

health club management

JUNE 2014

No 214



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On-track with tracking?

We're hearing more and more about the 'quantified self', and this trend is now steering a course directly towards us, with news of some exciting and disruptive deals that won't just bring tracking to the doorsteps of our clubs, but right into the heart of our businesses.

Apple is leading the charge by putting wellness at the heart of iOS 8 – its next operating system – and into its keenly anticipated iWatch. With its genius for connecting with consumers, this alone is enough to get health club operators sitting up and taking notice.

A new iOS 8 Healthbook app will monitor everything from sleep, nutrition and physical movement to vital signs: blood sugar, heart rate, breathing rate, weight, hydration. Also planned is an App Store-style health and fitness platform offering third-party health and medical apps.

In addition, a recent patent application from the tech giant suggests new headphones are on their way, with inbuilt accelerometers and sensors to detect perspiration, body temperature and heart rate. There's even mention of a 'psychological' sensor, which – it's speculated – may use algorithms to create a picture of the user's mental state.

And there's more. Last month Microsoft announced a patent for a fitness smartwatch, while April saw Facebook acquire fitness tracking app Moves and Nike implement layoffs in its FuelBand division, fuelling rumours it will partner with Apple for hardware – a potentially market-changing pairing. And as hardware continues to evolve – becoming less a question of remembering to put on a smartwatch and more a case of stick-on patches and swallowable sensors that stay in the gut – its appeal will only snowball.

All of this presents both an opportunity and a threat for our sector: it's time to embrace this technology or be left behind. Apple's ability to drive mass adoption could be the spark that moves us from an era of activity tracking by a

niche group of gadget-loving exercisers to wellness monitoring as part of daily life for all – but if we don't step up and take responsibility for members' total wellbeing habits in and outside the club, they could be taken away from us by the electronics giants.

Indeed, it's easy to imagine Apple joining the dots and challenging the health club model, prescribing personalised activity and nutrition plans off the back of users' data, offering motivation through PT apps, even facilitating the social element by enabling people to share results and find friends to work out with.

Clubs that ignore the tech trend will increasingly lose out. It's time to reinvent ourselves to ensure we remain relevant

So what can be done? Clubs can configure their systems to interact with tracking devices; create member challenges and competitions that run through their trackers but link with club-based activities; encourage members to share data as a basis not only for PT, but for more tailored small group, outdoor and at-home workouts. This programming may not be bespoke to each individual, but its advantage over an app will lie in the motivation of live, instructor-led sessions and accountability to the club, not just an app, for their results.

Clubs that ignore the tech trend will find themselves increasingly losing out. It's time to reinvent ourselves to ensure we remain relevant in today's tech-savvy society.

Kate Cracknell, editor

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Cover image courtesy of Kate W Photography (www.katewphotography.com)



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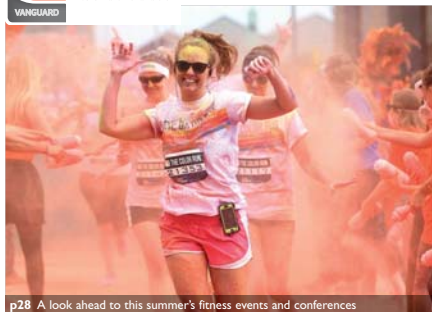
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Buyers' guide:

For suppliers of products and services in the health club and spa markets, turn to p86



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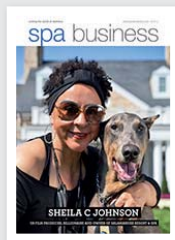


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Do you have a strong opinion or disagree with somebody else's views on the industry?
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Operators must set their facilities up to be welcoming 'health hubs' for all

Creating welcoming community 'health hubs' must be our focus

I read with great interest Liz Terry's passionate letter in *HCM* April 14 (p3) – particularly her comments that, as an industry, we must "aim to get more people from deprived areas really engaged in an active, healthy lifestyle. Anything less is patronising and cynical".

Stockport is a microcosm of the UK, with some very wealthy areas and some very deprived wards, and a 14-year disparity in life expectancy. Life Leisure has set about addressing this head on.

Five years ago, our Avondale Leisure Centre in Edgeley (one of the most deprived wards) was offering a poor range of facilities, cost the local authority around £170,000 a year, and was not meeting the needs of the community. Now, five years later – following only a modest facility upgrade but a massive investment in the range, reach and quality of public health initiatives – membership has doubled and the site is no longer a financial burden. This has been possible thanks to partnership work with local

public health providers including GPs, charities and community groups. Most gratifying is that our members in 2014 do not regard themselves as members of a gym; they come to the community 'health hub' where they are welcomed and encouraged by our team, and no longer fear exercise.

Our industry must help find a solution to the problem of inactivity, but we mustn't wait for that 'silver bullet' to be provided by someone else. We've had the '5 x 30' and Change4Life campaigns: the ball's now in our court to turn these into real, welcoming opportunities to get people exercising. A range of public health programmes already exists, with a market waiting and wanting to take part. Our job isn't to reinvent the wheel: it's to liaise with health providers, to facilitate, to communicate, and to use our facilities as welcoming health hubs for all.

Malcolm McPhail
CEO, Life Leisure

Investing in managers is crucial to our success

I'm pleased to see *HCM* is featuring a series of articles on management in the health and fitness industry. Management is certainly a buzzword of the moment – there are clearly talented professionals in our sector, but we can't assume that all are pre-programmed to be strong leaders. It's our responsibility, as an industry, to provide those with ambitions to manage and lead staff with the support and resources to drive their careers and their business forward.

I vividly remember Liz Terry's announcement at last year's Health Club Awards that there's a dire need for tailored, effective training for managers in the industry. As a training provider, this struck a chord and served as a catalyst to further develop our partnership with the Institute of Leadership Management. We now have 28 professionals completing the ILM Level 3 in Effective Management, which has been tailored specifically for the fitness industry.

It's not enough to deliver generic course content: training must be aligned to scenarios that directly impact the daily lives of our managers. Only then will we have leaders who inspire their peers, manage successful clubs and engage more people in active, healthy lifestyles.

Nigel Wallace
Client services director, Lifetime



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Training must be tailored to help our leaders engage more people



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and also the small percentage who don't have a readable print - clubs can still offer a card-only mode. In line with today's growing demands for security, new fingerprint verification technology helps address the problem of people exchanging membership cards.

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UK news update

CIMSPA backs leisure accident benchmarker

The Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA) has given its backing to a new benchmarking platform that enables operators to monitor the type and level of accidents occurring at health clubs and all types of leisure facilities across the UK.

STITCH is a leisure management accident analysis tool developed by health and safety specialist Right Directions, the company behind Sport England's Quest quality scheme, UKactive's Code of Practice and FLAME Awards, and accreditation for the ASA's Learn to Swim Pathway.

The new online platform captures, collates and aggregates accident and 'near miss' data, providing a live snapshot of key performance indicators that allow management to monitor accident trends locally and nationally for feedback.

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=Q9X8q>

24/7 Fitness opens at Fort Dunlop building



The famous tyre factory is now a gym

24/7 Fitness has taken Birmingham's iconic Fort Dunlop building as the site for its fifth fitness club, continuing the former rubber wheel factory's traditions by offering locals a place to shed their spare tyres.

The building that once housed Fort Dunlop tyres had stood empty for 20 years, but has now been redeveloped into an office and retail complex, with the 24/7 Fitness club occupying a sizeable space of approximately 594sq m (6,395sq ft).

24/7 Fort Dunlop is the second Birmingham facility for the health club chain, following the site in nearby Bearwood, to which new members will also have access.

As with the group's other venues, the new club features a full range of CV equipment including Matrix treadmills, ellipticals and cycles, plus resistance equipment from the Matrix Aura series, free weights, and a ladies-only gym.

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=n253r>

Sports Direct to launch gyms

Sports Direct International – the company founded by Newcastle United owner Mike Ashley – is considering a high-profile arrival in the health club sector with the acquisition of up to 33 LA fitness sites, according to reports.

Sports Direct confirmed it was in talks over the move which, if successful, would see it follow retail rival JD Sports into the gym market. The latter launched its first club at a former Fitness First site in Hull early this year.

Leases for the 33 sites were put up for sale by LA fitness in March as part of a restructuring plan to reduce debt. It's not yet known how the sites would be branded or

operated under any deal with Sports Direct.

Sources quoted in the national press claim Ashley has offered a parent company guarantee to LA fitness landlords to secure the sites, with a deal reportedly imminent.

Health Club Management understands that negotiations have been ongoing for some time and that a meeting took place among Sports Direct's senior management the day before the news broke. The group recently recruited former DW Sports and Fitness CEO Winston Higham – a move widely viewed as a precursor to an assault on the health club market.

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=D7M3k>



It has reportedly been a long-held goal of Mike Ashley's to launch health clubs

Microgyms: Lessons must be learned

Leading figures from the health and fitness industry have warned that companies must adapt to the changing market, exemplified by the surge of microgyms, to avoid being left trailing behind.

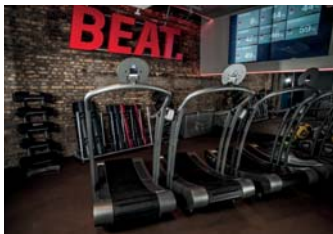
Speaking during a Q&A session at the 2014 Active-net conference in Coventry, Les Mills customer experience director Martin Franklin said microgyms had proved a "disruptive influence" to the traditional gym model and were indicative of a market shift.

"The success of microgyms tells us that both the market and consumer demand are changing – and we as a sector aren't adapting well enough," noted Franklin. "We need to analyse this success, pick trends and find innovative ways

to integrate them into existing operations."

During the same discussion, MYZONE's Dave Wright said gym models had to expand beyond their four walls to thrive in future.

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=fbj3C>



Microgyms like The BEAT (see p38) indicate a market shift

Athlete Lab launches in London



Athlete Lab started in Singapore, before expanding to Sydney and now London (above)

British Cycling technical director Shane Sutton is one of the backers behind Athlete Lab – the latest cycle-focused fitness club to hit London in what's fast becoming a competitive sector.

Following hot on the heels of former Fitness First CEO Colin Waggett's Psyche, the £1.5m Athlete Lab – with interior design by Zynk – aims to distinguish itself by offering an authentic road-biking experience in the heart of the City. The acquisition of Sutton – who also oversees the coaching strategies – was a major coup for Athlete Lab founders Michael Flynn and Neil Franks, who launched the London site at the beginning of April.

London is the third Athlete Lab to open and the company believes the 418sq m (4,500sq ft) site's 30-custom-made road bikes will give it the edge in an age when triathlons and Ironman competitions are growing in popularity – most fitness facilities only have studio bikes. Members are also free to bring their own bikes, which can be fitted to a workstation.

"In terms of coaches and equipment, we're offering members the cream of the crop," operations and marketing manager Ben Franks told *Health Club Management*. "We offer a personal experience with top technical advice." Details: <http://lei.sr?a=W9Y8f>

Virgin Active poised for £1bn IPO

Virgin Active is lining up a £1bn-plus float or sale, with the company close to appointing advisers on the process, according to press reports.

The health club giant last month announced a 10 per cent increase in underlying profits – it was also named Europe's leading health club chain in terms of revenue (see p13) – and is reportedly eager to cash in on this position.

Virgin Active is believed to have hired City IPO consultancy firm STJ Advisors to sound out interest from investment banks, according to the *Times*. It added that a primary listing would probably be sought in London, with a secondary listing in South Africa, where Virgin Active has more than 100 clubs.

Virgin Active has also been rumoured to be planning a stronger push into the Asian markets – a strategy also announced by rivals Fitness First (see p19) – following recent openings. Details: <http://lei.sr?a=A3M3q>



The Virgin Active health club chain is part of Richard Branson's Virgin Group

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UK news update

UK chains lead EU rankings



PHOTO: WWW.SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

EuropeActive aims to almost double health club membership in Europe by 2025

UK-based health club chains Virgin Active and David Lloyd Leisure are leading the charge of Europe's fitness sector, with 2013 revenues that place them first and second respectively among the continent's top gym operators.

This was one of the main findings of a report on current trends in the European health and fitness market, published by EuropeActive – formerly known as the European Health & Fitness Association (EHFA) – in co-operation with researchers from Deloitte.

Virgin Active, part of Richard Branson's Virgin Group, was named as the market leader in Europe, generating total revenues of £437m

in 2013, followed by David Lloyd Leisure in a distant second with revenues of £327m.

In terms of membership, Germany-based budget operator McFit led the rankings as 1.2 million people exercised in its 200 clubs. The report predicts budget gyms to be the biggest drivers of growth in 2014, identifying countries such as Turkey and Poland to lead expansion with expected growth rates of 20 per cent.

EuropeActive aims to almost double Europe's health club members by 2025 and reiterated the importance of a unified sector in improving wellbeing across the continent (see p80). Details: <http://lei.sr?a=H9P5C>

PHE unveils weight loss programme audit tool



PHOTO: WWW.SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The tool can produce 25-year forecasts

Public Health England (PHE) has launched a new Weight Management Economic Assessment Tool for health professionals.

The new feature is designed to help local authorities assess the financial benefit of adult weight management programmes to prevent and reduce obesity.

Local authorities can now compare the cost of a programme against potential future healthcare savings, as they bid to achieve a decline in obesity rates by 2020.

The tool estimates the health impact of weight loss in any group of adults who have participated in a programme. The tool allows users to enter their own local data, which can then be used to produce forecasts for up to 25 years. Professor John Newton of PHE said the tool will give a good idea of policy cause and effect.

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=h4Z6K>

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Sugar sin bin strikes a chord



(From left) Claire Jameson, Tom Horton and Anna Montgomery are behind the scheme

A West Country gym's new sugar sin bin has inspired more than 100 members to dump their sweet treats and seek nutritional advice on how to live a healthier lifestyle.

Staff at the club at Cadbury House in Congresbury, Somerset, decided to launch the amnesty in February off the back of a nationwide media backlash against sugar.

In Britain, research shows that the average person consumes about 700g of sugar a week – the equivalent to 140 teaspoons. Further studies have concluded that added sugar in food and drink is 11 times more potent at causing diabetes than general calories, sparking

calls for a crackdown on junk food.

In Congresbury, gym staff installed the sugar sin bin at the front of the gym and encouraged members to dispose of their unwanted (or unneeded) snack, in return receiving a healthy living advice pamphlet written by the club's fitness manager and nutrition graduate Tom Horton. They were also allocated a one-to-one consultation session, where a staff member would talk through dietary plans and offer alternative lifestyle suggestions. Take-up has been staggering, says the gym, and there are now plans to continue the initiative.

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=G4f8F>

London studio saddles up to join cycle craze



Live heart rates appear during classes

London's cycle-focused health club craze shows no signs of abating, with Richmond's new pay-as-you-go studio CychoCycle the latest facility to join the race.

The indoor cycling studio follows in the footsteps of recent high-profile debutants Psycle (see p40) and Athlete Lab (see p11) – evidence that workouts on wheels are in no danger of hitting the skids.

Situated on Mortlake High Street, the studio runs heart rate monitored classes for complete beginners to elite cyclists, using Keiser M3 Bikes. The newly-renovated studio is a five-minute walk from Mortlake station and studio director Sara Spencer envisages commuters as being a key market.

Riders can obtain their own Polar heart monitor at a reduced price or borrow one from the studio to wear for each class.

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=S3R4g>

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Supplier and training news

Technogym named Glasgow 2014 supplier



The Glasgow 2014 Athletes' Village

Technogym has been announced as the official fitness equipment supplier for the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games.

Technogym equipment will be on-hand at fitness centres in the Athletes' Village, which will be home to 6,500 athletes and team officials from the 71 competing nations and territories during the Games. The Italian equipment provider will work with Glasgow Life to ensure the installations run smoothly, giving athletes access to a vital tool in their pre-competition regimen.

This announcement comes as little surprise, given that Technogym has been favoured as the official supplier to the last five Olympic Games. "It's vital for our competing athletes to have access to high quality training equipment," says Glasgow 2014 chief executive David Grevenberg.

Details: <http://lei.sr7a=g8c9H>

Forces peddle group cycling

British troops in Afghanistan have undergone the first group cycling instructor training course to take place in the country, as they bid to keep comrades fighting fit in every sense.

Military forces deployed at Kandahar Airfield were eager to get fully trained up, to be able to offer their respective sections diverse exercise options while in the warzone.

Under the guidance of RAF warrant officer Calum MacIntyre, who is both a serving member of the Armed Forces and a YMCAfit tutor, 16 servicemen from a variety of army units and the RAF have now become fully-certified group cycling instructors.

"We're very lucky to have a fully equipped gymnasium plus a group cycling studio at our base, and we wanted to help other personnel learn how to train their own units. I suggested arranging a fully-certified course, where they receive a recognised qualification that they can also carry forward after they leave Afghanistan," says MacIntyre.

The initiative was supported by YMCAfit, which provided eLearning as well as PDF versions of the course manuals. The training provider also charged a half-price course fee of £75.

Details: <http://lei.sr7a=C3e4u>



Keeping in shape: British forces at Kandahar Airfield base in Afghanistan after a hard session

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International news

Hard Candy Fitness set for further expansion

The Hard Candy Fitness (HCF) chain started by Madonna and New Evolution Ventures chair Mark Mastrow looks likely to be expanded across Europe, after one of its biggest rights-holders began a fundraising programme to fuel further growth.

Jopp AG, which operates a number of HCF clubs in Germany and also holds exclusive rights to operate under the HCF brand in Austria and Switzerland, has revealed intentions to open additional clubs financed through a bond issue.

Jopp AG opened its first HCF in Berlin in September 2013 and has since launched the HCF Women brand, which it has applied to a number of its existing Women's Gym Jopp & Jopp clubs. HCF has steadily grown its presence worldwide, now operating in Moscow and St Petersburg, Santiago de Chile, Mexico City, Sydney and Rome. Details: <http://lei.sr?a=E0x9j>

Fitness brand to engage GenY via Snapchat

Training provider the Australian Institute of Fitness (AIF) has become one of the first fitness brands to use photo-messaging app Snapchat. The app enables users to send pictures and messages to their friends which display for a short period of time – typically 10 seconds – before automatically deleting.

Increasingly popular among 13- to 24-year-olds, the app presents a strong opportunity for fitness companies to tap into the difficult-to-reach millennials market, also known as 'Generation Y'.

Users will receive motivational content and insights into what it's like behind the scenes at the AIF with a view to attracting people to campuses through its 'fun, fresh and friendly' culture. Details: <http://lei.sr?a=v0s1Q>

Designs emerge for Iranian rock climbing gym

Tehran-based NewWave Architecture have designed a 4,500sq m rock climbing gym for Forlour, Iran, that resembles a giant boulder. The gym overlooks Iran's highest peak, Mount Damavand, and features a bouldering hall with a climbing wall, a temporary accommodation zone and a fitness gym. The centre's exterior will also provide opportunities for outdoor climbing. Details: <http://lei.sr?a=N2M7Y>

Singapore gets heart-healthy

The Singapore Heart Foundation (SHF) opened its second heart-wellness centre in April, providing local cardiac patients – as well as those at risk of heart disease – with a safe environment in which to receive care.

The 375sq m SHF-Life Insurance Association Heart Health Hub is designed to provide community-based phase 3 and 4 cardiac rehab for recovering heart patients. SHF is the only institution in Singapore that offers community-based phase 3 and 4 cardiac rehabilitation programmes at highly subsidised rates.

