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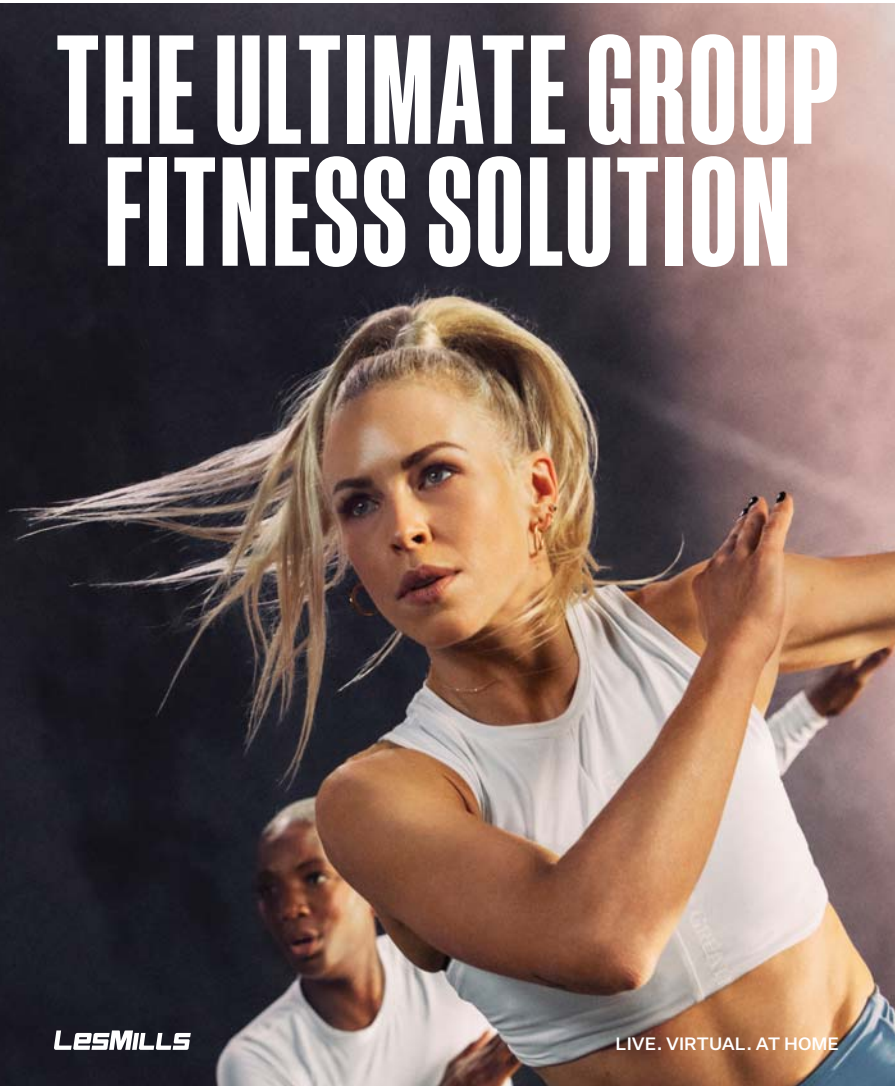

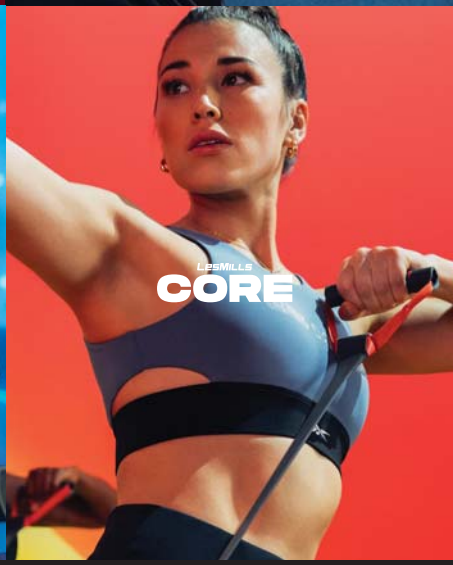

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UNITING THE WORLD OF FITNESS

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PHOTO: GEORGIE DELANEY

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Opportunity abounds

In this issue, we're focusing on sharing insights and thought leadership to highlight opportunities for the development of the sector in terms of both markets and offerings

Some stunning insights have been shared in this issue when it comes to the opportunities available for the development of the health club sector on a wide range of fronts.

On page 50, David Minton expands on his views around the potential presented by the ageing population, saying that if the fitness industry grew its membership base of people aged over 65 from the current 1 per cent up to 15 per cent, it would double in value and size.

Elsewhere, research firm Qualtronics surveyed 12,157 consumers across 15 countries in seven languages to create the *Les Mills 2021 Global Fitness Report*, highlighting the ways consumers are choosing to exercise (page 56).

