio, Bob Esquerre and Nic Jarvis.

Following the successful completion of an online assessment, participants receive three further updates and, after 12

months, undertake a final written exam to receive their certification.

Despite the absence of close student/teacher interaction in an online environment, Laura Baker, training and education manager at Fitpro, remains hopeful of achieving a classroom camaraderie when there are a few people studying together on the Certificate in Health and Fitness programme.

monitoring progress

The quality of student evaluation and assessment following an online study course has often been criticised. Yet many argue that these criticisms are unfounded. "The assessment should be the same no matter how the learning has taken place," states Marnoch. "The knowledge and skills of an individual should still meet the assessment criteria, and if they do, then the individual has demonstrated the same competence as someone who has been through a more traditional type of learning."

Moreover, many online learning programmes enable organisations to automatically monitor and track their employees' progress. ▶

"ONLINE TRAINING IS ONLY SUCCESSFUL IF INDIVIDUALS ARE MOTIVATED AND CONSIDER TRAINING A BENEFIT"

Management Systems typically track the dates an individual has been on a course, the time they have spent, the progress made, as well as reporting their scores on any exams or assessments undertaken online," explains Orban.

This tracking function is extremely important to Daniel Dyer, learning and development manager at leisure trust Fusion, which will be signing up for a selection of online learning courses from the NSA. "With over 30 sites in the UK, many of which are in remote locations, the accessibility of online learning makes it a very attractive prospect to us. As far as CPD is concerned, online training allows us to regularly assess our employees and check their competence," he explains.

Neil Burton, CEO at Holmes Place Central & Eastern Europe, who is currently trialling PTontheNET's Certificate in Health and Fitness Management with some of his staff, agrees: "Most online systems offer what 'guru' trainers cannot, such as feedback, a help function, management reports on the uptake and pass/fail rates and statistical data on how the training is being used."

However, Burton says online training is only successful if individuals are motivated and consider training a benefit, and if managers are actively involved in their team's training by setting measurable goals and monitoring participants.

Once an employee completes their in-house training with Holmes Place and qualifies as a PT, they are rewarded with a subscription to PTontheNET. "This has provided a really valuable incentive to trainers, both to pass the exams we set internally and to maintain their high standards," says Burton.

co-existing

So what about the future of online training? Marnoch sees a world where both online learning and classroom teaching co-exist: "People and their learning styles are different, so I don't think that online learning will take over and I hope there will always be a need for the more traditional styles of learning."

Nevertheless, as technology continues to advance and challenges some of the issues traditionally associated with online learning, the general consensus among industry professionals is that distance learning will continue to grow. As Baker puts it: "It's down to economics – it's all about the bottom line for operators, giving them a quality service that's convenient and good value."



andrea bickford
healthclub@leisuremedia.com



Online CV Keeping all training records in Lifetime's web-based format can make it much easier for instructors to assess learners' work

LIFETIME'S E-PORTFOLIO

When undertaking an apprenticeship programme, student employees must develop a file of all training records. Traditionally, students would provide evidence in a paper-based portfolio for a regional trainer to assess, which can become a huge, cumbersome document. Lifetime's E-Portfolio, launched just over a year ago,

eliminates paperwork by using a web-based format.

Regional trainers can focus on the instruction of each candidate via an online student assessment database – each trainer has a tablet personal computer, and all assessment notes, conversations and even video footage is able to be updated immediately onto the system.

benefits include:

- ◆ Timely completion of apprenticeships / qualifications
- ◆ Non-browser based, so doesn't need the internet to function and can be used anywhere. It simply needs to synchronise at the end of the day with head office
- ◆ Students can get remote access to view their files and measure their progress
- ◆ Students are 'involved' in their learning by having interaction with the assessor and the e-learning process / hardware
- ◆ The management information obtainable from the system measures the detail necessary to manage business KPIs and individual staff members
- ◆ The management team at Lifetime can track candidates at any time and report their progress accurately to employers
- ◆ Bespoke and integrated internal training processes are mapped to the national occupational standards to ensure the learner's development mirrors the assessment on-site by the lifetime assessor
- ◆ Relevant data, including authentication signatures from the regional trainer and student, is captured and, in real time, communicated directly to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). This eliminates the need for the majority of paper-based forms required by the LSC, allowing Lifetime to draw down funding from the government in the most effective way possible

Lifetime recently won the Work Based Learning Award for its innovative use of technology in education and learning from Becta, the government agency leading the national drive to ensure the effective use of technology throughout learning.