It also provides assistance for individuals at risk of developing heart disease – such as those

with medical conditions such as hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes and obesity – to better manage their condition through the Heart Wellness Programme. This includes monitored group exercise, dietary and stress management counselling, and smoking cessation.

The facility is equipped with treadmills, cross-trainers, fluid rowers, fluid cycles, free weights and a multifunctional weight training machine. The new centre also houses a multi-purpose room for educational health talks and workshops for members and the public, as well as a kitchen for cooking demonstrations. Details: <http://lei.sr?a=W4h7D>



The facility offers phase 3 and 4 cardiac rehab programmes for recovering heart patients

Viña Fitness announces expansion plans

Spanish health club operator Viña Fitness has announced plans to open four more clubs in Spain over the next two years.

The announcement comes after the opening of its first club in San Sebastián de los Reyes,

Madrid, at the end of last year. Future opening dates and venues are yet to be unveiled.

The first club – an 8,000sq m facility located in a brand new shopping mall – features a 1,000sq m strength and cardio room equipped by Life Fitness. Alongside this are four group exercise studios and three courts for padel tennis. The club also houses a complex of indoor swimming pools for training, teaching, leisure and spa treatments. Other spa facilities include bi-thermal showers, an ice fountain, heated bench seats, a sauna and steamroom.

Membership is priced at €40–45 a month, and the club currently has 3,000 members. Details: <http://lei.sr?a=7x2T8>



The Spanish operator's first club opened in a shopping mall

Fitness First's Asian expansion



Fitness First has announced plans to open a further 50 health clubs across Asia by 2018

Fitness First has announced it will invest more than US\$140m over the next five years as it bids to grow its footprint in Asia by around 60 per cent.

At present, there are 88 Fitness First Asia clubs – spread across Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand – and the chain intends to open a further 50 fitness clubs in the region by 2018, expected to cost US\$100m.

A further US\$42m will be invested in upgrading the existing Asian facilities. In addition, 4,000 Fitness First staff are currently undergoing specialist training programmes

deploying elements of behavioural psychology, sports science and emotional quotient training.

The company has identified south-east Asia as a strong opportunity for long-term growth, estimating that less than 5 per cent of the region's population are currently members of a health and fitness club.

Having grown Asian revenues by 9.8 per cent in the 12 months up to November 2013, Fitness First expects further acceleration in 2014. Eight to 10 new club openings are planned across the region, with emphasis on the growth markets of Singapore and Thailand. Details: <http://lei.sr?a=x6m8r>

Boston scheme prescribes bike passes

Authorities in Boston, US, have unveiled a pioneering new programme whereby doctors can prescribe patients with membership to the city's bike share scheme.

The 'Prescribe-a-Bike' programme will enable doctors at Boston Medical Centre to offer year-long memberships to Boston's Hubway cycling scheme to low-income patients for only US\$5 – a US\$80 discount on the usual price. A statement from the Boston mayor's office said patients would receive a free helmet and would be permitted an unlimited number of 30-minute (or shorter) trips on the bicycles.

"Obesity is a significant and growing health concern for our city, particularly among low-income Boston residents," said chief executive of Boston Medical Centre Kate Walsh in the statement. "Regular exercise is key to combating this trend, and Prescribe-a-Bike is one important way our caregivers can help patients get the exercise they need to be healthy."

In addition to promoting activity as a form of medical treatment, the scheme also serves to promote green living and will help ease the burden on the city's transport system, something London mayor Boris Johnson also hopes to achieve with his recently announced 'Mini-Hollands' cycling scheme.

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=L4dSB>



'Prescribe-a-Bike' is for low income groups

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People news

Whyte lands ukactive post

Celebrity fitness advisor and sports and exercise science expert professor Greg Whyte is to become the inaugural chair of the ukactive Research Institute's Scientific Advisory Board (RISAB).

The move will see Whyte steering a team of renowned academics – who will guide the future direction of the institute – as well as providing a sounding board for ideas and ensuring the rigour of research and project design.

"I'm passionate about building the evidence base to inform the delivery of physical activity interventions to address the nation's spiralling health costs and personal wellbeing deficit," says Whyte, who was awarded an OBE in 2013 in recognition of his services to sport, sports science and charity.

"There's no greater way of driving this agenda than at grassroots, and I'm delighted at the opportunity to influence this from my new position, alongside some of the most esteemed names in physical activity and health research."

The news came on the same day (29 April) as the ukactive Scientific Advisory Board launched its online research hub, providing a free-to-use online centre with the latest academic thinking and insight on physical



Whyte was recognised with an OBE in 2013

activity and health for the industry. The hub will house open access publications and translate complex academic research into easy to understand, digestible formats. Members of the ukactive's RISAB include professors Andy Lane, Lynne Kennedy and Alfonso Jimenez. Details: <http://lei.sr?a=7BE8B>

FitPro announces Kevin Laferriere as new CEO



Laferriere holds 36 fitness certifications

Fitness training association FitPro worldwide has appointed health and fitness industry stalwart Kevin Laferriere as its new CEO.

Laferriere has 23 years' experience in the sector and will be based in FitPro's North American offices in Denver. He is tasked with harnessing his skills and experience to expand FitPro's global reach with new offerings, as it bids to be the world's leading professional fitness development firm. Details: <http://lei.sr?a=Q5r3d>

Jim Graham joins The Gym Group

Budget gym operator The Gym Group has appointed Jim Graham as chief operating officer.

Graham joined the business in April after leaving Phoenix Equity Partners, the group's majority shareholder, where he has advised the management teams of a range of Phoenix investments, including The Gym Group.

Prior to joining the private equity industry, Graham was managing director of Orange's 10 million customer pay-as-you-go mobile business and also worked as a management consultant and engineer in the Royal Navy.

In his spare time, Graham is a triathlete and has competed in seven Ironman races, including the World Championships in Hawaii.

"As an investor, Jim has a detailed understanding of our business and a natural affinity with our proposition," says The Gym Group CEO John Trehanne. "He brings a huge amount of experience in commercial marketing of low-cost consumer businesses, which will help us deliver an even better



Graham joins from private equity firm Phoenix

customer experience and achieve our ambitious growth targets."

Graham joins the fast expanding gym chain at an exciting time, with a proposed merger with Pure Gym pending regulatory approval. Details: <http://lei.sr?a=D7M7t>

ARK Leisure founders return with Socius



Andy Kay is one of the founders of Socius

Andy Kay and Mhairi FitzPatrick, the pair behind ARK Leisure and London's 37° health clubs, have launched new leisure-focused funding venture Socius Investing.

Socius sees Kay and FitzPatrick investing money for an equity stake in a business – a model they say bears "a passing resemblance to Dragon's Den" – then working with the owners to change strategy and bring about accelerated growth. The pair hope to harness their prior leisure sector experience. Details: <http://lei.sr?a=B8a2d>

A World View

Melissa Rodriguez, IHRSA's senior research manager, outlines the key findings of the newly published 2014 IHRSA Global Report

Building on a strong performance in the leading markets, the global health club industry posted solid growth in 2013 – that's the topline finding of *The 2014 IHRSA Global Report: The State of the Industry*, which was published by IHRSA last month.

While economic growth remained uneven among global markets, the health club industry expanded as top markets recorded good results. Growth was particularly strong for economic leaders in the Americas, Europe and Asia. Overall, the global health club industry generated US\$78bn in revenue in 2013, and more than 160,000 clubs attracted nearly 140 million members worldwide.

The following is excerpted from the Industry Research section of the report.

The Americas

In the US, the health club industry posted growth in revenue as well as number of club locations and memberships. While revenue and club count increased modestly, membership rose significantly. More than



There are now more than 160,000 health clubs globally, serving nearly 140 million members

54 million Americans belonged to a club, up 8 per cent from 50.2 million members in 2012. Revenue grew to US\$22.4bn from US\$21.8bn in 2012, while club count increased to 32,150 from 30,000.

According to *The IHRSA Canadian Health Club Report*, club operators serve nearly six

million members at roughly 6,000 facilities in Canada. Results from IHRSA's Canadian health club survey show that, although a sample of clubs posted marginal revenue growth of 0.5 per cent from 2011 to 2012, growing consumer interest in non-dues revenue services may fuel future

Europe Industry revenue (USD in millions)

United Kingdom	\$6,194
Germany	\$5,984
Spain	\$4,966
France	\$3,259
Italy	\$2,738
Russia	\$2,125
Netherlands	\$1,597
Sweden	\$732
Norway	\$700
Switzerland	\$671
Austria	\$582
Belgium	\$497
Denmark	\$435
Poland	\$422
Finland	\$419
Turkey	\$350
Portugal	\$303
Greece	\$233
Hungary	\$216
Rep of Ireland	\$195
Croatia	\$137
Serbia	\$75
Czech Rep	\$47
Slovenia	\$42
Bulgaria	\$36
Lithuania	\$28
Romania	\$22
Latvia	\$17
Slovakia	\$14
Estonia	\$11

Europe Number of clubs

Germany	7,940
Italy	6,500
United Kingdom	6,019
Spain	4,700
Russia	2,450
France	2,970
Poland	2,200
Netherlands	1,900
Turkey	1,550
Sweden	1,300
Portugal	1,200
Denmark	970
Austria	860
Belgium	850
Switzerland	800
Greece	800
Norway	725
Finland	650
Romania	650
Croatia	625
Rep. of Ireland	600
Hungary	410
Czech Rep	375
Bulgaria	297
Serbia	250
Lithuania	180
Slovakia	175
Latvia	118
Slovenia	80
Estonia	60

Europe Number of members (in millions)

Germany	8.6
United Kingdom	7.9
Spain	6.4
France	4.3
Italy	4.1
Russia	2.5
Netherlands	2.1
Sweden	1.2
Poland	.8
Denmark	.8
Belgium	.7
Norway	.8
Austria	.7
Switzerland	.8
Finland	.56
Portugal	.31
Turkey	.4
Rep. of Ireland	.36
Hungary	.3
Greece	.3
Croatia	.18
Czech Rep	.15
Serbia	.147
Romania	.09
Bulgaria	.05
Slovenia	.045
Lithuania	.035
Slovakia	.035
Latvia	.035
Estonia	.016

Sources: The IHRSA European Health Club Report; The Leisure Database; DSSV, IHRSA industry experts



Brazil is the leading fitness market in Latin America, but penetration rates are low when compared with more developed markets

growth. Based on the OECD's Better Life Index, Canada ranks high in measures of wellbeing, providing club operators and developers with an ideal marketplace for health and fitness offerings.

In Latin America, Brazil continues to show strong performance as the leading health club market in the region. Also a global leader, Brazil's revenue totals more than US\$2bn from over 30,000 clubs with 7.7 million members. The *iHRSA Latin American Report* shows that opportunities for growth lie ahead in Latin America, as member penetration rates remain low in comparison with more developed markets.

Europe

The *iHRSA European Health Club Report* shows that 44 million members belong to more than 48,000 health clubs in Europe, producing annual revenues of US\$32.9bn.

The European health club market is the most profitable region observed, maintaining the greatest number of clubs and generating the most revenue. Although Ireland, Greece,

Portugal and Spain have struggled in recent years, the markets in Germany, Norway and Poland have shown growth.

Based on primary research conducted by DSSV (Deutscher Sportstudio Verband), the number of clubs in Germany rose by 4.9 per cent in 2013 as revenue climbed by an impressive 12.1 per cent. The number of memberships grew by 8.1 per cent and now roughly 8.6 million Germans are health club members. The health club landscape is shaped by a variety of club models: traditional full-service centres, women-only franchises, medical/wellness facilities, low-cost clubs, microgyms and more.

The health club industry in Norway and Poland is also strong. One in four Norwegians aged 16 and older belongs to a health club. Norway generates roughly US\$700m in revenue from 725 clubs with 800,000 members. The economic downturn had minimal impact on Norway.

Among emerging markets in Europe, Poland is the health club industry's leader. The Polish health club market brings in

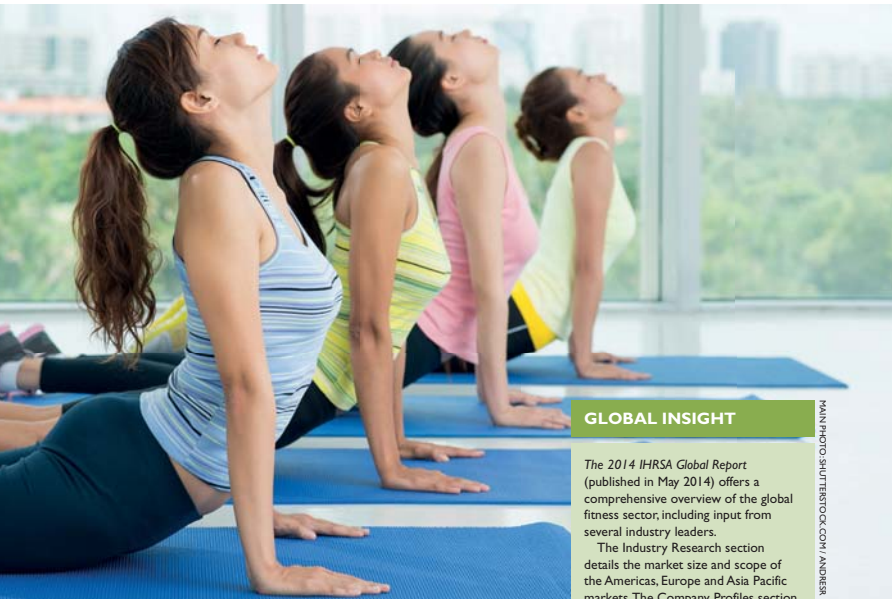
SHOWCASING THE STATS

Melissa Rodriguez, iHRSA's senior research manager, will speak on 10 June at the UK Fitness Convention 2014, being held at the Wyboston Lakes Executive Conference Centre.

Her session is entitled 'Global Fitness Trends Report: A Review of Consumer Activity & Member Behaviour'. She will present a review of the very latest health club consumer activity, trends and behaviour data from *The 2014 iHRSA Global Report* and other recent iHRSA publications.

Rodriguez has presented at several industry events, most recently at iHRSA 2014 in March. There she presented 'Member Retention: A Multi-Country Study on Influencing Factors' with retention expert Dr Paul Bedford. This session can be purchased in MP3 format at www.ihrsa.org/store

IHRSA Europe update



MAIN PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / ANDREAR

Growth in Asia Pacific is led by the rapidly growing economies of China and India

- US\$421m in revenue generated from a total of 2,200 health clubs, which maintain some 800,000 memberships.

Asia Pacific

The Asia Pacific region serves 17.4 million members at nearly 22,000 health clubs. Health club industry revenue totals US\$13.8bn in this region, led by the rapidly growing economies of China and India. Japan is also an industry leader, with a handful of the top 25 global club companies headquartered there.

According to the AASFP *China Fitness Club Industry Report*, the number of members in China grew by nearly 8 per cent; more than 4.8 million people now belong to a health club. The number of club locations also increased by 3.5 per cent in 2013, with the Chinese fitness industry now comprising more than 3,000 health clubs. In Hong Kong, some 600 clubs attract 15.1 per cent of the city population as members.

In India, the economy grew by 4.5 per cent between 2012 and 2013. Although this rate represents a decline from recent

years, the Indian economy remains strong and awareness of health and fitness continues to grow. Preliminary estimates show that health club revenue grew by 5 per cent, totalling US\$535m in 2013. Roughly 440,000 members belong to 1,200 health clubs in India.

In Japan, roughly 4 million members belong to 3,500 health clubs, which altogether generate estimated annual revenues of US\$5bn. Japan is home to three IHRSA Global 25 industry powerhouses: Central Sports, Konami Sports, and Renaissance. These three health and fitness operations combined generated roughly US\$2bn in revenue during 2013 – approximately 40 per cent of the Japanese industry's total revenue.

Future prospects

Looking ahead, the health club industry's potential for growth looks promising. Supported by existing strong economies and improving global markets, club operators and developers will continue to attract consumers as global awareness of health and physical activity grows. ●

GLOBAL INSIGHT

The 2014 IHRSA Global Report (published in May 2014) offers a comprehensive overview of the global fitness sector, including input from several industry leaders.

The Industry Research section details the market size and scope of the Americas, Europe and Asia Pacific markets. The Company Profiles section highlights 300+ leading club companies from around the world, including financial and membership information. The final section of the report includes supplier profiles, which provide clubs with useful information about industry-leading products and services.

The report can be purchased at www.ihrsa.org/ihrsa-global-report, in either print or PDF format.





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Real World Research



Steven Mann, lead researcher at the ukactive Research Institute, talks to HCM about its

research conducted in community fitness centres, and its implications for the delivery of physical activity interventions

Q: How can we put the principle of 'exercise is medicine' into practice?

A: The evidence showing that a sedentary lifestyle is associated with chronic diseases such as heart disease is irrefutable. There's also a huge body of evidence demonstrating the prevention and management of such conditions through physical activity. But the translation of this evidence into practice is one of the greatest challenges facing health promotion and disease prevention.

Q: What do you see as the biggest barrier?

A: Controlled environments such as labs – in which most research into physical activity and health is conducted – is reducing the transferability of the findings into community settings. It makes sense for research to be conducted in the same, or closely related, place of delivery in the real world. Participants also need to be representative of those most in need of the 'treatment' being proposed. In this instance, that setting is community fitness centres and the treatment is exercise.

If more research were conducted in real world environments, the results would have more relevance to, and application in, public health. Our study found that, of 1,225 peer-reviewed articles found in searches, only 22 were relevant, and just 11 articles described an intervention delivered in a community fitness centre and reported its impact.

Q: What do you think would help studies be more successful?

A: Physical activity interventions are generally reported as successful, with several common themes emerging, one of which is that supervised physical activity is associated with better outcomes.

A key issue of studies is retention – many programmes are front-loaded in terms of



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/ANDREW BASSETT

Studies should be conducted in communities, involving those most in need of intervention

supervision, putting more of an emphasis on the beginning of the programme. We found that spreading supervision throughout the programme, with post-programme follow-up, may increase retention and help maintain physical activity levels.

Q: You found that common methods of measuring outcomes may actually limit studies. Can you elaborate?

A: There are limitations that influence what we can count as reliable or certain. Take self-reporting as an example. It might be biased as participants may, wittingly or unwittingly, change what they say based on what they think researchers want to hear.

One study from 2012 showed that, while 39 per cent of males and 29 per cent of females self-reported achieving recommended levels of activity, accelerometer data showed only 6 per cent and 4 per cent respectively actually did so.

Another common criticism of research is that volunteers for physical activity interventions are often already motivated to change, arguably positively aiding the success of interventions. This limits the ability to generalise findings to less motivated members.

Body mass index (BMI) measure is used widely in studies, but it's a crude measure that may mask clinically significant changes in lean or fat mass. An analysis of body composition provides more clinically relevant information.

Q: So what needs to be done?

A: The measurement and evaluation of real world initiatives must be clinically relevant, rigorous and stand up to academic scrutiny.

As so few physical activity studies have taken place in community environments like leisure centres, the commissioning and administration of such interventions might be hampered. With public health budgets now in the hands of local authorities, we need to be sending an evidence-based message: 'physical activity interventions work, and this is how you can deliver them successfully'. We can't expect community-based programmes to achieve the same results as those delivered in the lab.

These principles provide the basis of all the research the Institute carries out.

NEED ADVICE OR MORE INFO?

The ukactive Research Institute findings will be published in the 'Exercise is Medicine' special being featured in the July/August edition of *Current Sports Medicine Reports*.