They found 50 per cent of the sample focusing more on their wellbeing in 2021 than previously, while 82 per cent 'regularly exercise or soon plan to'.

Of those who exercise, 75 per cent do gym-related activities, making fitness the world's biggest sport and presenting growth opportunities for fitness providers as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

The industry has a new entrant this month in the form of MDL Fitness, an offshoot of MDL Marinas the European marina operator (page 20).

The project is being driven by Tim Mayer – formerly with Everyone Active – and is a property play, with the company looking to leverage its facility assets while providing new and improved services to existing customers and building new income streams.

The arrival of MDL gives a hint of things to come, as any leisure-based business with a good spread of locations could pivot straightforwardly to launch a fitness offering, with a low barrier to entry due to its existing landholdings.

In Africa, Yves Preissler is working to launch one of the first budget gym chains in the form of his AfroFit concept (page 16) which will combine quality facilities with keen prices.

Preissler says Africa is the next frontier for the sector and presents huge opportunities to those with an appetite for adventure and the skills to navigate the complexities of the market. It's another sign that the health club sector globally is still in its infancy, with significant untrodden territory still to be had.

We investigate the opportunities presented by social prescribing in our interview with James Sanderson (page 66) and briefing by Kenny Butler (page 70). It's clear social prescribing has the potential to massively extend the reach and reputation of the sector and will play a significant role in the next stage of our development as we move to contribute to this extremely valuable and worthwhile work.

SHUTTERSTOCK/ KAVYN QUANPRASERTSUK

The health club market is growing fast in Nairobi

> **It's another sign that the health club sector globally is still in its infancy, with untrodden territory still to be had**

Liz Terry, editor
lizterry@leisuremedia.com

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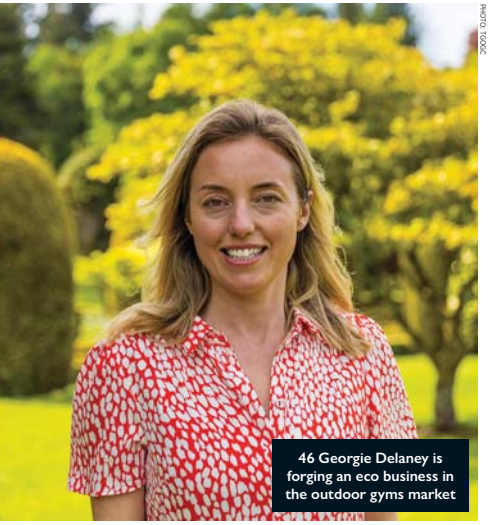