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Kate Cracknell reports on some of the new product launches at FIBO 2009

Record sales, a 9.1 per cent increase in exhibitor numbers and a 3.2 per cent growth in visitor numbers – these are the figures reported for FIBO 2009 by organisers Reed Exhibitions Deutschland GmbH. In fact, the 517 exhibitors marked a new record for FIBO, while 48,800 visitors attended over the three days of the show which took place in Essen, Germany, from 23–25 April.

Hot on the heels of IHRSA, many of the products on display in Essen had been launched in the US in March. Nevertheless, a significant number of products showcased at FIBO were enjoying their trade show debut. Here we round up some of the launches at this year's show.

Bicicletas Goi-Contini launched its prototype Running-Bike. The design of this exercise bike, with the pedalling axle further back, together with a longer connecting rod, means the movement pattern resembles running. The idea is that the bike could be used as a substitute where running is unadvisable due to impact on the joints.

Chirotractor, a company founded by the orthopedic specialist Dr Eduard Chen, introduced its CT-L back exercise

SHOW & TELL

device for mobilisation of the lower back. According to Chirotractor, existing back exercise concepts concentrate mainly on back muscle strengthening and neglect stretching and flexibility. The device is said to allow the health club user to safely mobilise, self-adjust and stretch the lower back in order to prevent and treat locked intervertebral joints, and to relax tight back musculature.

Escape Fitness launched Reebok's new range of studio equipment. Catering for all studio activities, the range – which comprises around 90 pieces of equipment – covers boxing, strength and aerobics. Reebok has redesigned the look and feel of the products, introducing new citrus colours to appeal to the female market. This follows Reebok's research – a survey of 5,000 women across the world – which found that they wanted to have fun while getting in shape. A new speed-training line joins the range, which includes ladders, speed belts and cones.

gym80 International, now with a UK office, launched a number of new products at FIBO. Enforbike is the world's first impulse training cycle, offering all the benefits of vibration training with the ease of cycling a bike. It's said to help users train more efficiently by increasing muscle fibre activation, with a range of studies also proving its value in areas such as rehab and cellulite reduction. The product won the FIBO Innovation Award for Equipment in the Fitness, Health and Rehabilitation Category.

Body Sense is based on almost 30 years' research by scientist Jurgen Woldt. Acknowledging that certain muscles in the body respond to particular colours and elements – the



gym80's Enforbike is the world's first impulse training cycle

quads are able to lift more weight when the exerciser is exposed to visuals of fire and the colour red, for example – Body Sense comprises a series of five 'pods', each with one piece of resistance equipment inside, and with a screen showing visuals of the colours/elements that will fire up the relevant muscles.

Meanwhile, E-Strength is a motorised, software-controlled strength range offering isometric, isotonic and isokinetic movements in one machine. The first prototype was exhibited at FIBO, with a 10-piece range scheduled for launch in 2010.

gym80's Software Version 3 – the latest version of the manufacturer's exercise management software – allows for multi-site connectivity, more interaction with the user and improved compatibility with other manufacturers' CV equipment through C-SAFE.



Stretching out Chirotractor's CT-L back device allows gym users to relax tight back musculature and prevent locked intervertebral joints



Going live New products and demonstrations (above) filled the halls of FIBO, designed to attract the attention of the show's 48,800 visitors

And the High Performance SYGNUM range now includes the Dynamic Hip Machine for long- and high-jump athletes, developed in conjunction with Olympic athletes and coaches. There is also an explosive kicking machine to increase speed and power, which has been trialled with Schalke FC in Germany.

Instyle launched its prototype of WebRacing. This allows you to exercise on a static bike, cross-trainer or rower while, via an internet connection, watching your virtual self taking part in some of the most famous races in the world, such as the Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race and the Boston marathon.



Instyle Via the internet, exercisers can compete virtually in races such as the Sydney trial bike course

Matrix Fitness Systems launched a range of premium CV equipment.

The 7 Series includes treadmills, ascent trainers, ellipticals, hybrid cycles, upright cycles, recumbent cycles and steppers, which are available in both the 7xe and 7x models. The 7xe models offer a 15" integrated touch-screen LCD console, with intuitive touch-screen graphics.

The 7x models feature a 7" LCD screen, which is self-powered on all models other than the Tread and Ascent Climbers. All consoles are iPod compatible and have an integrated three-speed personal fan and an embedded FitLinxx wireless transmitter.