For guidance on how to implement a study within your facility, or for advice on what to do with data you may already have collected, please contact Stephen Wilson, policy and public affairs director, on +44 (0)20 7593 8572 or stephenwilson@ukactive.org.uk

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JUNE

10 | UK Fitness Convention

Venue Wyboston Lakes Executive Conference Centre, Bedfordshire, UK
Summary

A management education conference for fitness and leisure professionals in the UK, from CEOs and fitness managers to PTs and social media managers.
Web www.ukfc.org.uk

17 | Leisure Tech Expo

Venue O2 Arena, London, UK
Summary

This new event will look at how the leisure industry can adapt in the digital age. It will showcase technologies including 3D scanning, augmented reality, Google Glass, 3D printing and a special presentation from MyndPlay about how you can control films with your mind. Its line-up of speakers includes global experience guru and author Joseph Pine.
Web www.leisuretechexpo.com

23-26 | 13th Annual International Conference on Health Economics, Management and Policy

Venue Athens, Greece
Summary

This annual conference brings together scholars, researchers and students who are involved in the areas of health economics, management and policy.
Web www.atiner.gr/health.htm

30 | Mature Marketing Summit

Venue Cavendish Conference Centre, London, UK
Summary

Organised in association with the Mature Marketing Association, this one-day

event brings seven industry-leading speakers together to grow delegates' understanding of marketing to mature audiences, as well as giving them an insight into the latest research and buying trends among the UK's older generation.
Web www.maturemarketingsummit.co.uk

30-1 July | Facilities Management Forum

Venue Whittlebury Hall Hotel & Spa, Northamptonshire, UK
Summary

Designed for FM directors and managers who are directly involved in the procurement of products and services.
Web www.forumevents.co.uk

JULY

2 | ukactive FLAME Conference & Awards

Venue Telford International Centre, Telford, UK
Summary

Offering a programme of high profile speakers, ukactive's annual conference is a leading educational and networking event for senior level professionals and decision-makers. The event will culminate in the FLAME Awards 2014.
Web www.ukactive.com

AUGUST

4-7 | 10th Annual International Conference on Kinesiology and Exercise Sciences

Venue Athens, Greece
Summary

Brings together scholars and students from a wide range of applied and integrated health sciences.
Web www.atiner.gr



A colourful charity event

16 AUGUST 2014

The Color Run Birmingham

The 5k Color Run is an un-timed race that sees participants doused in coloured powder at each kilometre, followed by a Color Festival at the end to create lasting memories. The event started in the US in 2011 as a way to promote health, happiness, individuality and community while raising money for charity. There are now more than 170 events in 30 countries, with seven in the UK – the next one will be held in Birmingham on 16 August. Details: www.thecolorrun.co.uk



A palatial cycle route

5 OCTOBER 2014

Palace to Palace bike ride

More than 4,000 cyclists are due to take part in this year's charity ride for The Prince's Trust. The 45km route starts at Buckingham Palace, goes along the River Thames and through three royal parks, and finishes at Windsor Castle. Details: www.princes-trust.org.uk

FAST & FRESH

New Miele Professional SPEED Plus freshwater dishwasher: the fastest commercial dishwasher using the freshwater circulation system

Miele Professional has launched a new commercial dishwasher that uses a freshwater system, combining speed, efficiency, performance and cost-effectiveness. The SPEED Plus dishwasher excels with short cycle times of as little as five minutes, without compromising the cleanliness of the load.

The SPEED Plus machine produces immaculate results in record time. The machine, which has 11 wash programmes, also has a high capacity of up to 456 plates per hour in the lower basket with further items of crockery in the upper basket, meaning that it is ideal for hotels, restaurants, offices and schools that need to run up to 40 cycles per day.

The shortest cycle time of five minutes is partly achieved through the use of a new electronically controlled heater pump. With an output of 8.5 kW, this pump heats the water as it passes on its way to the cabinet. Water is discharged and replaced in each phase of the programme cycle.

A fast and efficient machine, the SPEED dishwasher also saves on energy costs. Reduced cycle times result in considerable energy savings. The 'short' and 'universal' programmes, for example, require just 0.1 kWh per cycle, cutting previous requirements by half. Dishwashing capacities on the new models have increased by 20 per cent and despite the condensed cycles, these machines can wash two baskets every time. Furthermore, the new versatile standard wire basket can take significantly larger loads than before.

This dishwasher has been designed with the user in mind. The 11 programmes are set using touch controls and the three most frequently used programmes can be saved as favourites, launched at the touch of a fingertip using the quick selection button. The salt reservoir has a capacity of 2 kg and, with the tank located in the door rather than tucked away below the cabinet, refilling the salt container is extremely simple.

Les Marshall, Sales and Marketing Director at Miele Professional



The new model is ideal for sites that need to run up to 40 wash cycles a day

comments: "The innovative SPEED machine is designed with our customers' needs in mind. This energy saving dishwasher has one of our fastest running cycles and yet maintains the high quality of cleanliness at the end of it. Easy to use and innovatively designed, this machine is perfect for any business that requires a high load and fast turnaround, whether that be in the hospitality, catering, facilities management or the education sector." For more details on Miele Professional's products, please call 0844 8936907

For further information please visit www.miele-professional.co.uk

EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT ...

Mental wellbeing

There's no health without mental health, but gyms very often treat mental wellbeing as less of a priority than physical health. What's the best way forward?

One in four people in the UK suffers from mental health issues – that's one person in every typical family.

Mixed depression and anxiety is the most common condition, with 9 per cent of people in the UK meeting the criteria. One of the contributory factors is long-term stress – often a result of pressure at work. There's also evidence to show that depression and suicide have risen in response to the economic downturn. And it's a growing problem: the World Health Organisation forecasts that, by 2020, depression will be second only to coronary heart disease as a leading contributor to the global burden of disease.

Although GPs tend to prescribe anti-depressants sooner than they prescribe exercise, research proves exercise can be a very effective treatment for mental health: a study in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* indicated that people who were not active in their leisure time were almost twice as likely to suffer symptoms of depression than the most active individuals. The more activity, the less chance of being depressed (see p56).

Personally, I've found that the mental and emotional benefits derived from exercise are almost instant and certainly come way before any physical benefits. And I'm not alone in this: a survey conducted by mental health charity MIND indicates that many people

exercise to keep their mood steady. Indeed, 83 per cent of respondents said they exercised to help lift their mood or reduce stress, while seven out of 10 gym users with no mental health issues thought their mental wellbeing would suffer if they didn't exercise.

This suggests the fitness industry should be doing more to push the mental and emotional benefits of exercise, rather than focusing so heavily on weight loss. But how can operators go about this? How do you engage people with mental health issues and market programmes without applying negative labels? What sort of exercise appeals to people with mental wellbeing issues? What training do staff need? We ask the experts....

HAVE YOU HAD SUCCESS HELPING THOSE WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES? EMAIL US: HEALTHCLUB@LEISUREMEDIA.COM

BETH MURPHY

Head of information • MIND

"We would urge organisations to give their staff mental health awareness training and, when dealing with people who have mental health issues, to just be human and real, and not scared of people showing their feelings. They don't have to be experts to make a difference, but need to be aware that people with mental health issues may initially need more support, such as being greeted at the door and shown around the first time.

There are some barriers to this group taking part in exercise. One is cost, as some find their mental health makes it difficult to work. Another can be finding the motivation to exercise.

It's important to remember everyone will need a different approach: group exercise is a good way of connecting with people, but for people living with conditions such as social anxiety, this might be off-putting. MIND encourages outdoor exercise such as walking, running and outdoor group exercise, as research shows exercise in nature offers benefits for mental wellbeing. We run organised cycle groups, Bike Minded, as well as an outdoor physical exercise programme, Ecominds.

Local MIND branches welcome approaches from operators about running partnership programmes, as well as any publicity about the benefits of exercise for mental wellbeing."



DEBBIE LAWRENCE

Qualification development • Active IQ

"I don't think the fitness sector is sufficiently equipped to deal with people who turn to exercise to help with mental health issues. There isn't a broad enough understanding of the subject and instructors don't have the necessary skills, especially soft skills.

Maturity and experience is needed to work with people suffering with mental health issues, and all instructors should have some mental awareness training as a minimum. Ideally, each club would have a specialist who is Level 4 qualified in mental health. This is essential if the club is going to be dealing with people who have more acute issues.

With one in four people suffering from mental health issues, this is a large audience – but they are hard to market to, firstly because of the stigma and secondly because someone suffering from depression is very hard to engage with. The best route is therefore via GP referral or mental health charities. On a broader level, operators could start marketing the benefits of exercise for mental health, getting away from the weight loss aspect and moving towards the wellbeing perspective.

Rather than leading to mental breakdown, depression can often lead to a spiritual breakthrough, so practices like yoga and tai chi often appeal to those with mental health issues."





83 per cent of people say they exercise to lift their mood or reduce stress

HARRIET HEAL

Co-founder • Up and Running

“Mental health problems are very common, so all health club operators will already be catering for people with these issues. However, it can increase staff confidence to offer some basic training and education in this area.

When engaging with customers, talk about the holistic benefits of exercise and how it can lift the mood and keep you steady. Don't present exercise as a standalone treatment for depression, but as a useful tool for managing mood and energy.

If you want to run specifically targeted programmes, develop partnerships with local mental health services. As well as directing clients to you, they can offer vital support, education and mentoring. Be clear that you are offering exercise, not therapy. People may well want to talk about their problems, but there should be no pressure to do this. Confidentiality is very important: be respectful and don't gossip afterwards. It's important to make sessions fun and low pressure. And connect with the individual, treating them as you would anyone else.

We organise progressive running programmes for women with mental health problems (see p56). Feedback shows people are initially wary about who else will be on the course and are relieved to find it's just normal people, like them.”



SIMON HOLLIFIELD

Lecturer • The Wright Foundation

“When working with this demographic, the exercise is the easy part. It's the soft skills that are all-important: empathy and active listening. This is where more staff training is needed. The Wright Foundation offers a Level 4 Mental Health course for those wanting to specialise in this area.

An umbrella scheme won't work – it needs to be patient-centred. Support and flexibility are the two main things we focus on in a programme I run in Wales. We offer a whole range of activities, because different people like different things.

Most mental health exercise schemes are around 15 weeks, but ours is 45 weeks. This means that, even if people relapse – which always happens – there's time to get them back. We usually find that, by week 25, people are able to operate in the mainstream, but we're there if they need us. As we're trying to avoid stigma, we don't label the programme.

Our clients are all referred by GPs or psychologists. The first thing we do is get them into a positive pattern. If I can just get them to a centre twice a week in the first month, I'm happy. Once they've formed the pattern, the exercise becomes more important. There are no real rules – it's all about individuals' needs: give them what they need for as long as they need it.”





Thornton: "Good reputation in the community is key"

Sean Thornton

The joint MD of 3-I-5 Health Clubs talks to Julie Cramer about creating an exclusive network of 'X-Force family' clubs

INDEPENDENT OPERATOR FOCUS

One gym workout a week comprising single sets of exercises: if someone told you that was all your members needed to do to build muscle mass and burn fat in a few short weeks or months, you might be more than a little sceptical. Yet these are the kinds of results that fitness entrepreneur Sean Thornton – owner of the 5,853sq m (63,000sq ft) 'super club' 3-I-5 in Lancaster – claims to be seeing with his members.

So what's the secret of this success? Thornton immediately points to the X-Force equipment used at the club – a range of machines that offer negative strength training for different sets of muscles (see briefing, p33) – which he and business partner Ceri Smith have taken on in an exclusive partnership agreement with Mats Thulin, the Swedish inventor of the equipment.

"Ever since the 1970s, when the first cam resistance machines were invented

as an alternative to barbells and dumbbells, trainers have understood that accentuating the negative motion in exercise maximises strength gains," says Thornton. "To quote the late Arthur Jones – trainer to Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Mr Universe contests – it's not about how much you can lift, it's how much you can lower."

He continues: "The results we've been experiencing since opening 3-I-5 in May 2013 have been phenomenal across all user groups. For example, one of our over-70s members managed to halve the amount of medication they were taking after working out on X-Force for just three weeks, while in the same period another senior was able to raise a bar behind their head for the first time in years, showing they were regaining a full range of motion."

"In the US, a controlled medical study by Dr Ellington Darden – which centred around using X-Force for weight loss – saw 50 volunteers use the equipment just



“Accentuating the negative motion in exercise maximises strength gains”



The 3-1-5 'super club' offers 200 stations, including 56 X-Force pieces, and is also a show site for StarTrac CV equipment

once a week and abide by a simple calorie controlled diet. The average weight loss was 2.4 stone in just six weeks.”

The drawback for other clubs wanting to get in on the action is that 3-1-5 has the exclusive UK rights to X-Force: the only way for other operators to gain access to the equipment is by becoming an X-Force partner through a new licence programme launched last month. Even then, the programme will focus on independents rather than multi-site chains, giving compatible new start-ups, established fitness facilities and even small personal training studios the opportunity to offer and profit from X-Force's results-driven programme.

Building a 'super club'

The name 3-1-5 derives from the X-Force training concept, where the protocol is 'lift for three, pause for one, lower for five'. Yet even though the machines will undoubtedly give 3-1-5 Lancaster the 'X-factor' in terms of

The X-Force factor

So how does X-Force work? Thornton explains: “With conventional resistance machines, when you push out 100kg you get back 100kg. With X-Force, when you push out 100kg (the positive phase), the weight stack moves through a 45-degree angle. At the top of the lift, the stack reverts to the vertical and automatically adds 40 per cent to the load, so the user is lowering 140kg in the negative phase. “The muscle is 70 per cent stronger in the negative phase when compared to the positive, so we could add 70 per cent more load to the lowering phase. But to stay within safe parameters and ensure anyone can use X-Force machines, we're sticking to a 40 per cent load gain.”

Since its launch in 2012, there are now facilities offering the trademarked X-Force concept in 14 different countries, including the US, Australia and Switzerland.

Established US facilities are seeing some impressive results. The Gainesville Health & Fitness Club – the club at the centre of what was voted the healthiest community in the US – currently has 500 people on a waiting list for the 3-1-5 Weight Management Programme centred around X-Force.

Meanwhile the Mainline Health & Fitness club in Pennsylvania, operated by industry veteran Roger Schwab, has generated an uplift of US\$1.7m in PT revenue through its X-Force PT Room alone.



If clubs documented all the amazing life-changing results they're producing, it would change the industry

After 20 years in the industry, Thornton remains committed to promoting 'knowledge, service and professionalism'

► training possibilities, for Thornton it's really only half the story.

Thornton has been in the fitness industry since the 1990s, and even talking to him for just a few minutes it's clear to see he has an inexhaustible passion for the industry, as well as a great knowledge of his 'craft'.

He started out in fitness and leisure management in four-star country hotels throughout the 90s, moving on to become national sales and marketing director for equipment supplier Star Trac in 2002. In November 2002, he founded the Eze Fitness gym chain with Smith, a small chain of clubs which they still run on an income share basis with two local authorities – three clubs in partnership with Castlereagh Borough Council in Belfast, and two clubs with Sefton Council on Merseyside.

While this created a comfortable lifestyle business for the pair, Thornton says they ultimately had far greater ambitions to take their knowledge of the industry – particularly relating to service standards, staff development and creating a true community hub – and combine it in one amazing club (although Thornton isn't ruling out further sites) that would offer "the best of the best" in training and club culture.

3-1-5 is the culmination of these grand ambitions, and fulfils a longstanding ambition of both Thornton and Smith to

return to their roots and open a 'super club' in their hometown of Lancaster.

It was perhaps serendipitous that the right, super-sized property presented itself at the right moment – a former Total Fitness gym that had been sold off from the portfolio to a private landlord. "At its height, it had been a successful £11m club development with over 4,500 members, but the industry changed and diversified and it became an operation that was no longer viable," says Thornton.

"When we acquired the building in 2012, it had been totally asset-stripped and we needed to invest £3.3m in the site." Of this total figure – and despite a much higher original asking price by the receivers – Thornton, Smith and Thulin eventually purchased the site for £1.25m.

Finance for 3-1-5 came from a mix of directors' money, a commercial mortgage, and backing from various small investment groups. Thornton then personally managing an ambitious 14-week refurbishment programme, bringing it in on budget just before the scheduled opening date.

The club is now home to a 200-station gym, including four circuits (56 stations) of X-Force. Cardio equipment is provided by Star Trac, which has chosen 3-1-5 to be one of its showcase sites.

In addition, there are two exercise studios, a holistic studio, a 25m swimming pool, a 10x10m learner pool,

a hydrotherapy pool for 40 people, a poolside functional training zone, sauna and steam facilities, a large café-bar and lounge, and meeting facilities.

Service and professionalism

Thornton admits the club represents a huge leap from Eze Fitness, and he, Smith and their close-knit team have been working 24/7 to ensure success.

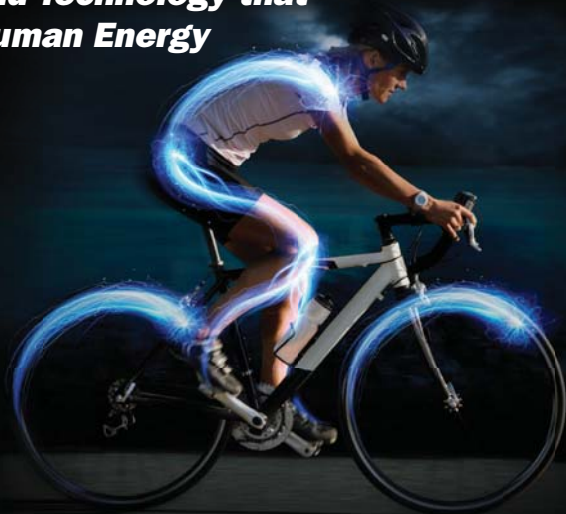
Promotion for 3-1-5 started months before launch, including taking the concept 'on tour'. Thornton explains: "We chose 20 iconic locations around Morecambe and Lancaster – one was beside the Eric Morecambe statue at sunset – and set up a high energy event with 20 Spinner bikes to help create the vibe of 3-1-5. Local media got involved and we did a lot of promotion with great shareable content on Facebook to create a viral effect."

As a result of this and other initiatives, 1,500 memberships were sold pre-opening; eight months later, the club was 46 per cent above target with 4,500 members paying £45–£60 a month.

While 3-1-5 comes 20 years into his industry journey, you get the feeling that Thornton is just getting started. He says his driving forces are offering superior service, with staff who have been heavily invested in, and serving the community by creating a 'third place' where everyone wants to spend time. ►

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Prior to launch, 3-I-5 took its concept 'on tour' around the local area, creating a buzz and generating 1,500 member sales

► "Health and fitness is about physical and psychological wellbeing, but it's about the spiritual and social too. What we've created is escapism for people outside of their work and home life – an unthreatening environment that encourages peer-bonding and interaction between people from all walks of life. Loneliness is one of the biggest killers of the over-60s."

At 3-I-5 there's a friendly 'meeter and greeter' at reception at all times, as well as four staff to deal with member requirements. Exercise areas have deliberately been kept to the first floor mezzanine, leaving the ground floor as a buzzing social space.

There's a large lounge seating 60 people with free wifi, while the café-bar hosts regular theme nights. Particular attention has been paid to lighting, both to zone the area and to create ambience. But lighting apart, Thornton is a believer in keeping technology to a minimum in the gym space to promote more interaction. He says: "We only have six TVs in the gym. In fact, we didn't get round to wiring them up to the cardio theatre for the first seven months and not a single person complained!"