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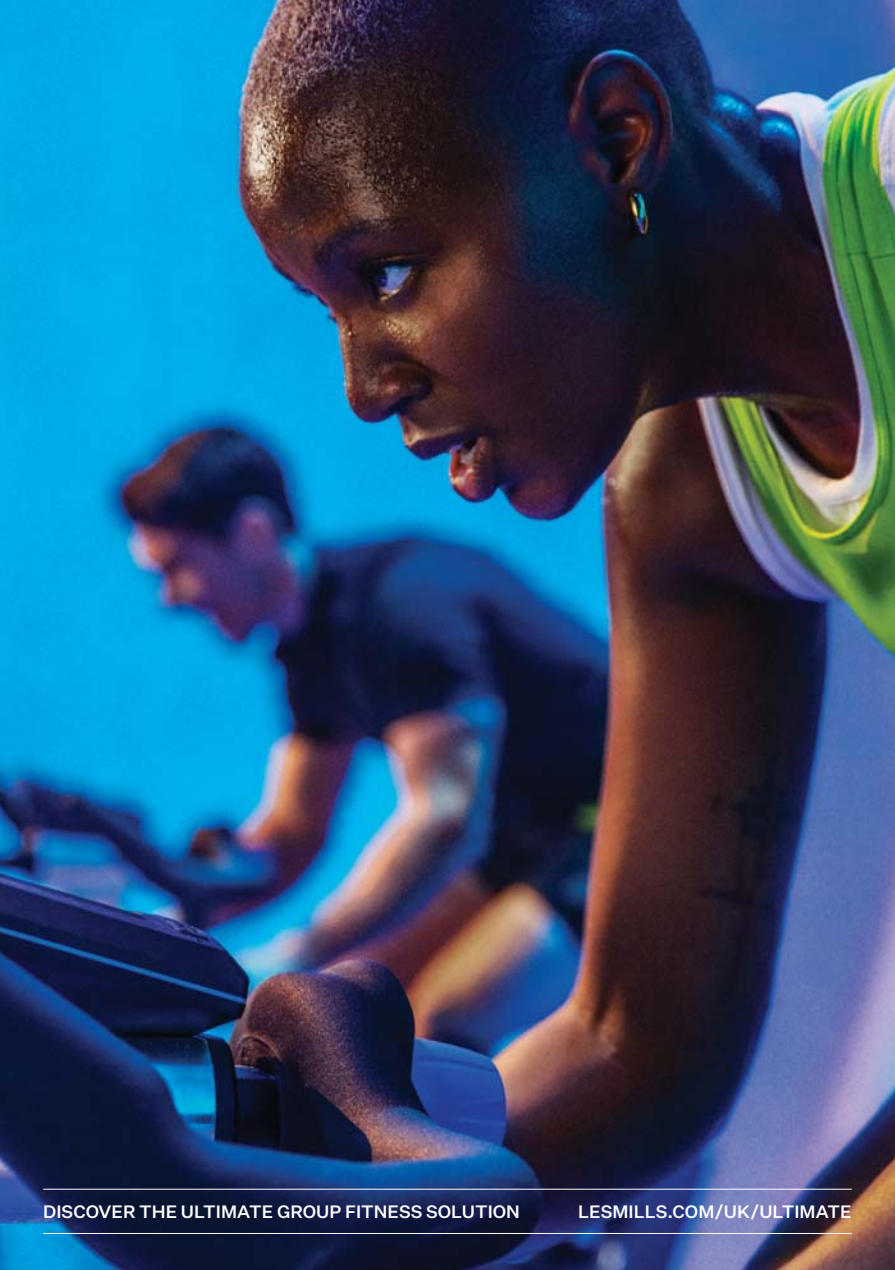
With 58% of members saying they would cancel their membership if their gym stopped their favourite class, is your timetable set up for peak-time success?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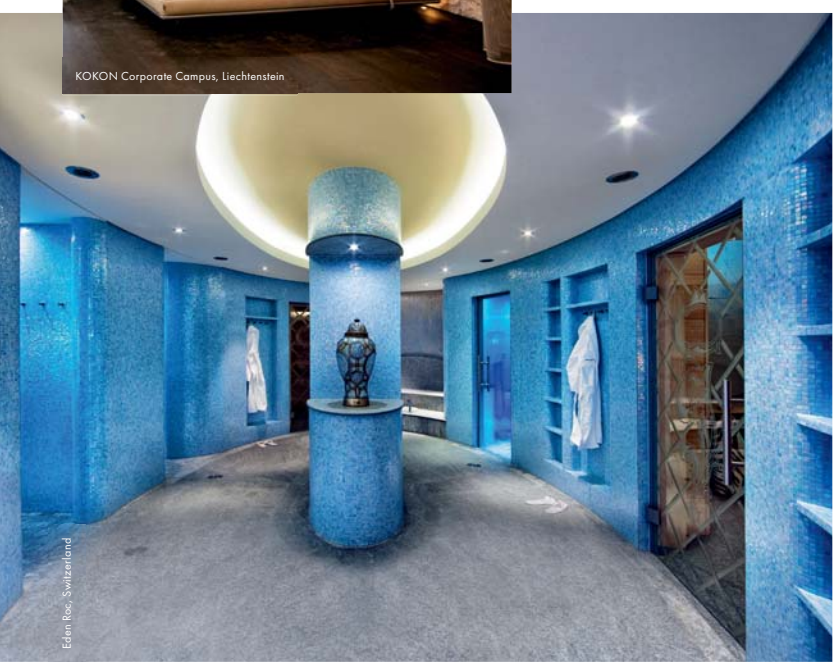
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Write to reply

Fuel the debate about issues and opportunities across the industry. We'd love to hear from you – *letters@leisuremedia.com*

Health and fitness operators are working on sustainable models and our sector can already demonstrate a number of great examples

Pete Wells ukactive

PHOTO: UKACTIVE

I write in response to David Minton's article in the previous issue (*HCM* issue 8 2021, page 55), with an update on ukactive's environmental commitments.

In June 2019, the UK government announced it would became the first major economy in the world to pass laws to end its contribution to global warming.

The ensuing *Climate Change Act* set a legally-binding target to reduce all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. Earlier this year, the UK pushed the envelope further, setting in law the world's most ambitious climate change target to date, which aims to cut emissions by 78 per cent by 2035 when compared to 1990 levels.

As the government continues to progress the sustainability agenda, the physical activity sector must also make headway in this space. The sector's commitment to becoming carbon neutral by 2040 is an important first step.

ukactive is working with pan-European consortium 'Green Sports Hub Europe' to identify barriers to sustainability in sport and physical activity and the *2021 Survey on Existing Barriers on Sport and Sustainability* – powered by ukactive – aims to reduce the existing knowledge gap, by gathering firsthand information about physical activity and sustainability from people and organisations directly involved in the sector.

The survey has been designed to generate new knowledge of existing barriers and issues, along with what is working well, which we can then take forward with relevant government organisations.