Matrix The 15" LCD on the 7xe models features intuitive touch-screen graphics

milon Industries GmbH has formed a strategic partnership with FPZ

(Forschungs-und Präventionszentrum Köln), the leading German institution for research and rehabilitation for back- and spinal column-related injuries. The resulting 'Dorsys Back Concept' from milon consists of four machines that allow the upper body to work in four different directions, ensuring a comprehensive workout. It can help to stabilise and strengthen the torso's muscular system, as well as helping prevent and treat back-related problems, and is being used as part of FPZ's rehab concept.

milon also won the FIBO Special Concept Category Innovation Award

for its flagship concept, the smartcard-controlled milon circuit. This award is presented to the best overall concept – the product itself, but also the marketing, communication and training concepts that ensure correct usage by staff and members alike.

Nutriworld launched Nutrispace, an online community platform developed specifically for athletes from all over Europe to share their knowledge and experience. It also launched Nutristores, an online chain of sports nutrition shops to be run by certified partners who are able to offer advice on their products. ▶

▶ Power Plate International

unveiled its new pro-motion accessory, a cabling system that expands the exercise possibilities on the Power Plate. Upper body and resistance training was already possible through the standard straps supplied with each machine, but the pro-motion accessory, which clips to each side of any Power Plate pro series model, can provide a much more intense and varied resistance training workout.

The flexible cables offer consistent resistance at three different levels. They also extend to more than two metres, offering full range of movement and allowing the user to perform a full range of dynamic exercises, both on and off the vibrating platform.

PowerBlock Fitness, the European distributor of PowerBlock dumbbells, used FIBO for the European launch of US-based fitness retail brand GoFit. The company is now distributing the GoFit range of sports, fitness and stability products throughout Europe, and also launched the GoFit 2009/10 product catalogue at the show.

Pulse unveiled the third phase of its Smart Centre gym management software. It can now track activities external to the gym environment – from swimming to walking the dog – to help contribute towards members' overall



High-fliers Reebok launched Jukari, a Cirque du Soleil-inspired workout that gives the feeling of flying while delivering a full-body workout



Technogym launched a new Studio Bike, for group cycling classes, based on Italian professional road cycles

fitness goals. Additional enhancements include the ability to programme the AbCoaster, Fluid UBE and Fluid Rower as part of a user's workout plan; a clearer reflection of a user's status within the gym environment; auto logout functions for staff; and a number of improvements to the user interface.

A new, ultra-slim consumer-facing Smart Centre kiosk was also unveiled, with an integrated PC system operated via a 19" display touch-screen.

Reebok launched a new group exercise experience in conjunction with Cirque du Soleil. Touted as 'a cure for your workout blues', the name of the class – Jukari Fit to Fly – comes from a world dialect meaning 'to play'.

Using a specially-designed piece of equipment called the FlySet, which looks rather like a trapeze, the hour-long workout gives the sensation of flying while strengthening and lengthening the body through cardio, strength, balance and core training. A trained instructor guides a class of up to 12 people through the workout moves, each using their own FlySet which is suspended from the studio ceiling.

SALUS introduced its NOVA series, which it says is the world's first oscillating (see-saw movement), whole body vibration platform with adjustable amplitude system. The amplitude ranges from 4mm–16mm, allowing users to exercise more efficiently by selecting a specific range of amplitude to match

the workout they're doing. It has a sleek design with a metal body, an integrated touch-screen LCD, and a frequency range of 4–50Hz.

SCIFIT debuted its upgraded Fit-Key system, which now uses USB technology. While the concept is the same – using the software to document a client's workout – the USB technology is more user-friendly for both the client and the facility.

The system does not require additional accessories such as a key reader box and keys. Facilities can still, however, drive revenue by selling programmes on the USB keys, as with the current technology.

Susanagateira introduced its new collection, Light in Motion. With two distinct lines for men and women, it's based on the concept of fitness fashion, offering high quality, high ergonomics and strong, unique design.

Technogym launched Excite VARIO, a cross-trainer that follows the user's stride. The product automatically adapts to the desired movement – from the classical vertical step to a simple walk or a long stride – with no adjustment of the controls needed. The natural movement of the legs is combined with arm movements to offer a balanced and



SCIFIT has upgraded its Fit-Key system to include USB technology, so it's more user-friendly and doesn't require additional accessories



Looking good Susanageira's new clothing collection is available for men and for women, and is designed with 'fitness fashion' in mind

effective workout, whether for a young person looking for a dynamic experience or an elderly user who wants to take a gentle stroll without loading their joints.