Future developments

With his mega-club up and running, Thornton is continuing to focus on making his facility and staff the best they can be. He recruits high-calibre individuals – one is Glenn Robinson, who just won the first Commonwealth Gold medal for England in water polo – and continues to invest in them.

Being a true community hub is also key, with Thornton focused as much on the club's role outside the facility as

within its four walls. For example, he's planning school-based kickabout sessions to tie in with this month's World Cup, in partnership with local football clubs and radio stations, while old CV kit is given away to local facilities such as village halls and boxing clubs. "It's not just about sales. It's about getting a good reputation in the community," he says.

Another ongoing focus is improving data capture, which is currently where Thornton feels the fitness industry badly falls down. "Our sector doesn't have enough respect or credibility at the moment. We have six million members, but where's the data? If all ukactive members documented all the amazing results and life-changing experiences they're producing in their clubs, this would change the industry and ensure it gets the government support it deserves."

"At 3-I-5, we document a member's entire journey, from initial goals when they first meet us to their progression three, six, nine months down the line and beyond. We've identified the ideal measurements and checkpoints to give us the best possible analysis of their journey."

He continues: "We have a vital role to play in the community. It's about changing lives and behaviours and continuing to motivate members, not only for the present but 10, 20 and 30 years into the future. People plan for their retirement and worry about being financially secure, but they never plan for the most important thing of all – their health."



The pre-opening tour included outdoor Spin sessions

Exclusive network

Thornton's other future focus will be the licence scheme, although expansion plan are not aggressive – the emphasis is on quality not quantity, with hopes to create around five new partnerships each year. For a monthly fee, partners will receive X-Force equipment and all the training and marketing support required to create a successful business.

Thornton says: "It's a highly designed product with limited production capacity [Thulin owns the manufacturing base in Sweden], so X-Force will only ever be a niche product, and we will carefully choose the sites we work with."

"Although it's a licence programme, our partners will receive support rather than interference. But of course they'll have access to X-Force's equipment and will feel like our club in terms of priorities: a focus on service, knowledge and expertise; using technology for results rather than distraction; and being a true club for the community."

For now, 3-I-5 is on a mission to improve the health of Lancaster locals. But in spite of his cautious expansion plans, it wouldn't be surprising to see Thornton's enthusiasm for the industry mushroom into something far greater – and potentially even global – in the years to come. ●

"People plan for their retirement and worry about being financially secure, but they never plan for the most important thing – their health"



"Star Trac were our first choice when it came to the Kent Sport project. Having worked with the team for a number of years, we have developed an excellent working relationship and are receiving a first class, dedicated service. The global relationships the Kent Sport team has with the Star Trac team is exactly what I was looking for in a partner for our facility."

Graham Holmes, Director of Sport

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NEW OPENING



The Beat focuses on heart rate-based training

Small is Beautiful

Microgyms are taking London by storm. Kate Cracknell tries out a class at three recent new openings

In a Heartbeat

FITNESS FIRST BEAT

www.fitnessfirst.co.uk/beat

Location: Embankment/Charing Cross, central London, UK

USP: Exclusively heart rate-based training

The concept

With its London portfolio already effectively covering the city, rather than launch more big clubs, Fitness First made the decision to launch smaller, complementary facilities located between the larger sites. Each of these sites will have a specialism, with The Beat – a specialist heart rate-based club – the first of these. Others are expected to follow, with head of communications Mark Hutcheon predicting group exercise-only studios and even concepts similar to The Zone in Sydney, Australia (see *HCM* Sept 13, p21 and *HCM* Oct 13, p40). Top-tier members will be able to use all of these specialist clubs in addition to their ‘home’ club.

As UK head of fitness Lee Matthews explains, Fitness First wanted to launch

something genuinely new rather than getting in on the trend of cycling or yoga microgyms. The idea of The Beat stemmed from the success of the freestyle (functional training) zones in its existing estate; The Beat adds an added dimension of measurement, and with it motivation. Are you working as hard as you should be, in the right heart rate zone to get the results you really want? How many calories have you burned? How has this workout compared to previous ones?

“If you want to achieve results, this is the club for you,” says health and fitness manager Kat Morgan. “Heart rate-based training ensures you always train at the right intensity level for you, and our experts are on-hand in every session. You can track and monitor

your progress and we can guarantee the quality of your workout, as everyone works out to their own personal best. The equipment can also be used between sessions, allowing you to train independently – it’s up to you.”

The experience

The run-up: Details are found within the main Fitness First website, but I felt there wasn’t enough of an explanation of what heart rate training is all about, how Beat works and what to expect (although a nice selection of images helps give a feel for the style of training). This club probably merits its own site, or at least microsite. However, the different levels of class are briefly explained, there’s a downloadable timetable and a click-button to sign up for a free pass. New users can also register on the website to create their own account – which allows them to book classes up to a week in advance – but this option isn’t as clear or as simple as on other websites.



Bouts of CV are interspersed with functional exercises on the gym floor



Sessions at The Beat encourage a real sense of team to help boost motivation levels

Facts & stats

Opening date: 27 January 2014

Ownership: Fitness First

Size of the club: 192sq m main training space in a total upper floor of 238sq m. Lower floor (with cycling studio and changing rooms) of 197sq m.

Facilities: Main gym + group cycling studio, offering Beat classes and Spin classes respectively. There are 14 classes a day (Monday to Friday only), at five different levels, from beginners (65 per cent of HR max) to HIIT Pro (over 90 per cent of HR max).

Maximum class size: 32

Suppliers: Woodway (Curve treadmill), Versaclimber, Water Rower, Star Trac (Blade Spin bikes), plus Polar's heart rate monitoring system. Functional training equipment from Escape.

First impressions: An enticing club – small but with a great vibe, even when a class wasn't in progress, with nightclub-style décor, music and lighting. I was looking forward to my workout from the moment I walked in.

The class: I did the 40-minute Pro-Athlete class, meant to be 80 per cent max heart rate and alternating between two minutes of cardio and two minutes of functional exercises, with just 20 seconds' rest in between. I actually spent more time in the 90s than the 80s, but it was a great workout – albeit I wished it would hurry up and end a couple of times!



Top-tier members have access to The Beat in addition to their 'home' club

Aftercare: A workout performance report is sent by email to each member at the end of the session, allowing them to monitor improvement over time.

The verdict: One of the best workouts I've had in ages. Well led by the instructor with plenty of explanation, motivation and a personal touch (e.g. using everyone's first name), and all taking place in an environment – and using software – that made you want to work hard. My only query relates to whether that same sense

of motivation would be replicated in a class of 32 people – we were five in the class I attended. However, I loved it and will be back for more!

Payment structure

Starting at £60 a month on a 12-month contract, for dual membership of Beat and the nearby Fitness First Charing Cross.



Although you work hard at Psytle, the vibe is more Ibiza than Tour de France

Wheels in Motion

PSYCLE

www.psyclelondon.com

Location: Regent Street, central London, UK

USP: Founder Colin Waggett believes it's not possible to extract one element of the whole and elevate it above the others as a USP, but to me Psytle's USP is its focus on a positive mindset above all else.

The concept

Psytle was established to cater for what founder Colin Waggett calls an 'under-served' set of customers: fashion-conscious people in the broader sense, who choose experience over functionality when it comes to bars, restaurants, shops, hotels, but who are let down by the typical, non-experiential health club. They're conscious about their health and know they should exercise, but haven't found a boutique experience within the fitness sector that they really identify with. "You have to create an experience that's fundamentally different from anything you get elsewhere," explains Waggett.

Psytle sets out to meet this need with an ethos that's embedded in its very name: a combination of psychology and cycling. "We believe, if you get people in the right frame of mind, they'll exercise. And if you focus during the class and afterwards on how they feel – happier,

better about themselves and their lives – they'll come again," says Waggett.

"Physical transformation only comes from repeated exercising, and for many people if it's not enjoyable, that won't happen. There's a robust exercise science underpinning our classes, and you will work hard, but we've paid just as much attention to making it an enjoyable experience so people do keep coming back. When people say it feels more like they've been to Ibiza than riding in the Tour de France, I know we're onto something."

Unsurprisingly then, music lies at the heart of the concept, with "heavy investment" in the playlists. Technology has also been left out – no heart rate monitoring or competitive leaderboards – with the approach to instructing different too: no shouting at you to crank up the resistance, and with most of the instructors coming from a performing arts background.

Facts & stats

Opening date: 23 February 2014

Ownership: Colin Waggett,

former CEO of Fitness First

Size of the club: Just over 465sq m (5,000sq ft)

Facilities: Two studios (one with 45 bikes, one with 25), changing rooms, and a reception/lounge area. Currently offers 36 classes a week, aiming for 50 by the time this goes to print.

Maximum class size: 45

Supplier: Star Trac

The club is already averaging 75 per cent capacity across its timetable, with most new customers brought along by existing users – there has been no advertising, just PR and social media.

There are plans to open more sites – two are already confirmed – but as Waggett explains: "It could be three, 10, 20 sites, but definitely not 100+. It's about being different and special as opposed to world domination."

The experience

The run-up: A strong, uncomplicated website clearly explains the concept



The club is already averaging 75 per cent capacity across its timetable



Psyple's reception-lounge area is light, spacious and modern

and what to expect, covering FAQs in a very approachable way; an active Twitter feed suggests any other questions and comments are swiftly and efficiently addressed. Classes can be searched by instructor, credits purchased and a specific bike booked through the online booking process. **First impressions:** A very warm, informative welcome in a light, spacious reception-lounge area. Clean changing rooms with plenty of towels, hairdryers, ghd hair straighteners, nice bath/body products and little extras like hair elastics. First-timers are invited to turn up 15 minutes early so staff can check them in, help set up the bike and show them around. At least two staff are on-hand in the studio before each class, to make sure everyone's good to go. You're quickly made at ease – not a newbie in a class of experts.



Psyple aims to create an exercise experience you can't find anywhere else, with a big focus on feeling positive and happy

The class: How best to describe the class? It's effectively a dance class that just happens to take place on a bike – and it's great fun. A good instructor, uplifting music that fitted with the choreography – far more than just a background soundtrack – and a full body workout thanks to the incorporation of hand weights and body angles while cycling. The 45 minutes flew by. **Aftercare:** A follow-up email asked 'how was your first class?', giving me a chance to give feedback, book another class, encouraging me to tell my friends and follow Psyple on Twitter. It was a chatty but on-the-ball follow-up, very much on-brand and with the sense of a community already being built. **The verdict:** I'm not a big fan of group cycling classes, but then Psyple is unapologetically not catering for the Spin hardcore – and in fact purist Spinners may not like it. Personally I loved

its take on things. The price might put me off going more than once a week, but it'd definitely be a good addition to a workout repertoire.

Payment structure

"There's a complicated emotional relationship when it comes to contracts and cancellation rules. Members hate them and they just cause problems," says Psyple founder Colin Waggett, who decided to steer clear of memberships altogether. Psyple works on credits that can be purchased through the website, and which are then used to pay for classes: one credit (one class) costs £20, five credits £95, 10 credits £180, and 20 credits £325.

NEW OPENING



Barre classes are included in Group B, which costs £95 a month

All together now

THE FITNESS MOSAIC

www.thefitnessmosaic.com

Location: Chalk Farm, north London, UK

USP: Five studios offering group exercise only

The concept

The Fitness Mosaic positions itself as the group exercise specialist, offering top quality instruction across all disciplines and categories of class. It's aiming for the standard of instruction you'd expect at a cycling microgym, but across the board of group exercise – and with the convenience of having it all in one place.

The strategy going forward is to partner up with experts to create a series of reputable sub-brands seen to be worth paying a premium for; where possible, the club also aims to become a product training centre to further evidence its in-house expertise.

One sub-brand has already been launched – Exhale Pilates London is

the club's equipment pilates brand – with others set to follow. Fitbug Indoor Walking is already on the table, for example, with suggestions that classes such as boxing, group cycling and bootcamp may receive a similar sub-branding treatment.

Pricing is based on the idea that, whereas those using a cycling microgym might also need a gym membership, Fitness Mosaic members will have all they need within one package.

Co-owner and general manager Joe Proops believes 1,000 members is a realistic target – paying an average of £100 a month – with 500-600

Facts & stats

Opening date: Soft launch 1 March 2014; official opening 1 April.

Ownership: Former teacher turned fitness entrepreneur Joe Proops, the club's general manager, owns 50 per cent of the business; David Turner (co-founder of LA fitness) and Allan Fisher (founder of Holmes Place) – both also founders of ADDleisure – own the other 50 per cent.

Size of the club: 930sq m (10,000sq ft)

Facilities: Five studios offering around 150 classes a week, from boxing to barre, aerobics to boot camp, equipment pilates to suspension training.

Maximum class size: Varies by class. Five for Power Plate/Indoor Walking classes; 12-14 for barre; around 25 for aerobics or dance.

Suppliers: Schwinn, Performance IQ, Freemotion, Indoor Walking, Power Plate, Physical Company, Basile.



Boxing and boot camps in particular are attracting men to the new club

members needed to break even. Although the club is group exercise-based, the appeal doesn't seem to be limited to women – boot camps and boxing in particular are, says Proops, also attracting men.

If successful, the aim is to roll the concept out, starting in London – which Proops believes could support six or seven sites – but with international expansion not ruled out.

The experience

The run-up: Easy-to-use website took me through a quick sign-up process, including nominating a screen name for in-club leader boards and running through an online PAR-Q. Simple click-button process to buy your choice of package and book onto a class.

First impressions: The club was in its soft launch phase when I visited, with finishing touches still being made to the building. Nevertheless, it was clear the design brief had focused on clean, clear spaces and functionality rather than high-end plush. Reception staff, stood behind the juice bar-meets-reception desk, were relaxed but welcoming.

The class: I attended the barre class and enjoyed the lack of pre-choreography – all classes are designed in-house. It wasn't as tough as I expected, but was enjoyable with a good instructor. **Aftercare:** The website has an area to track your performance, while group cycling participants – by choosing a specific bike when they book – receive a Performance IQ feedback report. **The verdict:** I enjoyed the class but have a question over the price point. To do barre, I'd have to pay £95 a month – double the price of the gym I currently use in London. So was the class twice as good? Probably not. Did I get more personal attention than usual? Not really. Did the ambience feel 'premium' in some way? The jury's out, but I realise I was there during soft launch. However, with MBA-endowed Proops at the helm, supported by fitness experts David Turner and Allan Fisher, you can be sure the pricing strategy is based on robust research – and the sheer number and range of classes on offer is certainly a selling point. It will be interesting to see if this complex model can successfully be rolled out beyond this initial site. ●

Payment structure

With a goal of increased transparency and flexibility, the club offers three ways to pay: **Pay as you go** – paying on a class-by-class basis. **Buying an 'e-wallet'** of credit for £50 (actual value £55), £100 (actual value £130 extra) or £200 (actual value £260). **Monthly unlimited** – a rolling monthly plan for a minimum of three months. Within this, all activities are sorted into groups, with cost bands structured around these. For example, group A encompasses dance, aerobics, yoga, mat pilates and indoor cycling and currently costs £75 a month. Group B covers off more HIIT-style training, including circuits, boot camp, barre and Tabata – as well as all of group A (£95 a month). Group C covers Power Plate sessions, and also includes A and B (£125 a month). Group D is equipment pilates classes only (£180 a month; private sessions also available at extra cost), and at the top end is the all-inclusive group E (£250 a month). Personal training will also be launched.

Fit for the job

The Aspire National Training Centre is an exemplar of inclusive fitness: not only are almost a third of its members disabled, but well over half of its gym instructors are too. Now a scheme to get more disabled people into fitness careers is gathering momentum. Rhianon Howells reports



Well over half of Aspire's gym instructors have a disability

Given its location in the grounds of the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital in Stanmore, north-west London, it may at first seem unsurprising that the Aspire National Training Centre (ANTC) caters so well for the needs of disabled people.

Founded in 1982, it was originally conceived as a rehab centre for patients at the hospital's world-class spinal unit, but quickly evolved into something much more groundbreaking: a fully accessible leisure centre to meet the needs not only of those with spinal injuries, but people of all backgrounds and levels of ability.

More than three decades later, both the centre and the charity, Aspire, which

was set up to run it remain committed to this inclusive ideal: 30 per cent of ANTC's 3,000-strong membership is disabled (compared to a national average of 2–3 per cent) while the remaining 70 per cent is not. A further 2,000 registered users visit the centre on an ad hoc basis.

According to centre manager Hannah Bladon, ANTC's success in attracting disabled customers can be attributed to a number of factors: its impressive array of accessible facilities and classes (see below); its partnership with the London Spinal Cord Injury Centre, whose patients use the facility for rehab and also receive in-patient memberships for the duration of their stay; and a proactive outreach programme, including exercise referrals.

Leading by example

A large part of the centre's appeal to disabled customers – and crucial in retaining them – is its employment policy. At present, just over 20 per cent of ANTC's entire workforce and around 60 per cent of its 20-strong fitness team (including full-time employees, cover staff and volunteers) has a disability.

What's more, says Bladon, those figures are achieved without positive discrimination: "We don't actively recruit for disabled staff, but because of who we are and what we do, we probably get more applications from disabled people. They know the facility is accessible, they'll be welcome and have as good a chance of getting the job as anyone else."

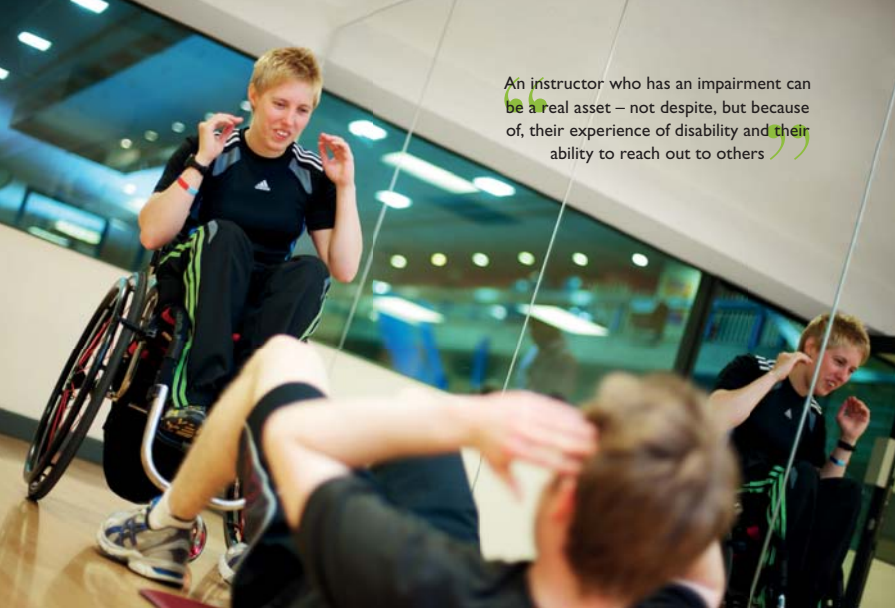
THE ASPIRE NATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE

The centre's wide range of accessible facilities and services include:

- IFI-approved gym with a full range of equipment that can be adapted for wheelchair and non-wheelchair users.
- Swimming pool with full ramp access, removing the need for wheelchair hoists; water temperature maintained at 30–32°C – ideal for the very young, old or those with temperature-sensitive conditions.
- 52 fitness classes, of which at least 40 per cent are suitable for disabled users; popular inclusive options include yoga, pilates, Zumba, aquatherapy and Schwinn group cycling, which offers four hand-cycles – Kranks – alongside 12 regular bikes.
- The Passport to Leisure membership option, which entitles disabled users to one-on-one assisted exercise sessions.



The water temperature in the pool is maintained at 30–32°C



An instructor who has an impairment can be a real asset – not despite, but because of, their experience of disability and their ability to reach out to others

To accommodate disabled employees, the staff room is fully accessible and some do work shorter days – but mostly, few allowances need to be made. On the flip side, there are enormous benefits to employing disabled fitness instructors, not least in reassuring disabled customers that their needs will be understood and catered for.

Disabled fitness instructors also give a more human face to the gym environment, making it less intimidating not only for disabled users but also for older and deconditioned populations (more than half of ANTC's registered users are aged over 50). "Our disabled instructors have life experience. They can turn people around," says Bladon. "They can say, 'I've been through this and look where I am now. You don't think you can do it, but you can.'"

Industry education

But if ANTC is at the forefront of the drive to make fitness and fitness careers more accessible to disabled people, it's clear the rest of the industry is still lagging behind.

For starters, the percentage of disabled members in fitness facilities remains disproportionately low (17 per cent of the general population has a disability). Further to this, Aspire has identified active discrimination against disabled

Aspire has identified active discrimination against disabled people seeking jobs in fitness

people seeking work in the fitness industry'. According to research published by the charity in 2011, a wheelchair user is twice as likely to receive an outright rejection when applying for a job in the fitness profession, all other factors being equal. Meanwhile, a non-wheelchair user is nearly four times as likely to be invited for an interview.

One way that Aspire is working to redress this imbalance is through its involvement with Quest, Sport England's national quality scheme for sport and leisure. ANTC has been Quest-accredited since 2012 (it currently has an 'excellent' rating) and, through regular involvement with the scheme's annual conference and other events, the charity is able to raise awareness among fellow operators and provide a benchmark against which they can measure their own efforts to cater for disabled users. "Quest enables us to share the inclusive nature of our facility with other general managers and to broaden their horizons as to how they can further promote activity to disabled people," explains Bladon.

But most crucial of all to Aspire's drive to educate the wider industry is

its Sport England-funded InstructAbility scheme. Set up and managed by Aspire in partnership with training provider YMCAfit, the initiative offers free training to unemployed disabled people with a view to helping them gain qualifications, experience and eventually employment as fitness instructors.

Created in 2010 but just now gathering momentum, the programme includes an 18-day training course for up to 12 students, delivered over seven weeks and leading to a CYQ Level 2 Certificate in Gym Instructing as well as a CYQ Level 3 disability and exercise qualification. This is followed by a 12-week work placement within a leisure centre or private health club.

While YMCAfit delivers the fitness training in Inclusive Fitness Initiative (IFI)-accredited venues, Aspire provides each student with a mentor to support them through the process; delivers community outreach training aimed at providing students with the knowledge, skills and resources to engage disabled people in the local community; and works with other industry operators to set up and facilitate work placements.

Made possible by an £850,000 grant from Sport England's Places People Play initiative, the first InstructAbility courses were held in London but have since been offered across southern, ►

“Our long-term aim is to influence fitness training providers and leisure operators to the extent that an intervention like InstructAbility will no longer be required”



Thirty per cent of members at Aspire's centre in Stanmore are disabled

► eastern and central England, with plans to roll out the scheme in northern regions next year. To date, 90 people have qualified as fitness instructors through the scheme, with impairments ranging from spinal cord injury, spina bifida and cerebral palsy to visual impairment, missing limbs and loss of function caused by stroke, brain injury and neuro-muscular disease.

According to Hilary Farmiloe, national project manager for InstructAbility, the scheme was set up to tackle the under-representation of disabled people in the fitness industry, both as employees and users. “InstructAbility is not just a project, it’s a movement, and I believe the army of disabled people we’re equipping to work in the fitness industry will provide a legacy of lasting change.

“Our long-term aim is to influence fitness training providers and leisure operators to the extent that an intervention like InstructAbility will no longer be required.

“When disabled people have more role models within the industry and

no longer face physical and attitudinal barriers to accessing training and employment, we will have succeeded.”

The key to success, adds Farmiloe, is buy-in from the industry, and feedback from operators with whom the scheme has partnerships – including GLL, Fusion, Everyone Active, DC Leisure and Fitness First – has invariably been extremely positive. “We regularly hear how an InstructAbility student has raised awareness of disability among other staff and, in some cases, helped the centre make small adjustments to improve their accessibility,” she says. “Managers have also reported an impact on retention of current customers, as well as an increase in the number of disabled people using the facility.”

Quest for excellence

Recently, InstructAbility received a boost from the Quest quality scheme for leisure centre operators, which has announced the addition of a compulsory Community Outcomes module to its assessment process, starting this

summer. “If a centre can show it’s supporting disabled people, encouraging them to participate in sport and fitness, this will certainly help them do well in our new module,” says Caroline

Constantine, Quest operations director.

“One of module’s key aims is to make sure that Quest-accredited operators are reaching out to people from all backgrounds and levels of ability, including those who might traditionally have felt they didn’t belong in this kind of environment. Taking part in an inclusive scheme such as InstructAbility and/or employing disabled staff is a great way for operators to demonstrate their commitment to this goal.”

Farmiloe agrees: “I’m delighted that Quest is supporting InstructAbility and recognises how the programme can support centres in their drive to do well in the Community Outcomes Module, while also encouraging greater diversity in their workforce and customer base.”

However, there’s still education to be done to get more operators on board, particularly in the private sector.

Central to the InstructAbility concept is the role of the disabled fitness instructor as an ambassador for inclusivity – with their unique ability to relate to disabled users as well as other hard-to-reach groups in the community – and it’s this message that Farmiloe is keen to push.

“Operators often respond by saying they don’t do work placements or accept volunteers,” she says. “But we want them to realise there’s a business case to answer, because if they want to remain competitive, they can’t keep focusing only on the clients they have.

“It’s about making the industry understand that an instructor who has an impairment can be a real asset – not despite, but because of, their experience of disability and their ability to reach out to others.” ●



Disabled instructors can be role models for prospective disabled clients



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This is not goodbye

Why are gyms making such a mess of the leaving process, and how can they do better? Kate Cracknell asks the experts

Whether handcuffed by a contract and not allowed to leave, or at the opposite end of the scale being allowed to quit without staff so much as batting an eyelid, sadly few members would score their gym (or, rather, ex-gym) particularly highly when it comes to its handling of the leaving process.

Further light was shed on this issue in recent research commissioned by *Health Club Management*. Conducted by Leisure-net Solutions, the qualitative study found that clubs routinely failed to try and rectify the situation when members decided to leave; if they did anything, they put obstacles in the way rather than trying to understand individual needs and encourage people to stay (see *HCM* Jan 14, p62). Research carried out by Dr Paul Bedford also highlighted a broad sense of apathy on the part of operators, with members feeling their gym didn't care if they stayed or left (see *HCM* March 14, p52).

Bedford's research also looked at why members decided to leave in the first place. This is vital information according to Bård Windingstad of Evo Fitness in Scandinavia, who takes a more rounded overview of the 'leaving process'. He believes retention has to start the moment members join, to hopefully avoid a leaving day altogether, but that if a member does decide to leave, you have to let them – making sure you find out why they're going, so you know if/how to try and win them back.

So what can operators do to better manage the three key phases of the leaving process: before one of their members decides to leave and while they're wavering, the event of leaving itself, and the weeks and months afterwards? We ask the experts.

Members may leave to train outdoors in the summer, but then re-join in the winter

If you conduct an exit interview, try to focus on what the member enjoyed

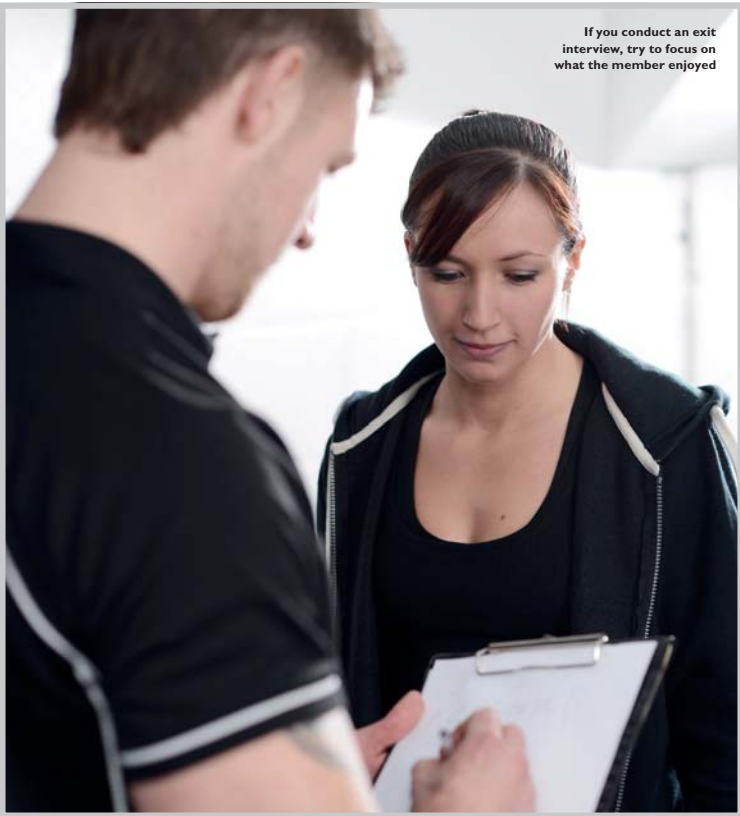


PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/ANDREW BASSETT

Research shows that people's memories of an experience are heavily influenced by two things: firstly, the peak moments of the experience – ie the best and the worst parts – and secondly, how the experience ends.

We never want to see a member leave, but when they do, we hope they'll leave with good memories of their experience with us and remain a club ambassador.

To facilitate this, it's important that the membership ends on a high

Jeremy McCarthy

Group director of spa, Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group – and author of *Psychology of Spas & Wellbeing*



note. There are many ways to achieve this, but one way would be a personal dialogue with the manager. The manager can let the member know how much they have appreciated their membership and, if they are leaving to join another

gym, congratulate them on continuing with their personal fitness goals.

During this 'exit interview', many gyms will focus on what went wrong. For example, they might ask: "Why did you decide to leave us?" or "What could we

have done better?" While this kind of information can be valuable, it can also serve to reinforce the member's memories of what they don't like about you.

I suggest using your last precious minutes with a departing member to focus on what went well. Ask them to tell you what they most enjoyed about the gym, and what aspects they will miss the most. The last thing you get them to talk about as they are leaving will likely be the first thing they will tell someone else. ▶

Too many members do workouts that will never bring them progress, so it's important for clubs to help them gain results

Melvyn Hillsdon

Associate professor of physical activity and population health, Exeter University, UK



The decision by a member to initiate the termination of their membership could be seen as a small window of opportunity for the operator. Encourage them to reflect on the benefits they glean from membership and assess their motivation to continue to exercise, with the exercise aim of trying to get them to talk themselves into continuing their membership.

A three-minute intervention may save a small number of memberships, and even those for whom it's too late will leave feeling more positive about the club, and speaking favourably about it to friends.

So what should the intervention look like? Based on the principles of motivational interviewing, it might go something like this: "First of all, I'm sorry to hear you're thinking of leaving us. Would you mind if I spent just a couple of minutes to understand how you arrived at your decision?

Could we start by you telling me some of the good things for you about being a member of the club?" Then just listen and summarise.

Next: "And right now, what are the three most important reasons for you to continue with exercise?" Again, listen and summarise.

"What could we do as a club to help you continue to exercise?" Just listen. Then offer them a reason why they might stay, without telling them they should. An example might be: "A number of members in your situation have found that a few sessions of PT remotivates them to get back into the exercise habit. I could offer you some free sessions if you wanted to stay for a while longer."

This process shows you're interested in their views, gets them to talk out loud about why your club/exercise is good for them, and gives them a reason to give you a second chance.

Bård Windingstad

Evo Fitness, Scandinavia



Our philosophy is that you have to start the retention process as soon as a member joins your club. It's about managing expectations from the outset and helping every member work out a bit better; too many people do workouts that will never bring them any progress.

When a member has decided to leave, it's too late to change their mind. If you try – if you complicate the leaving process – you'll just annoy them. We make it easy to leave and to rejoin: you can cancel your membership online with the click of a button, and it will expire at the end of that month.

People seldom leave saying "I'm never going to work out again as long as I live". By making it simple to leave, there are no bad feelings and they're happy to rejoin at a later date. Indeed, at some of our clubs that have been open for more than three years, approximately 15 per

cent of current members are members for the second, third or fourth time.

When a member leaves Evo Fitness, they have to answer two questions. Firstly, 'why are you leaving?' – some of the multiple choice answers are things we can help with, such as not reaching their goals. Where appropriate, we follow up with communications after they've left. The second asks them to rate Evo Fitness on a scale of one (lowest) to six (highest): 85 per cent of leavers rate us four or above. So we're not offering a bad service – they're just leaving to do something else.

For example, we see patterns emerging whereby people join in September and leave in March every year – because they're leaving to do outdoor activities in the summer. I see those as loyal members, and we wouldn't want to make things hard for them to come and go.

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Don't be afraid to communicate with ex-members

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / DEAN PROBOT

Guy Griffiths

Director,
GG Fit, UK



If you want to stop members leaving, there are lots of lessons from other industries. Take a look at the rapidly diversifying TV subscription sector, offering different packages, payment holidays or discounts, and 'value-add' (tie-in) services such as on-demand. With consumers' disposable income limited, people are having to choose between keeping their Sky subscription or their gym membership – and all too often, gym membership emerges the loser.

Once a member has decided to leave, there's often little you can do to change their mind, so the best option is to make it relatively easy. You have two priorities: to find out why they're leaving, and then to stay in touch with them. A leaver's form or survey

can formalise the process, whether it's completed face-to-face or online.

You can tailor follow-up messages based on responses; we always suggest asking similar questions again after a month, as responses could change once they've left. Ask if they're interested in future offers: if they say yes, treat them as an ex-member-prospect, otherwise treat them as an ex-member.

Thereafter, don't be afraid to communicate regularly with ex-members. You should value their opinions almost as much as your members', so ask them for feedback on new initiatives and find out what they're up to now. Ask why they joined in the first place, rather than why they left. We recommend a quick quarterly survey with a reward for those who complete it.

Paul Bedford

Director,
Retention Guru, UK



When members state their intention to leave, the response from their club is likely to fall into one of four categories: no reaction, disappointment, criticism/cynicism, and antagonism.

No reaction means no formal or informal response. It's a non-event. The club processes the request, but makes no attempt to identify why the member is leaving. Where members are leaving because of poor service, lack of results or for other negative reasons, a non-response causes them to feel abandoned, as if no-one cared. This leads to increased displeasure and a form of buyer's remorse.

Criticism/cynicism most often occurs with reception staff. The member expresses a desire to quit and the staff member responds with derision or an aggrieved

tone that they have to do something for this process to happen. This can create a hostile experience.

Antagonism is a progression of criticism/cynicism and is often accompanied with a confrontational: "Why do you want to leave?" Members are usually introduced to a number of barriers (including financial), creating a sense that the club will squeeze every last penny from them because they want to leave.

Clubs responding with disappointment are perceived to at least care. Allowing those who have completed their contractual period to go with good grace – with the club expressing a sense of disappointment – creates a break-up that has a possibility of reconciliation at a later date. ●

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On the ball

As part of Health Club Management's Gymtopia series, Ray Algar reports on a project that uses simple squash balls to help autistic children

During early April, I opened an email from Anna Rounaja, CEO of the Hukka fitness club in Finland. I had met her during 2013, when I was presenting Gymtopia to a group of European club operators in London. I was there to pitch the idea that clubs with an altruistic mindset could build powerful connections with their communities. Seven months later, Rounaja was writing to share a wonderfully simple story of how her club's used squash balls were helping children with autism to better cope with their disability.

A basket of balls

Among the extensive facilities enjoyed by members at the family-operated Hukka club are its four squash courts.

Gymtopia – a place where clubs do social good

Gymtopia was conceived by founder and chief engagement officer Ray Algar, who believes the global health and fitness industry has enormous influence and potential to do good in the world, reaching beyond its immediate customers. The idea of Gymtopia is simple: to curate and spread remarkable stories in which the fitness industry uses its influence to reach out and support an external community in need. It was created with the generous support of five organisations: Companhia Atletica, Gantner Technologies, Les Mills, Retention Management and The Gym Group.

Read more stories and submit your own: www.Gymtopia.org



With more than 3,500 members and a thriving squash community, the club gets through more than 2,500 balls each year; with the club soon celebrating its 40th birthday, that

means a lot of used balls which historically were simply thrown away, eventually finding their way to landfill.

One day, Rounaja asked members to begin leaving used balls in a basket next to the courts, thinking there must be a new use they could be put to – a second, useful purpose. Rounaja developed a few ideas, but was seeking a unique use for these balls and was unconvinced she had yet unlocked that new exciting purpose.

Enter Facebook

Hukka has been an enthusiastic user of Facebook since August 2010 and has 5,660 people following the club. So Rounaja posted pictures of the basket of balls and set members and staff a challenge: to create a great new purpose for the balls.



Hukka members get through more than 2,500 squash balls each year



The 'ball blankets' have been shown to help relax and soothe autistic children



The winning idea for sensory blankets came via Facebook

People began posting suggestions such as door-stoppers and stress balls. These were good ideas, but not really compelling enough. Then came the winning idea: a special needs teacher suggested the balls could be used to create a 'ball blanket', a sensory stimulation aid perfect for calming children suffering from autism and other developmental disabilities. This clever idea received 10 times the number of votes of the second placed idea.

These 'sensory' blankets have proven therapeutic effects for children with autism, helping to relax and soothe them and reducing the time it takes them to enter a deep sleep. As Rounaja explains: "They don't know the borders of their own bodies – it's one of the reasons they find the world overwhelming. The blankets adapt to the child's body and calm them, as though they are being hugged."

Normally these blankets are filled with plastic or even glass balls to provide the weight. They are complicated to make, and medically certified blankets can cost up to £570.

Enter the furniture maker

Rounaja next approached a local furniture maker to explore the possibility of producing the blankets, using a near endless supply of donated squash balls. The company was enthusiastic and agreed to get involved.

It now produces blankets for Hukka members, parents and local schools. The furniture maker does charge for the blankets to cover costs, but just £118 (US\$200) rather than the £570 (US\$960) charged by specialist suppliers.

The power of altruistic creativity

This is such a beautifully simple project, using what a club already has in abundance – in this case, squash balls. However, it began with a club that was determined to reframe a problem into an opportunity, fuelled by a desire to help others.

This project also shows that Facebook can be used as an effective idea generation platform, allowing members to genuinely contribute and become more deeply involved with their clubs. The Hukka club now publishes Facebook updates showing children using the blankets and the difference that they are making to them.

Let's also not forget how quickly altruistic acts can spread. This story has now moved off Facebook and been picked up by organisations across Europe and the United States. It's proof that thinking about others can pay off on so many levels. As Rounaja says: "I wasn't expecting something this great. It opened my eyes and makes me feel so warm inside – maybe the same feeling the kids get by using the blanket."

What's good about this idea?

- It reframes a problem (disposing of the club's squash balls) into an opportunity (how can we convert a waste product to help others?)
- It encourages the club to look outside its walls and think about creating a wider societal impact.
- It harnesses its Facebook community in an intelligent and collaborative way.
- It connects members, staff, owners and other stakeholders as they unite around a project that's focused on helping others.