VISIO, a user-friendly, digital 15-17" interface for CV equipment, was also launched. It offers comprehensive programme options, video demonstrations to help users set up the equipment, and a variety of entertainment features including integration with the iPod and iPhone. VISIO also provides operators with a

tool to communicate with members and understand their expectations – through messages and touch-screen surveys, for example – and thereby improve the club business model. It will eventually also offer email and internet access.

Also launched were a new range of PURE Strength benches and the Studio Bike, an indoor evolution of the classic Italian professional road bikes, with an elegant design, aluminium frame, easy adjustments and non-slip handles.

TOGU Jumper combines power, endurance and co-ordination for a fun, full-body group exercise concept. Similar in appearance to a BOSU ball, the TOGU Jumper incorporates two-thirds of a ball for a trampoline effect. Thanks to the constant change between high and low resistance, jumping has the benefit of interval training and is ideal for burning fat and supporting the cardiovascular system. Distributed in the UK by Hab International, TOGU Jumper has a non-slip design, good stability for ankle joints, and an ideal pressure distribution through proven Dynair technology.

Spring in the step The TOGU Jumper replicates the effect of a trampoline for group exercise classes



TuffStuff The new CTS Series includes recumbent bikes

TuffStuff introduced a new line of commercial CV equipment. The CTS Series offers five commercial treadmills with a mixture of LCD and Dot Matrix displays, recumbent and upright exercise bikes, a full body elliptical and group exercise cycles. Also launched was its latest version of the Apollo Multi Stack Gym System. Compact and versatile, the Apollo 7000 Series modular gym system is billed as the perfect choice for hotels, apartment communities and corporate fitness facilities.

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MICROTUCH SYSTEMS

A new touch-based system has been introduced for unattended vending machines and kiosks.

The MicroTouch System, from a division of the technology company 3M, offers an economic, user-safe and easy-to-seal screen, which can be integrated into an existing vending machine.

The new sensor screen has been designed to be very rugged and can be used either outdoors or inside a club. It's particularly useful for clubs with unattended vending machines.

fitness-kit keyword: **microtouch**



SAVOUR THE FLAVOUR WITH WEST MIDLANDS FOOD

A new vending machine has launched, aimed at introducing a healthy alternative to more traditional vending snacks, while focusing on regional food and drink and supporting West Midlands producers.

The machine, called Savour the Flavour, has been designed so it can only be filled with healthy, locally-produced food and drink, which could include water, fruit (either dried or fresh), yoghurts, smoothies, cereal bars, milk products and sandwiches.

The machine is the brainchild of the Heart of England Fine Foods company (HEFF) – a regional food group for the West Midlands that represents local producers. Outlets can receive a branded machine if they commit to stocking it with food and drink from the West Midlands.

HEFF marketing manager Jon May says: "This is a fantastic way of raising



consumer awareness. We believe it is a particularly good scheme for health clubs and leisure centres where there is already an emphasis on healthy lifestyles."

fitness-kit keywords: **west midlands food group**

GANTNER'S CONTACTLESS TECHNOLOGY

Gantner Electronics is continuing to roll out its contactless technology system for use in health and fitness clubs. Focusing on a microchip that can be integrated into a membership card or a wristband, the system can be used to make payments throughout a health club – from the car park to vending machines. If cash sums are credited, the chip works like a wallet for internal club usage – just hold the card or wristband up to a vending machine that's been fitted with a receiver and buy products with no need for cash. The chip can also be used as a data carrier, with a range of software solutions for membership administration.

fitness-kit keyword: **gantner**

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N&W PRODUCT LAUNCHES

Manufacturer N&W has boosted its vending portfolio with a number of innovative new products.

Along with its Samba Classic free-standing machine, there's a new can and bottled drinks machine called Diesis.

There are also a number of other products, such as the new table-top hot drinks machines – the Korinto bean-to-cup option and a bean-to-freshbrew machine, called the Wittenborg 7100.

N&W also offers the highly energy-efficient Snakky Max Green, as well as The Rock – a high-capacity snack and drinks machine specifically aimed at the public sector.

MiZIP is the final launch, a system based on users having just one 'smart card' or 'smart key' for controlled access to all systems in a venue.

fitness-kit keywords: n&w



AIMIA'S NEW RANGE

The independent supplier of hot and cold beverages, Aimia Foods, has boosted its core business with a range of new products.

The company has improved its existing Pour Moi coffee shop concept and has launched a new range of hot chocolate drinks.

Pour Moi brings coffee shop quality to vending machines, with the combination of a premium product in a cup-based delivery format. It's exclusively available on Wittern Geneva systems.