So what can your business do?

Ask yourself: What do we have in abundance that can help others? If you need inspiration, put the challenge to customers and members, who'll relish the chance to get involved. Once you've made a difference in your community, share your story on Gymtopia and be amazed at how simple acts of generosity have the capacity to spread. ●

IN A NUTSHELL

Initiative by: Hukka – www.hukka.net
Location: Finland
Status: Ongoing
Impact: Local
Gymtopia keywords: Health & Wellbeing, Helping Children
Charity supported: Various

A record number of anti-depressants were issued in 2012. Is exercise a better drug?

PHOTO SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The Feelgood Factor

Sam Murphy reports on the impact of physical activity on mental health

If you were asked to list the most compelling reasons to exercise, you'd likely come up with factors like weight loss, improved cardiovascular fitness, lower blood pressure and cholesterol, and better muscle tone. And rightly so: all of these factors are proven benefits of regular physical activity.

However, with one in four people in the UK experiencing some kind of mental health issue, and a substantive body of evidence showing a link between physical and mental health (see HCM March 11, p36), many experts

would like to see more emphasis on the value of exercise for mental wellbeing.

"There's a clear and strong association between mental health and physical activity, including a positive effect on depression, stress, low self-esteem and even cognitive function," says professor Stuart Biddle, an exercise psychologist at Loughborough University in the UK.

Debbie Lawrence, a qualification development manager for Active IQ and author of *The Complete Guide to Physical Activity and Mental Health* (Bloomsbury), agrees: "Two things are clear from the research," she says.

"Firstly, that people with mental health issues tend to have poorer physical health. And secondly, that exercise can help to prevent or alleviate many mental health symptoms."

Physical activity, then, could be an important part of the jigsaw when it comes to prevention and treatment. But statistics suggest it's still undervalued: 50 million prescriptions for anti-depressants were issued in 2012 – the highest number ever – while a report in 2013 from healthcare charity Nuffield Health found that GPs were 46 times more likely to prescribe medication than explore evidence-based alternatives like exercise. The charity calculated that, if we each did just 12 additional minutes of daily activity, we could save £6.3bn in costs to the NHS, welfare, and loss of earnings related to mental health issues.

Dr Davina Deniszczyc, wellbeing medical director at Nuffield Health,

“There's a clear and strong association between mental health and physical activity, including a positive effect on depression, stress, low self-esteem and cognitive function.”



The Healthy Kickers scheme is open to anyone with a mental health diagnosis

comments: "We encourage all GPs to prescribe exercise, refer patients to support services that can help them exercise and ensure exercise, where applicable, is a central part of the treatment a patient receives."

Addressing the stigma

But what role could fitness operators play in promoting exercise for mental health? Lawrence believes the industry should shift its message. "The emphasis should be on exercise to feel good, rather than to not feel bad," she says.

Harriet Heal, a clinical psychologist with an interest in the interaction between physical and mental health, agrees: "Gyms and health clubs tend to focus too much on the physical pay-offs: lose weight, tone up, get fit," she says. "There needs to be more attention given to the mental benefits. Think of it this way: one in four of the people who walk through the door of your health club or leisure centre has, or has had, a mental health condition."

It's hardly a minority group, then. Yet while gyms and health clubs routinely offer classes for pregnant women or for the over-50s, it's rare to find sessions aimed specifically at those with mental health problems.

"There's still a long way to go in breaking down the stigma surrounding mental ill health," says Mark Owen, who led the pioneering Bristol Active Life Project (BALP – see briefing, p58) in his role as physical activity development officer for mental health at Bristol City Council. "Many people aren't comfortable being 'labelled' in public."

Heal, who co-founded Up and Running – a running group for women in Kent with mental health issues (see briefing, p60) – agrees: "Our poster says 'Do you suffer from anxiety or depression?' But I sometimes worry that it puts off as many people as it attracts. I don't want to avoid terms like 'depression' or 'mental health', but I also want don't want to alienate people. We've had people enquiring about the group who say: 'I don't know if I'm 'bad enough' to join...'"

When Up and Running launched in 2010, the *Sevenoaks Chronicle*, in which Heal had placed an ad, published a mocking piece describing the prospect of an exercise and mutual support group for depression and anxiety as "a barrel of laughs". While the newspaper later issued a written apology, it shows just the sort of negative reaction that might hold people back from seeking support.

Case study:

Healthy Kickers

Every Thursday lunchtime, men and women of all ages and abilities with mental health issues gather at the Westway Sports Centre in London to play football. Each session begins with a warm-up and skills practice, followed by a number of seven-a-side football matches.

The Healthy Kickers project is a joint initiative by SMART and London Cyrenians Housing – charities that provide support to people with mental health problems through physical activity – and there are staff on-hand to offer motivation and advice, and to ensure participants develop the confidence to engage fully with the sessions. Coaching is provided by Queens Park Rangers Football Club and sessions are adapted to meet the fitness and support needs of everyone who attends.

Healthy Kickers is open to anyone with a mental health diagnosis who is referred by an approved organisation or charity within the London tri-borough area of Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster and Hammersmith and Fulham.

Details: www.smartlondon.org.uk

A warm welcome

Projects like BALP and Up and Running demonstrate that specifically targeting a mental health market can be successful. But it's not the only way. "The right approach and attitude can make any exercise environment more welcoming and inclusive," says Heal.

In 2000, a study conducted by the YMCA in the US set out to identify what kept people coming back to their gyms. After analysing more than 150,000 member satisfaction surveys, ▶

“Better mental health education gives staff more confidence. If someone's brave enough to take a step through the door, every staff member they encounter could make or break whether they come back”

► they concluded that it wasn't fancy machines or yoga studios but the human factor: staff knowing members' names and greeting them with a friendly smile. The research didn't specifically address a mental health population, but as Heal points out, this positive social interaction would be even more crucial for someone feeling anxious or depressed, or lacking self-esteem.

Owen believes there needs to be more commitment from operators to train staff on mental health: “When we were running BALP, none of the local clubs or leisure centres came to ask us for training – it was always us going to them to offer it,” he says. “Better mental health awareness and education give staff more confidence. And it's not just the instructors and coaches – it's all staff. If someone's been brave enough to take a step through the door, every staff member they encounter could make or break whether they come back.”

Dr Kitrina Douglas, a researcher in exercise, health and sport at the

One in four people has, or has had, a mental health condition – yet gyms don't address this



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

University of Bristol, was involved in evaluating BALP, interviewing participants and staff. “Education is really important,” she agrees. “For many of those we interviewed, medication made morning classes difficult – just getting up and out was a much bigger deal than it is for most of us. Staff didn't

always understand what a big effort it could be even to get to the venue.”

Many of the instructors connected to BALP took the exercise referral course Physical Activity for Persons with Mental Health Conditions, which looks in depth at specific conditions such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and post- ►

Case study:

The Bristol Active Life Project

The Bristol Active Life Project (BALP) was set up in 2005 to bring the benefits of physical activity to those with severe and enduring mental health problems. The idea was sparked when mental health staff within a Bristol hospital began providing gym sessions for people hospitalised with conditions such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

“Originally, it was more about occupying time than any perceived health benefits,” says Mark Owen, former physical activity development officer for mental health at Bristol City Council. “But when reductions in BMI, increases in lean body mass and a reduction in medication were noted, it was clear that extending its provision would be worthwhile.”

The project received local authority support and funding from the Football Foundation to provide facilities and coaches, and train those involved in delivering the exercise

sessions. In the three years between 2009 and 2012, more than 900 referrals were made and BALP was running 20 sessions a week, from five-a-side football to martial arts, gym classes and badminton. The project's funding ceased in 2013, but many of the classes it spawned now run independently. There's still a referral process – not anyone can turn up at one of the sessions – but the ‘net’ of referrals is much wider, including GPs and mental health support workers.

“We succeeded in getting people out of their homes and into the sessions,” says Owen. “When you think of the barriers that exist for people with mental health issues – poor self-esteem, bad experiences of sport/exercise in the past, lack of energy – it demonstrates the impact of what we provided.”

Details: <http://www.bristol.gov.uk/page/health-and-adult-care/bristol-active-life-project-balp>

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The Up and Running programme benefits women with mental health issues

“ We tend to medicalise mental illness, but the truth is that many people slide in and out of depression and anxiety disorders ”

► traumatic stress disorder. “The education we delivered helped practitioners understand what life is like living with long-term mental illnesses,” says Douglas.

So how might a fitness session for a mental health population differ from other sessions? “It’s not so much the format or structure as the atmosphere and approach,” says Owen. Heal agrees: “You might need to take more time over things and focus on the process, rather than the outcome. You don’t want exercise to become another stress for someone.”

Those involved with delivering BALP sessions were taught the importance of creating a safe, supportive environment. “As an instructor or coach, it’s less about knowing all the answers regarding any given mental health condition and more about focusing on the individual’s needs at that time,” says Owen.

Universal benefits

Heal wonders whether gyms would benefit from a resident or attached mental health expert: “You’d expect there to be professionals in physical health – why not in mental health?” she asks. “They could be there to advise the

health club users, but also be a point of contact for other staff at the facility.”

Douglas believes the real solution lies in being able to break down the barriers and stigma surrounding mental health issues. “Even the terms we use – ‘people with mental health problems’ – create a rift that makes it seem ‘they’ aren’t normal, and ‘we’ are, when of course all of us, regardless of our mental health status, want to have fun, enjoy social activities and have access to exercise and work opportunities,” she says.

Heal agrees. “We tend to medicalise mental illness, but the truth is that many people slide in and out of depression and anxiety disorders,” she says. “Physical activity has the same benefits for everyone – and while many of these are long-term, perhaps what’s more useful in terms of mental health is to focus on the immediate payoffs. ‘Feel better this afternoon than you did this morning’ is a very powerful message for health clubs to get across.” ●

See p30 for a discussion on whether the fitness sector is geared up to deal with mental health issues.



Case study:

Up and Running

In 2010, clinical psychologist Harriet Heal and running coach Shona Campbell founded Up and Running, a 10-week running programme specifically geared towards women suffering mental health problems.

Through her own experience of depression, Campbell had seen first-hand the difference lacing up her trainers could make, and Heal needed little convincing: “I don’t know any runner who doesn’t believe it helps their mental health,” she says.

But Up and Running isn’t just about getting the miles in. “Many of the benefits come from the social and mutually supportive aspect of being with people who have experienced similar problems,” says Heal. “People don’t have to discuss their mental health if they don’t want to, but know they’re in a safe, non-judgmental place to do so.”

Participant feedback thus far shows that 90 per cent of women believe it has had a positive impact on their mood and mental health; 100 per cent would recommend it to others. “There are former Up and Running course participants who still meet up once a week to have a walk and a coffee together,” says Heal. She and Campbell have been approached by other groups and individuals interested in setting up similar schemes. Watch this space...

Details: www.upandrinninginsevenoaks.org.uk



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RESEARCH ROUND-UP

Cash back

As little as £3 can make people 50 per cent more likely to change their behaviour, according to research from Newcastle University

Earlier this year, research firm Mintel revealed that 30 per cent of people in the UK admit to rarely or never taking part in sport or exercise. In the survey, 24 per cent of Brits said they struggled to motivate themselves to exercise on their own, while the top reason for not using a leisure centre or swimming pool was cost. However, another piece of research – this time by Newcastle University in the UK – has suggested that things could change if people were offered a financial reward.

The university focused on 16 previous studies in which people had been given incentives to improve their health in some way, such as by taking up physical activity, quitting smoking or attending vaccination/disease screening sessions. The studies involved a total of more than 30,000 participants, and the university says its research is the broadest look to date at the impact of incentives.

Money motivation

The research, published in the journal *PLOS ONE*¹, was funded by the National Institute of Health Research with a view to finding out how the NHS might save money in the long run.

Overall, financial incentives ranged from £3 (US\$5.16) for having a flu vaccination to £467 (US\$786) for taking part in an employee scheme to give up smoking for a year. Yet the team found that even in the flu vaccination study, where the reward was just £3, people were 50 per cent more likely to change their behaviour. In fact, it discovered that larger incentives were no more effective than smaller monetary rewards in influencing people's behaviour.

Financial penalties for not succeeding in the task were also found to work. In



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/ANTARIX

Financial incentives, as well as penalties for not succeeding, changed behaviours

these studies, participants had to hand over a set amount of money which they knew they wouldn't get back if they didn't fulfil the health behaviour requirements.

Surprise findings

Dr Emma Giles, a research associate at Newcastle University and lead author, comments: "This was an interesting finding and we were surprised at just how strong the effect was. People who took part in these reward or penalty schemes were much more likely to adopt healthy behaviours, and if they continued, they would have more chance of remaining healthy for longer."

She adds: "Many studies used vouchers for supermarkets or similar things rather than actual cash. This might be a more acceptable way of implementing this."

Dr Jean Adams, a senior lecturer in public health at Newcastle University,

comments: "We were surprised how few studies we found which had looked at the impact financial incentives can have. But at this stage, we don't know the right level that incentives should be at, so it's not clear if this sort of scheme would save the NHS and country money."

In addition, the team says it's not clear whether the effect continues in the long term, after the rewards have stopped. It's also not clear from the current research whether there's a bigger impact in certain socioeconomic groups. Both of these areas were highlighted as possible variables to investigate further.

But as Adams concludes: "We try all kinds of techniques to try to help people quit smoking or otherwise live healthy lives, so why not try this? It's about nudging people into healthier behaviours. There's a chance this could save the taxpayer money in the long run."

¹Giles, E. et al. The Effectiveness of Financial Incentives for Health Behaviour Change: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *PLOS ONE*. March 2014

On the move with Gladstone



The launch of Gladstone's mobile booking app at Edinburgh Leisure sites has brought great benefits to both customers and staff

Ever since 2002, Edinburgh Leisure has had good results with a wide range of Gladstone products, from the company's signature Plus2 membership management software to the Connect and Join@Home modules for online booking and joining. So when Gladstone announced they were launching a new smart phone app called MobilePro, we knew right away that we wanted to be early adopters.

Our customers have been asking us for while now if they can access our website and book fitness classes on their smart phones, and we knew that if we wanted to stay competitive, it was vital for us to offer this kind of flexibility.

In January and February, we soft-launched MobilePro in 15 out of our 30 sites, and started to actively promote it on 3 March via our website and Facebook page. The results have been incredible. During the soft-launch period we had 1,000 downloads, but just 16 days after the official launch those numbers had already topped 3,500.

So far, 75 per cent of downloads have been for booking classes – on 3 March alone, 486 bookings were made using MobilePro – and our pool timetables module is also popular. Customer feedback has been terrific. They love being able to book and cancel classes on the go, even when sites are closed, and they like how easy it is to access information on how many spaces are left in a class or where they are on a waiting list.

As well as having a real impact on customer satisfaction, the app is great for sending push messages to inform people of maintenance/downtime issues on site or time-limited promotions. This is in addition to dedicated News and Offers tiles on the home screen, which can be updated as necessary. Adding or amending content using the MobilePro Web Cockpit is very straightforward, and navigating the system has been



Customers can now book, change or cancel gym classes on the go

made even easier since the launch thanks to the developers taking on board some of our feedback.

When it comes to making the most of the app, the real-time reporting feature is extremely useful. Not only does it give us an instant overview of the number of downloads in any given period, but it also breaks this down by venue, as well as showing us which modules are most popular. Having this data will be invaluable moving forward, as it will help us decide which modules we definitely want to keep and which ones we need to either change or promote more.

Overall, we are delighted with the results we've seen from MobilePro so far. Looking ahead, we'd like to incorporate bookings for activities outside the gym or fitness studio – such as golf, tennis, badminton and squash – into the app. As soon as this functionality becomes available in the next couple of months, we plan to roll it out to some of our other sites.

Stuart Fairbairn, ICT manager, Edinburgh Leisure

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SELLING IN A BUYING WORLD

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Dave Wright offers his advice to health club managers wanting to improve their understanding of, and performance in, the area of sales

Sales in the fitness industry can be a very rewarding profession: you're the gateway to members achieving their dreams of a healthier, more fulfilling life. It can also be a frustrating and time-wasting profession without the right tools, mindset and guidance. It's a manager's role to provide the sales team with these tools and guidance.

First and foremost, a sale will only take place if the value in the transaction has outweighed the cost. The value is relevant to the individual's goals, wants and desires, and the cost is what's holding them back. The bottom line is that if the customer has not parted with their money or committed to join your club, they believe the cost has outweighed their motivation to join.

Everything that transpires in selling will always swing back to this basic equation. As a manager, you must encourage your sales team to deposit features and benefits into the value bucket while also trying to outweigh the negative cost elements of the sale.

Here are some tips and suggestions to share with your sales team, to help them encourage people to purchase a gym membership at your facility.

Understanding consumer mindsets

Two factors must be met for a fitness sale to take place: logical needs and psychological (or emotional) needs. Logical needs are usually the 'reasoning' people use to justify their purchase: people always buy emotionally and justify logically.

Logical needs at a club are things like flexible opening hours, convenient location or reducing the risk of cancer. They are important, but they will not get the member across the line without their emotional needs being expressed or understood.

Emotional needs are usually centred on how membership will make a person feel about themselves. Losing weight so they can fit into their wedding dress and feel good about themselves as they walk down the aisle is far more persuasive than the logical understanding of a club having 50 treadmills.

The science of influence

In 1984, social psychologist Robert Cialdini produced the results of arguably the most researched project on sales and the psychology of persuasion that had ever been published.

The decision-making principle of 'liking' states that people are more likely to say yes to someone they like

PHOTOS/ISTOCK.COM



When gathering information on prospects, a key task is to find out what their 'problem' is and then present a solution

Cialdini came up with six major principles that can affect human decision-making: reciprocity, scarcity, consistency, authority, social proof and liking.

The law of reciprocity states that people are obliged to give back to others the forms of behaviours they have received – aka 'do unto others as you would have others do unto you'. For example, a PT might offer help on training techniques when not working with clients – those receiving the free help then feel 'obliged' to commit to future spending with that PT.

Scarcity combines with fear of loss to elicit action that wouldn't otherwise occur. When an item becomes less available, its appeal increases. This is what makes rare coins more precious and why, if marketing a special membership package or discount, the number available should be limited – this builds desire as the deal isn't normally available.

Then there's consistency. People have an innate desire to live up to their own previous commitments. One study asked people if they would vote in an upcoming election and provide a reason why they thought they would. Close to 90 per cent of those who gave a reason went on to vote – a huge increase compared to those who said they'd vote but didn't explain why. Asking the right questions and including 'trial closes' during a health club tour encourages the prospect to make that public commitment so, when it comes to the final question on whether they will join, it's harder for them to renege.

Authority is key in today's busy world. We're exposed to so much information that an efficient way to decide on a course of action is simply to follow the advice of experts. In a study, doctors who displayed their certificates in their practices

Remuneration & retention

As a manager, you need to make sure the sales team's remuneration package is congruent with your goals as a facility.

Individual commissions based on the value of the sale are important, as well as team goals when targets are hit. Some companies pay a small initial commission for the

sale, derived from the joining fee, then a monthly recurring revenue as long as the member remains at the club. The incentive is not just having a member who's paid upfront, but one who continues to pay over a period of time.

What you set must be monitored, acknowledged, and best practice shared.

were 30 per cent more effective in persuading patients to take a particular course of therapy. If a member wants to put on muscle, they're more likely to take advice on the use of protein from a Mr Universe-like than a tiny fitness instructor. If you have accolades, endorsements or qualifications, display them at the club to encourage prospects to see you as an authority.

Following the crowd is a powerful force when we don't know what to do. Bestsellers lists on websites are what people refer to when unclear what they want. When clubs are talking about the different membership options, they can move potential clients towards their way of thinking by using phrases such as "and this is the membership option most people go with". ►



Reciprocity principle: If a PT offers free advice, the member is more likely to spend with him in the future

- Marketing using phrases such as 'the most popular club in town' also tap into this principle known as 'social proof'.

Finally, the principle of liking states that people prefer to say 'yes' to those they like and have a relationship with.

But the important thing with all these techniques is that it must rest on a strong ethical foundation for it to work.

Go with the flow

As soon as your team has mastered the buying or influencing principles, they should be taught to follow a sales process. This comprises the greeting, the information gathering, the presenting and the closing.

Top tips on selling memberships

- **HELP**, don't sell. Gain details about a prospect, then solve their problem.
- Practise what you preach. You'd be surprised at the referrals and respect you earn if you work out in your own club.
- Be prepared. Most of the work happens before you meet your prospect. Role-play the club tour, know where you'll take them, what areas hold most appeal, etc.
- Know your competitors. Take time to know the relative pros and cons of your facility. Speak respectfully about the competition, but then point out how your facility offers better value.
- Focus on the process and don't prejudice the outcome. Stay focused on the needs of your prospect, not your desire for a sale. Don't eliminate steps to save time.
- Ask questions. Don't fall into the trap of the museum tour: the more you overwhelm your prospect with information, the more likely it is that you'll create objections. Find out as much about them as you can, and then guide them in their decision-making.
- Sales is often described as a transfer of enthusiasm from one person to another. Be happy about what you're offering.
- Be accountable. Ask yourself questions on how you can improve, and never stop learning.

The ultimate intention in the greeting is to build rapport and trust: people will then believe you're trying to help them and will listen to what you say. Using people's names, letting them know your name and creating that initial connection through conversation is the easiest way to achieve this.

The second step is information gathering. Rather than trying to push or sell something that's not in line with what the person wants, ask and understand what they're trying to achieve, and why. A simple acronym – H.E.L.P. – will help you gather the relevant information from a prospect. H stands for how they Heard about the club. E is for their Experience. L informs you about their Lifestyle and P stands for the Problem.

The easy part of the sale is presenting the club and solution in line with what they want: if they're serious about wanting a solution, they should buy it. For example: "From what you've told me Mary, you want to tone up the back of your arms so they look good in a dress. This tricep machine would be ideal."

But you should never start presenting until you've gathered the correct information. One of the major reasons why members leave a club is due to 'expectation violation' – being sold something that's unrealistic to their lifestyle and habits.

Finally, it's important to ask for the sale. If you've correctly gone through the previous three steps, held rapport and presented the solution – and they know it's the solution – the natural progression is to ask if they're happy to go ahead.

Helping, not selling

Many people in the fitness industry hate the term 'sales', yet it pays their livelihood. So why not look at it from a different angle: your sales team should be helping people achieve what they want, rather than selling something they don't want. ●

Dave Wright is the CEO of CFM, historically a fitness sales and marketing company that has served the international fitness community for over 24 years. He regularly speaks at international conferences such as IHSPA, Filix and Club Industry and has presented at UK conferences such as ukactive, LIW and CIMSPA. He's also the owner of 11 health clubs across two continents, a board director of ukactive, founder of IOU (Independent Operators Unite) and the creator of MYZONE.

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Apps account for up to 86 per cent of daily phone use

Mobile CRM

Sean James reports on the growing appeal and functionality of apps for gym members and staff alike

Recent research from US analytics firm Flurry shows that US consumers are spending longer on their phones – an average of two hours 42 minutes a day, compared to two hours 38 minutes in March 2013. Within that, apps account for up to 86 per cent of daily phone use – equating to two hours 19 minutes. Meanwhile, according to web analytics provider Stat Counter, in 2013 the share of mobile website browsing had grown to 21.6 per cent of all global browsing, at the expense of desktop and laptop browsing.

The fitness industry has already experienced a huge growth of web-based systems and services in recent years, particularly in the area of booking systems and online joining. But with data from companies like Flurry and Stat

Counter indicating that consumer use of apps is continuing to grow, what app technology is available?

Mobile bookings

Earlier this year, Gladstone Health and Leisure launched MobilePro, a new smartphone app enabling operators to stay better connected to their customers and boost online transactions. The application can be customised, enabling operators to add any number of information pages to market their site to prospects, as well as update members with news, promotions and new activities or facilities.

West Country leisure trust 1610 is an early adopter of the MobilePro app. "With 60 per cent of our web users now viewing our site through their mobile or tablet device – and this figure growing ▶



Health clubs are able to customise Gladstone's MobilePro app

“The smartphone might just be the most powerful sales and service tool available to support today’s forward-thinking leisure operator”

► month-on-month – we needed our own mobile app to keep up with our customers’ needs,” says Rebecca Sawtell, head of marketing and communications. “MobilePro is quick and easy to navigate, so we hope it will encourage more people to book and pay through this channel, easing the pressure on our front-of-house team.”

Michelle Schwick, leisure systems co-ordinator at Huntingdonshire District Council – which has also taken on MobilePro – adds: “The app helps people on the move to quickly book at their convenience. Within seconds of showing it to a customer, they had downloaded it and started booking classes.”

MobilePro also allows customers to interface with social media sites, sharing their activities and giving even more exposure to individual health clubs and leisure centres.

Tom Withers, sales and marketing director at Gladstone, says: “We think the smartphone might just be the most powerful sales and service tool available to support today’s forward-thinking leisure operator. As well as a great communication tool with voice, text and email in your pocket, a member’s smartphone is both a social media portal

TRP’s app replaces membership cards with a barcode



and a mobile shopping basket. With this in mind, we created MobilePro to help clubs stay connected to their customers and let them purchase on the move.”

Meanwhile, Serco Leisure has implemented Legend Club Management Systems’ mobile application for online bookings. Developed by Legend to make it much easier to book classes and courts via smartphones, the app is offered to customers as a free upgrade to its online services.

Serco members could already make bookings online, but having examined the statistics, Serco noticed that 30 per cent of the traffic to its website – in particular the booking pages of the site – was coming from mobile browsers.

During the initial trial of the app in three of its leisure centres, Serco saw a significant increase in the number of mobile bookings – in particular Harborough Leisure Centre, where there has been a 25 per cent increase.

The app has received such positive feedback from members that Serco is now rolling the solution out nationally.

The mobile app is also fully integrated with the core Legend database, so Serco can see who books via the app, enabling it to build a better view of members’ behaviour and provide continuous improvement in the way its services and customer service are delivered.

Sean Maguire, Legend MD, says:

“We’re seeing a channel shift in front of our very eyes. Mobile apps are a vital way for leisure operators to further improve customer service and at the same time enhance data integrity and business intelligence. In fact, mobile is the key to another very important objective: seeing a step increase in the take-up of self-service initiatives.”

Broader functionality

Many other software providers now have apps available. ClubWise, for example, has an app called CW4Members, which allows members to book PT sessions and classes by activity or by specific trainer. They can also manage their sessions by seeing how many they have booked, attended and how many they have left in any multi-session packages they may have purchased. In addition, they can refer friends, linking to ClubWise’s member rewards scheme (for every friend the member refers, they receive £1 off their monthly membership for as long as their friend is a member of the club) and then view referrals and see how much they are saving. There’s also an option to view and amend personal details, view account statement and contract details, and communicate with the club by requesting a call or sending feedback.



The MINDBODY app lets users book, pay for and review classes through one log-in



PHOTO: WWW.SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/WWW.BERKAPEDIA

The ClubWise app enables members to book classes with specific instructors

MINDBODY also provides an excellent consumer-facing mobile app that allows club users to easily find, book, pay for, review and share any class, all through one log-in. It also offers a club management app called MINDBODY Express, which enables club owners to manage everything – scheduling, clients, reporting, payroll, swiping credit cards, and so on – from their smartphone.

TAC's (The Assistant Company) Club Assistant mobile app offers several features to make club management easier. These include a walk-in web contract form for walk-in prospects or guests, class reminder and staff calendar reminders. Combined with the TAC web shop, the mobile app also facilitates the booking of personal training, classes and sale of products. It also includes gift certificate downloads.

And The Retention People released an app earlier this year called Mobile, which provides a platform for clubs and leisure centres to engage with customers wherever they are. Features include specific club/centre branding and a smartphone membership barcode (replacing a membership card).

There's also space for a group exercise schedule alongside Fit Friends, whereby clubs can connect members with each other via a group messaging system. Other functionality includes

customer loyalty surveying, an option for members to apply for guest passes and customisable promotions, plus YouTube channel integration, social media links, and a QR code scanner for customers to access more information about the club/leisure centre online.

A paradigm shift

Meanwhile, low-cost operator Xercise4Less – working with PT management software specialist Fisikal and Fisikal's powerful mobile phone app – has produced an excellent tool that enables Xercise4Less members to book classes, message PTs, book PT appointments, keep nutrition and exercise journals and more, all through the app.

Xercise4Less CEO Jon Wright comments: "We wanted to create a strong brand connection, with an app that would give Xercise4Less members important functionality and excellent service. Our first generation app has been well received and shows fantastic use. For example, we've had over 3.1 million screen views and from those, over 326,000 appointments booked in just the first three months of 2014.

"We're now working with Fisikal to release a second generation app that will include the ability to phone-download QR-coded fitness programmes, currently only available through the Xercise4Less website."

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“Mobile phone apps have already well outstripped website equivalents offering the same functionality”

► Fisikal CEO Rob Lander adds: “We’re seeing a real paradigm shift in fitness programming and management. While we’ve enjoyed good success with online booking and programme and service consumption through websites, mobile phone apps offering the same functionality have already well outstripped website equivalents.”

Third party involvement

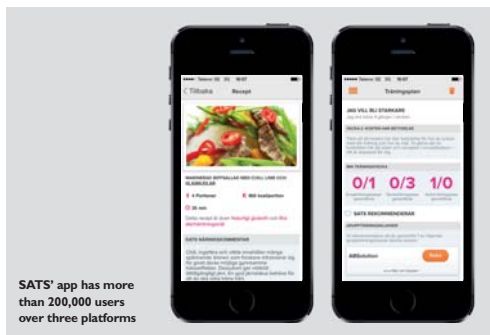
But app development doesn’t always have to be off-the-shelf from a specific software provider. Some software providers allow an encrypted API (application processing interface) library to exist, whereby third party software systems are also able to push and pull certain sets of data through the API library and into the app.

This makes for a lot more flexibility and a broader functionality in the app, as different software systems within the club are able to work together – for example, club management software and fitness management software – sharing information between them in order to deliver a more extensive, customised app that’s bespoke a particular fitness club or group.

That all sounds very technical, but in a nutshell, the API library acts like a portal or bridge between separate software systems in the club. It pushes and pulls data between the app and the various software systems to provide much broader app functionality than would otherwise be possible.

European club management software house Exerp has a software platform that includes a comprehensive API with which third party systems can easily integrate. Jacob Nathan, head of sales at Exerp, says: “With the Exerp API, our clients are in full control of their member experience. The API gives them the opportunity to build a tailored app which, in turn, delivers a competitive edge over off-the-shelf apps.”

An example of this comes from Scandinavian operator SATS – Europe’s third largest health club group with



SATS’ app has more than 200,000 users over three platforms

116 clubs, over 260,000 members in Norway, Sweden and Finland and more than 4,000 employees.

Working with the Exerp API, SATS has created its own dedicated smartphone app. This has a wide range of bespoke features that draw on data not only from Exerp’s club management software, but also from the operator’s fitness management software system.

As a result, in addition to more common features such as class bookings, the app also offers members things like ‘own training’ – which enables a member to plan and log all of their training, in or outside their SATS club – and ‘my training’, which allows members to use training log graphs and statistics to follow their progress. There’s also a recipe bank and dietary advice, as well as a training programme, whereby members can view their recommended training programmes and exercises directly on their phones. Much of this functionality is based on data not from Exerp, but from the clubs’ fitness management software system.

Adam Perman, SATS’ Nordic webmaster, says: “Initially the SATS app was made for members who attended our group training classes. We could see they were using the booking system to keep track of their bookings and plan their training. The app made it possible to book new classes and stay in control of their training, at any time and wherever they were.”

“We’ve made major improvements over the years since the first app, and working with Exerp we’ve released new features both to improve the experience of the app and also to attract a broader user group among our membership base.

“A year and a half ago, the app surpassed our website in terms of visits, and that number is increasing continuously. We currently have over 200,000 users across three platforms – iPhone, Android and Windows – and in three languages: Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish.”

Way of the future

Apps are fast and easy for customers to use, and their popularity continues to grow, with many consumers preferring native phone apps over a traditional browsing experience. There’s certainly a functionality case for health club operators to offer their members an app that’s relevant to key information and services.

Many software suppliers now have available ‘branded’ fixed app offerings, and these are clearly very effective. But another option, as highlighted by Exerp and SATS, could be to integrate multiple technologies and sources of data within a custom-built app, creating a solution that’s specific to your business and that offers additional functionality to improve the user experience.

Either way, apps are here to stay, and software providers are riding the technology wave and providing health and fitness clubs and centres with a great range of options. ●

Sean James is the owner of market research and staff communications company Interactive Industry. He has worked in the leisure industry for over 22 years, the last 10 years of which as a CRM specialist.

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CLIENT SUPPORT

(PART TWO)

Leisure centres have a way to increase their sales, income and reach without any financial outlay. Alliance Leisure's client support manager, Paul Woodford, explains how the company's 'No Risk' package works

What does your No Risk, Performance-based support package entail?

It's something that's unique to Alliance Leisure – you won't find it offered by any other company. We bundle all our products together – anything from training courses to e-marketing software – and the client benefits from a huge amount of resources, which represents a great saving.

The package we offer to leisure sites is a true partnership where we take all the risk upfront, meaning there's no upfront costs for the operator. Also, we are in the partnership for the long haul – usually around five years. It's certainly not just a question of sending a sales team into a facility for a short while or doing some one-off training.

But of course, we're not just there to create savings for them, but to actively grow their income.

Why should a leisure site employ your services?

In the current financial climate many facilities, especially local authorities or trusts, simply don't have the budget to develop their businesses. Even if they did have a budget to begin with,

Follow the series

To view the whole series of articles on Alliance Leisure's offering, visit: www.healthclubmanagement.co.uk/allianceleisure

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Scoping/investigation | 5. Fixed price contracts | 8. Client support |
| 2. Conceptualisation | 6. Overseeing the | (part 1) |
| 3. Viability assessment | building work | 9. Client support |
| 4. Site investigation | 7. Ordering phase | (part 2) |

marketing and training budgets are the first things to disappear in a cost-cutting exercise.

We only take an income when we hit and exceed the target that we've set within the partnership with the client for income growth.

It sounds perfect – so why wouldn't a business want to take up this kind of offer?

Obviously if a site is performing well they wouldn't want to bring us into the mix. But the reality is that most of these businesses need some help. Also, it's not just a case of us coming in to bring revenues back up to sustainable levels, but about creating fresh income sources that the site would never have achieved on its own.

Apart from your complete bundle of products and resources, what else do clients receive?

The first thing we do once the contract is agreed is to assign them a dedicated account manager who becomes like one of their permanent members of staff. This account manager might attend the site or sites several times a week or several times a month, depending on the scale of the contract and the requirements of the client.

It's important to note that our representative is certainly not a threat to the existing staff or there to make any cuts to the current operations.

They're there to coach staff and mentor them, and to co-ordinate and ensure the correct implementation of our marketing strategies and the required training, etc.

What percentage of Alliance Leisure's business does income share represent?

As we work with many local authority leisure sites, just about half of our business is now conducted on an income share basis. We don't currently work with any private operators in this way, but that's not to say we wouldn't consider it if approached by an appropriate client.

Can you give us an example of successful income share project?
Birmingham City Council approached us. It had 10 constituencies where all



The Alliance Leisure team have refreshed the branding across BCC's fitness gyms



► VIEW FROM THE FLOOR

Helen Morris, Alliance Leisure account manager, Birmingham City Council (BCC)



"When I joined the Birmingham City Council team two years ago, there was lots of negative feedback on their own ability in increasing membership sales and income.

I've worked for Alliance Leisure for 12 years, and the 20 sites across the city of Birmingham are the most diverse I've ever experienced. When I started there were very large sites with lots of casual usage traffic, as well as very small sites with relatively few members.

Initial responsibilities involved coaching managers on the commercial opportunities that were unique to Birmingham – citywide members, caring staff, creative classes, etc. I created an 'inspiring change' training module which looked at the role of a GM to inspire and change culture among staff.

I visit Birmingham weekly. At the start of each year, I create an annual support plan with the senior managers to tackle priorities such as marketing, promotions, foundation sales training, customer retention, culture change and customer service.

Tasks and activities vary from week to week. For instance, last week I went out with a small team of very apprehensive staff on an outreach appointment to promote their own leisure centre, and it was rewarding to see the team gradually grow in confidence.

My favourite sessions are still basic foundation sales training as this gives new, inexperienced staff in health and fitness a clear understanding that we're here to help our customers achieve their goals – that staff are responsible for changing lives. Who wouldn't want to do that as a job!"

the leisure sites across those constituencies were operating quite independently, and the branding also needed refreshing across all their leisure offers. The council decided that it needed to change that culture, as well as boost its income. Three years after Alliance first became involved, we've now grown that income by 130 per cent.

How did you achieve this?

We used a variety of methods, which of course included drawing on our whole portfolio of resources.

Our starting point was to go in and thoroughly train all 800 members of staff over a four-month period. We also gave them an impact sales team consisting of four people, not just to assist with sales in the early stages but also to facilitate ongoing sales training where it was needed across the organisation.

To boost marketing, we ran five big city-wide campaigns over a year, using local radio and press, banner advertising and social media. These types of large campaign may typically cost around

£10,000 a time to run, but they were all included in the contract. Alliance Leisure's in-house designers also worked with Birmingham City Council's central team to come up with refreshed branding.

The whole contract has been a great success, and the client is delighted with the sustained rise in income. ●

Find out more:

www.allianceleisure.co.uk
Tel: +44 (0)1278 444944

HOT OFF THE PRESS

This year's FIBO in Cologne, Germany, welcomed 116,000 trade visitors and fitness fans, with 15 per cent more visitors than last year. Here, we detail some of the products that were unveiled

PROGRESSIVE RESISTANCE

reemotion Fitness premiered its new cable-based strength training technology, the Live Axis, which allows users to train against resistance with every move they make.

The resistance equipment is fitted with live-sliding cables, allowing for optimum activation throughout each movement. Users can also engage different parts of the body by changing their position when conducting exercises.

The line includes a number of pieces of equipment, ranging from chest and shoulder resistance pieces through to deadlift and rotary stations.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
Fitness Systems Limited



STRIDING FORWARD

Life Fitness released two new machines in its Elevation Series cardio line-up: the FlexStrider and the PowerMill. The FlexStrider Variable-Stride Trainer has a stride length up to 36" and lets exercisers vary their stride length on the fly.

The PowerMill – the company's first step climber – is equipped with

SureStepSystem technology. The equipment features an AC motor for a wide interval training range, varying from 12 steps to 185 steps a minute on its highest speed.

Also announced was the Insignia Series, to replace the Life Fitness Signature Series in summer 2014.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
Life Fitness



WELLNESS ECOSYSTEM

Technogym launched its Wellness On The Go digital 'ecosystem', which connects its fitness equipment with consumer mobile devices, apps and movement tracking to allow operators to manage members' activities inside and outside the club.