The company has also introduced a reformulated and repackaged hot chocolate, its Freshers Granulated Hot Chocolate. The new recipe has a higher cocoa content than standard vending chocolate, giving it a slightly darker, richer milk chocolate flavour.

fitness-kit keyword: aimia

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Two brand new, elegantly styled shower columns have been launched by Bossini of Italy to grace outdoor and indoor pools and spas. Ideal for a pre or post swim shower, the columns are sure to be a hit in commercial and private projects alike.

AquaBambú and ArchColumn are showers that have been designed by the experts in indoor showering to make a real statement. Minimalist in design, but oozing style and finesse, they are made from high quality stainless steel, with the option of a subtle matt finish. Installation is made easy with a choice of floor or external water inlets and the temperature and flow controls are both conveniently positioned and easy to use. A low level foot shower is fitted as standard.

The AquaBambú – whose design inspiration came from its namesake in the plant world – is beautifully rounded in shape and delivers a cascade of water from a slit in the bevelled head. The ArchColumn, with its combination of sculpted edges and soft curves, has a rainfall spray pattern delivered through easy clean nozzles that prevent limescale and grime build up.

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VENDING MACHINES HELP AFRICAN COMMUNITIES

Twenty rural communities in Africa now have a constant supply of clean, disease-free water, thanks to a vending scheme from Liverpool City Council. A year ago, the council signed a contract with Autobart to supply Thirsty Planet bottled water to vending machines in its 15 leisure centres. From every bottle sold, 5p goes to the charity Pump Aid.



fitness-kit keywords: thirsty planet

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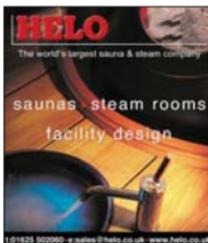


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SHOPPING AND RACING FOR CANCER RESEARCH

Race for Life – a series of 5km charity runs across the UK in aid of Cancer Research – begins in earnest this month. In preparation, some women have got fit for the event in a less than conventional fashion: by shopping!

To help women prepare for Race for Life, Cancer Research launched Shop for Life: a gentle exercise regime staged in 11 UK shopping centres. The first session was held in Chapelfield's in Norwich in March, with others following throughout April and May. The idea was that a 40-minute walk around the centres would burn up to 200 calories, with bursts of speed and stair climbing included in the mix to raise heart rate and calorie consumption.

Natasha Dickinson, head of Race for Life, says: "Without even realising it, many women cover several kilometres on an average weekend shopping trip. Shop for Life is a great way to help women prepare for Race for Life."



SWIMMING THAT GOES THE DISTANCE

Long-distance swimming is touted to be the next big UK fitness craze, after the success of our open water medallists – David Davies and Cassie Patten – at last year's Olympics.

Nova International, which organises the Great North Run, has been staggered by the number of entrants in its one-mile Great North Swim. The event only launched last autumn, but the number of entrants for this year's race – due to take place at Lake Windermere in September – has doubled to 5,000. There's been so much demand that Nova plans to roll out four more Great Swims across Britain



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WEIGHT UP WITH THIS NEW ALARM CLOCK

For some of us, the idea of a workout first thing in the morning is enough to make us hide our heads under the duvet. If this is you, then you're going to hate the latest product to come from US company Fred and Friends. On the other hand, fitness fanatics are going to love it.

Shape Up is an alarm clock that guarantees to get sleepers out of bed, because they have to do 30 reps of bicep curls with it before it switches off.

The clock has been designed to look like a dumbbell, with a 10kg logo on the side, but fortunately weighs less – 660g. The gadget retails at around £19.99

new cellulite buster: it's pants!

Summer's here and, as people start preparing for the beach, they'll be looking for ways to get rid of unsightly cellulite. A recent article in the *Daily Mail* newspaper rounded up some of the wackier alleged cures, including 'cellulite melting' underwear!

Apparently the pants' fabric contains microcapsules of caffeine, which are released on to the skin to increase the body's temperature. This is said to speed

up the metabolic rate and is claimed to burn fat. Wearing the tights daily can reportedly reduce the size of your thighs by 2cm. The team here at *Health Club Management* aren't quite so convinced about this miracle cure!

Other touted solutions include a cellulite bike – users cycle on a stationary bike set, within a pod, while infrared beams are blasted at problem parts to soften toughened areas of cellulite.

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The no-impact movement dynamically and automatically adapts to your natural stride length. With a low perceived effort and high calorie consumption, it is the best choice for you and your customers.

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