The service offers: Technogym's Unity console, available on Artis and Excite equipment lines; the cloud-

based MyWellness Cloud platform, which connects operators, trainers and members to create a personalised training plan, including access to a range of apps; the new MyWellness app, to keep clubs in touch with members; and a new Prescribe app so trainers and instructors can monitor members' exercise data.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
Technogym



AIR POWER

Star Trac introduced an air-driven bike that delivers simultaneous upper and lower body exercise through a distinctive isokinetic resistance mechanism.

The Turbo Trainer's flywheel design displaces air at a rate that matches the effort put in by its user, meaning that the harder the flywheel is turned, the greater the isokinetic resistance. Those using the machine can measure workout metrics including elapsed time, distance, kilocalories, RPM and telemetric heart rate when using a chest strap. The bike has been designed with durability in mind and can be used anywhere in a gym space, as it's self-powered and doesn't require electricity to operate.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **Star Trac**



ON THE PULSE

Pulse put forward two new digital design concepts to help enhance gym-going experiences.

The company unveiled its new 18.5" interactive Android user console, which can be installed into its Fusion cardiovascular range. The concept allows users to experience digital TV and radio, full internet browsing with social media access, and a training programme with personalised workout options. Meanwhile, its new web-based cloud solution offers a personalised training experience for users.

Also unveiled was its Trixter XdreamV2 bike, with a 23" touchscreen and HD graphics. In addition to the virtual reality mountain biking mode, the model offers real video rides. A classic mode lets the bike act as a standard exercise bike, plus there's a live multiplayer mode and ghost racing.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
Pulse Fitness

HEALTHY VIBRATIONS

Performance Health Systems has brought a number of new Power Plate models to market, including a new concept that could be adopted by healthcare providers.

The pro7HC has been specifically designed to cater for the healthcare market, with the plate suitable for use with a range of medical conditions, helping speed up recovery times and return patients to their activities of daily living.

For use in gyms and health clubs, the Power Plate pro6+ features a touchscreen monitor suitable for instructor-led classes, while its embedded cable system allows for enhanced workouts for upper-body as well as full-body.



fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
Performance Health Systems

MUSIC MAESTRO

Schwinn has brought its new Class Tamer music player to market for use on iPads and iPhones, which can be used by cycling class instructors to lead effective sessions for group exercise.

Designed with the help of Schwinn's global team of instructors, the app has scrollable notes pages to allow instructors to input and save cueing notes, music tags and BPM counts for specific songs. Other features include the ability to modify the tempo of songs during a ride, 10 sound effects for classes, and a stopwatch that works independently of the song timer.



fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
Schwinn

► A SOFT TOUCH

Escape Fitness launched its new plyometric CrossFit box at FIBO this year, with the unveiling of the MultiPLY Soft Box.

The Escape MultiPLY has been designed using soft, high-density foam, inclusive of anti-slip landing zones, to help reduce the kind of injuries that occur when using wooden plyometric boxes. The outer material of the box also allows users to easily clean the MultiPLY after each use.

Escape has also kept in mind users at both ends of the fitness spectrum, with the box being created to cater for both beginners and long-time plyometric enthusiasts.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

Escape Fitness



THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

Cybox has unveiled a new 12-piece line that features refined movements, restyled aesthetics and re-imagined user features, as the business attempts to increase its blueprint in the field of selectorised equipment.

The range includes a leg press, leg extension and leg curl, while users can also train using a chest press, overhead press, row, arm curl, arm extension and a pulldown. Also included in the line are abdominal and back extension pieces.

The Eagle line offers patented Dual Axis Technology, which allows users to train with pre- or user-defined patterns of motion. Workouts can be optimised with an incremental weight system.



fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

Cybox



RESISTANCE & RESULTS

Precor unveiled a new product in the field of strength training, as well as a fitness-related app to improve gym-goers' experiences.

The manufacturer has completed its Discovery Strength Series with five selectorised converging and diverging resistance pieces, with independently moving arms. The equipment features Advanced Movement Design (AMD) platforms to engage more muscles to functionally develop strength and stabilise movement.

Precor also showcased its Preva Android App, which extends the reach of Preva Personal Accounts, enabling smartphone users to set fitness goals, track progress, save their favourite workouts, as well as earn achievement badges for their exercise.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

Precor

SEEING IN TECHNICOLOUR



Dutch company VibroGym International used FIBO to launch a progressive vibration training device that makes use of a number of smart applications.

The newly designed VG Evolution is built from precision-cast aluminium to deliver vibrations across the entire surface of the platform. The VG makes use of an innovation named Cardio Colour Control, which allows users to view cardio stats on-screen in colour.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

VibroGym

BACK PAIN RELIEF

Following six years of development, combining elements of traditional Eastern and Western therapies, the portable LumbaCurve device seeks to relieve back pain through the use of acupuncture stimulation.

Making use of Passive Gravity Assisted Traction (PGAT), the device is rolled under the base of the spine to stretch out the lower back, causing the vertebral joints to separate. This in turn relaxes the spine's discs and frees up the spinal nerves to provide pain relief.



fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

LumbaCurve

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80 MILLION MEMBERS

EuropeActive plans to grow usage of fitness centres to 80 million people across Europe by 2025. But how? Otilia Vlasov reports

EuropeActive (formerly EHFA – European Health and Fitness Association) has embarked on an ambitious plan to reach 80 million fitness centre users across Europe by 1 January 2025 – a goal that will require an average annual growth rate of approximately 5 per cent.

The rationale behind the adoption of this target is based on evidence presented at the inaugural EHFF – the European Health and Fitness Forum held in Cologne, Germany, on 2 April – of the alarming rates of obesity, high levels of physical inactivity, endemic growth in lifestyle-related conditions and an ageing demographic profile of citizens.

All of these factors will combine to bring devastating consequences if they are not addressed as a matter of urgency – hence EuropeActive's goal of 80 million users. It's an ambitious target – the European fitness sector currently

represents 46,500 facilities, which help more than 46 million people reach their fitness goals – but if the sector wants to contribute actively to overcoming the crisis in physical inactivity, it's a vital one.

Policy-makers and industry leaders will be expected to play an increasingly important role in tackling the challenges to curb high rates of inactivity, and focus on how exercise, fitness and activity can help to control chronic diseases.

Tapping new markets

The Future of Health & Fitness – A plan for getting Europe Active by 2025 is a seminal book written by 13 leading academics and experts from seven European countries, which provides EuropeActive with the evidence and challenges it must consider if the fitness sector is to serve as a driving force in the promotion of health enhancing physical activity (HEPA) across Europe.

The recommendations put forward in the book emphasise that the reasons behind physical inactivity are too complex to be solved by a simple 'one size fits all' solution. It stresses the need for sensible, targeted promotions; for an acknowledgement of the barriers to physical activity; and for the sector to work with a range of partners to overcome these barriers.

In order to realise its full potential and positively contribute to HEPA, the fitness sector will have to build new partnerships in different areas, working towards better professionalising the sector to be able to work with more diverse population groups.

However, although these actions will take the fitness sector into new areas, success will not be achieved without making use of new innovations and digital technologies. A detailed analysis by PricewaterhouseCoopers from May 2013 shows that 141 million Europeans could improve their lifestyles with the full integration of mobile technology into the European healthcare system.

Many obstacles will need to be overcome for this to happen, however, as there remains inconsistency in mobile app certification, in personal data protection across EU countries, and in the (often inadequate) level of involvement of healthcare providers in the integration of digital in the sector.

And different target groups require adapted digital strategies. While the younger generation is more ready to embrace the applications and gadgets designed to quantify their physical achievements, the mobile technologies that are available today – such as social media, gamification, apps and augmented reality – do not typically overlap with



Corporates are advised to improve staff canteen nutrition

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/XINXING



**The industry must
provide offerings for
an ageing population**

the age group that needs them the most. People affected by chronic diseases account for 30–40 per cent of EU healthcare expenses, but according to the EU Economic Policy Committee, only 18 per cent of this population group are smartphone users. Finding a compromise between traditional and digital technologies for the 65+ age group will help improve tracking of their health indicators and medical routine. This will be key to promoting active ageing, better supporting older adults to live independently in their senior years.

Macro perspective

The Future of Health & Fitness also recommends a holistic approach among policy-makers, with targeted and integrated campaigns that involve local communities, media, transport and private companies, while also promoting nutrition and physical activity messages.

Governments are also encouraged to adopt a more tolerant taxation system towards health and fitness-related products and services, while investing more in health-enhancing educational programmes and Public Private Partnerships focused on stimulating physical activity and sport.

The book analyses successful collaborations between public bodies and the fitness sector in Spain (The Strategic Plan to Promote Physical Activity in Galicia), UK (*Turning the Tide of Inactivity* report) and EU in general (European Year for Active Ageing, launched in 2012 by the EC).

A clearer focus on physical activity guidelines – ie promoting and elaborating on these at a national level – is also recommended as a way of ensuring more clarity and precise targets for the population. *The Future of Health & Fitness* provides an analysis of selected EU State guidelines for physical activity, concluding they all share the recommendation of at least 30 minutes' moderate intensity physical activity a day, at least five days a week, for adults.

Micro focus

At a micro level, fitness instructors will be expected to broaden and deepen their skills to work with varied population groups and with people presenting different conditions. Adapted strategies should be used for older members and newly active people, as studies show the development of self-management skills during the first few months is crucial for retention.

A higher level of co-operation with local medical communities and practitioners will also be needed if the sector is to embrace a more holistic approach, integrating medical care with higher levels of activity.

The sector's suppliers should continue investing in R&D and co-operate with operators in developing new technologies, backed up by viable partnerships with universities and research institutes.

Education providers and research institutes are encouraged to develop more evidence into the reasons why

people refrain from exercising and to co-operate closely with operators to develop appropriate educational programmes that will equip future generations of fitness professionals with the skills they will need.

Recommendations at a corporate level include in-house health schemes, financial incentives for physical activity, healthier canteen nutrition, smoking cessation programmes and so on. This is thanks to a WHO investigation into the benefits of physical activity plans at work, which were found to reduce staff turnover, raise productivity and reduce risk of litigation for companies, while boosting employees' self-esteem and job satisfaction and reducing stress.

Meanwhile, national associations are seen as key actors for getting Europe active by 2025, as they are responsible for co-ordinating activities and campaigns, providing the sector with relevant market research and sharing best practice. ●

FOR MORE DETAILS ON THE REPORT...

Additional information about the *The Future of Health & Fitness – A plan for getting Europe Active by 2025*, and options to purchase the publication, can be found at: www.blackboxfitness.com/en/

For further information, visit www.ehfa.eu or email communications@ehfa.eu

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Nutritional supplements can provide a substantial revenue stream, so it's worth getting to grips with this business. Health Club Management has gathered some top tips from operators who have cracked the formula...



Crunch operates premium health clubs, each with around 4,000 members, and our average club revenue for nutritional supplements is US\$6,000 a month. The lowest revenue per club is around US\$4,500, with the highest around US\$16,000.

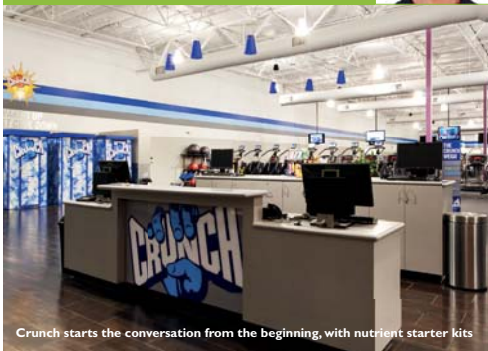
So we've had a lot of success with nutritional supplements, but I wouldn't ask members to buy a product I didn't believe in. We have a long-standing partnership with Dotfit and much of our success is down to the quality of its product and the support it provides through training – it puts a lot of resources at my disposal for training staff. In addition, there's not one challenge I've been presented with that I haven't been able to find the answer to on the Dotfit website.

In addition to this, we only hire staff who are aligned with our views on exercise science. At the outset, we ask them for their thoughts on nutrition and about their own experience with multi-vitamins. Members' goals generally involve losing size, but side-effects of dieting include a nutrient deficit and the loss of lean muscle tone. In order to accomplish weight loss while still

TRUSTED PARTNER

William Coker

West coast director, Crunch – US



Crunch starts the conversation from the beginning, with nutrient starter kits

maintaining good tissue and retaining nutrients, they need multi-vitamins.

Trainers need to be comfortable conversing with clients about nutrition too. This is a sensitive subject, as

it encompasses ethnicities and how people were raised.

You run into obstacles and negative perceptions, but we start the conversation with members from the very beginning. We give them a nutrient starter kit with a 30-day supply of vitamins, some meal replacements and snacks. Trainers then pick up on the subject at orientation and take it from there.

“Choose a good partner, with a product you believe in and who will give you sufficient support, especially when it comes to staff training”

William Coker, Crunch

RECOGNISED BRANDS

Simon Gomm

Owner, Fitness Station – Dogsthorpe, Peterborough, UK



Gomm stocks products like whey protein, mass gainers and fat burners

I've built supplements up to account for 30–40 per cent of income at my pro-gym, without borrowing a penny. In fact, it's worked so well for me that I've entered into a partnership to open a high street shop and an online shop, because I've practically run out of space in the club.

We stock four ranges – whey protein, branch chain amino acids, mass gainers and fat burners – across a number of brands: MET Rx, USM, Dorian Yates, NRG, Fuel, Boditronics,

Optimum Nutrition and BSN. It's important to stock the products your members will recognise: look in the magazines your members read and see which brands are promoted, then invest in them. Offer a mix of premium and budget products that are well marketed by the manufacturer. Start off small – you don't have to invest thousands of pounds.

Revenue streams like this are key to survival for those of us who are going up against the budget chains.

TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS

"Speak to product companies about doing an in-club assessment to find out what will work for your clientele, then work with them to run taster days"

Simon Gomm, Fitness Station

"Make the most of the rep. We got the MaxiMuscle rep to perform a tasting and staff briefing, so staff felt equipped with the product knowledge they needed to sell to members, learning how to match the product to the member"

Laurence Gibson, leisure club manager, Cardiff Marriott Hotel

"Start the conversation about nutritional supplements from the outset. Give new members a starter kit as soon as they join and get the dialogue going with trainers immediately"

William Coker, Crunch

"Empower your reception team to chat to interested members and upsell, informing them about the products on a regular basis. Having a monthly meeting on all products – going through ingredients, benefits and how they can help achieve training goals – has boosted our sales of nutritional supplements to make up 75 per cent of our daily sales"

Dani Mitilades, operations director, ThirtySeven Degrees Olympia, London

TAILORED APPROACH

Mark Anthony

CEO, Rush Fitness – Uxbridge and Southend, UK



It's very important to supply the body with the right nutrients after exercise, and Mitonics is revolutionary in that exactly the right protein requirement is calculated for each member, based on their weight and body fat percentage. We work hard to educate members about the importance of nutrition, and have found this precise and scientific approach resonates with them.

After their first workout, we encourage members to try a shake. Once a month, we run a promotional day with free tastings that we promote via email and Facebook.

We've just designed some new programmes – Weight Off, Muscle Up, and Lean and Tone – which have special drinks to complement the programmes. These have proved hugely successful.

Free tastings can help drive uptake



Although other revenue streams are more significant, protein drinks are a very important part of the offering at our two clubs, and will be at the six new clubs we're going to be opening this year.

TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS

“Hire trainers who share your passion for nutritional supplements, and who are comfortable having the conversation with members. Then make sure they are properly educated about the benefits”

William Coker, Crunch

“When going through a member’s diet and food diaries at consultations and programme reviews, prescribe a nutritional supplement, matching the product to the person. We find people are open to recommendations at this point”

Laurence Gibson, leisure club manager, Cardiff Marriott Hotel

“We make up taster pots of Body Plus Nutrition during our busy times and find this has a great impact on our daily sales”

Dani Mitilades, operations director, ThirtySeven Degrees Olympia, London

“There isn’t a ‘one size fits all’ approach, as different clients will have different aims – some might want to bulk up, for example, while others will be looking to build lean mass. Build relationships with each individual member to find out their aims and be able to recommend the product accordingly”

Simon Gomm, Fitness Station



Offer treats that also have nutritional benefits

“Make sure they taste good. Protein First’s ice cream has proved a popular seasonal product with our hotel guests. It’s low fat and high protein, so is perceived as a treat with some nutritional benefits”

Laurence Gibson, leisure club manager, Cardiff Marriott Hotel

“Sell individual shakes to members post-workout. As well as giving them the opportunity to try the product and experience the benefits, selling by the scoop is a good moneymaker”

Simon Gomm, Fitness Station

“Matching nutritional supplements to particular programmes can be a good way to promote the product, while also educating the member about the most suitable product for their goals”

Mark Anthony, Rush Fitness



Mitonics calculates the protein requirement for each member

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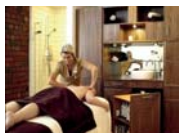
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BRIGHT IDEA FOR NEW SPORTS TOP

A fashionable new way to stay safe while running or cycling on the roads during the hours of darkness could be making its way into our high street shops.

The Sporty Supaheroe Jacket features ultrathin, stretchable circuit boards of LED lights which fit into the lining of the jacket. The lights, which are also moisture resistant, shine through semi-transparent panels in the jacket. They're white at the front and red at the back and have been designed to last for up to 10 hours before they need recharging. The jacket itself is made from a durable organic cotton.

Created by Wolfgang Langerer from German clothing company Utope, the Sporty Supaheroe has already earned a 'best of the best' accolade in the Red Dot Design Awards. It will be produced in Europe by Belgium-based Gysemans Clothing Group and will be available for purchase online by the end of 2014. Details: www.utope.eu



ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR WITH ZUU FITNESS



Animal movements have inspired the Zuu – a high intensity workout that's set to roll out across Virgin Active health clubs in the UK.

The classes – which are said to burn 600 calories in 30 minutes – include frog-like squats, bear crawls on all fours and gorilla walks incorporating ape-like jumps.

There are around 100 techniques based on seven primal planes of movement – push, pull, bend, twist, squat, lunge and locomotion – mixed with bodyweight exercises. The classes are said to be popular with athletes, sports teams and the military. Details: www.thezoo.com.au



EVERYONE'S RAVING ABOUT ELECTRIC RUN

There have only been two Electric Run events in the UK, but thousands of people have been drawn to this 5k night run which features light shows, pumping tunes and thousands of glow sticks. In fact, it's fair to say that it's more like a rave with some running thrown in for good measure.

The event was originally launched in the US in 2013 by Dan Hill, who helped set up the Ragnar Relay night race series there. It's been designed as a fun, alternative way to get some exercise, with four more runs now being planned for Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow and either Southampton or Portsmouth. Details: www.electricrun.co.uk

Push-up to wake up, says tech writer

A 30-second burst of high-intensity bodyweight exercise provides as much of a mental boost as a cup of coffee, says journalist Gregory Ferenstein in a recent article for *The Daily Beast*.

Ferenstein used www.quantified-mind.com – a website with memory and reaction tests validated by Stanford University – in a self-experiment. He took the cognitive test after performing bodyweight exercises such as burpees

and mountain climbers for around 30 seconds – to get his beats per minute up to 70 per cent – and on another occasion after drinking 250mg of caffeine.

His overall cognitive score increased by 12 per cent after exercise and only 6 per cent after drinking the coffee. However, he also found that his short-term memory was significantly higher after drinking coffee (26 per cent) than after exercising (16 per cent).

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