Everyone understands there's much more to be done, from the management of major events, the implementation of sustainable travel policies and the selection and use of recyclable materials, to the creation and operation of low energy and low resource-hungry facilities.

There's a keen interest in and awareness of environmental sustainability across the physical activity sector and a willingness to promote change where needed. Physical activity organisations should continue to lead by example, taking a critical look at how they operate, quantifying and recording consumption and waste and setting challenging targets to reduce or eliminate their carbon footprint.

Climate change threatens lives and livelihoods

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/PHILIP OREN-SHAW

As hosts of the upcoming COP26 in November, the UK Government and wider business community will be under increased scrutiny and pressure to act against climate change.

ukactive will be attending the conference in Glasgow to speak and also to represent the physical activity sector and identify what other sectors and countries have done to embed sustainability into their policies and practices.

Over the past 18 months, the sustainability agenda took a backseat as the sector directed its energy and focus towards managing and mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we're fully aware that operators are already working on sustainable and carbon neutral models, and that our sector can demonstrate a number of great examples and case studies in this space.

The sector is not looking at sustainability as a 'standalone' issue relating to facility design and operation, we continue to work with various departments across the Government to showcase the many ways in which our sector supports the Net Zero agenda, as well as other closely linked policy areas such as 'Build Back Better' and the Government's 'Plan for Growth', 'A Fairer, Greener Scotland' and the wider work of the Climate Change committee.

Responding to climate change is not an easy task but there's no choice here. The sport and physical activity sector is a force for good and has a major contribution to make.

● Take part in the survey: www.ukactive.com/projects/sustainability

PHOTO SHUTTERSTOCK/BELL MA RANG

Alliance Leisure has been supporting sector decarbonisation

Local authorities are delivering against the net zero agenda to help avert a climate catastrophe, while continuing to serve the public health agenda

James Foley Alliance Leisure

David Minton's informative article in *HCM* issue 8 2021, (page 55) about two of the biggest challenges facing the world – the health of the planet and the health of individuals – was a fascinating read and really struck a chord. And it's evident to me that in their own way, public sector providers are playing a key role in helping to overcome both of these challenges.

The recent *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report* (www.HCMmag.com/IPCC) shows that human activity is unequivocally the cause of rapid changes to the climate, resulting in extreme heatwaves, droughts and flooding.

We're working with public sector leisure providers across the UK to help the government meet its net zero targets by decarbonising their activities through targeted investment in equipment and infrastructure.

PHOTO ALLIANCE LEISURE

Many of the UK's sports and leisure centres were built in the 1970s and are extremely energy inefficient, generating levels of high carbon emissions. By improving energy efficiencies and cutting emissions, local authorities are having a significant impact on sustainability targets, while providing physical activity facilities that support healthy, active communities.

As an example, we're working with Hambleton District Council to cut carbon emissions across four leisure centres in Northallerton, Stokesley, Bedale and Thirsk. We helped the council to secure a £4.7m Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme grant to fund the installation of new heat pumps, solar panels and LED light fittings. Projections indicate these collective efficiencies will result in 57 per cent per annum reduction in the carbon output for each centre, with the added bonus of a £38,985 projected cost saving per year.

The government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme is designed to help councils improve efficiencies and cut carbon emissions from public sector buildings. Both rounds of the fund were a huge success, with phase two closing after just one week, because applications worth more than £150m were submitted for the £75m fund.

This demonstrates just how proactive local authorities are being in delivering on the net zero agenda to help avert a climate catastrophe, while they continue to serve the public health agenda.

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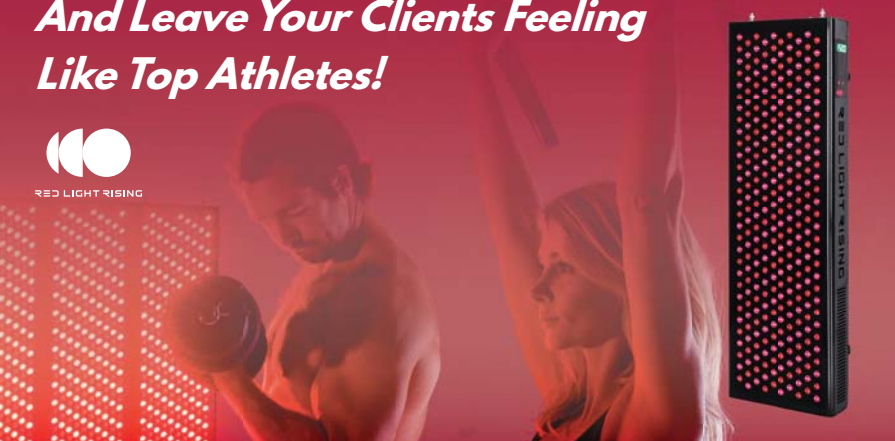

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HCM people

Preissler is addressing the lack of quality, affordable fitness in Africa

PHOTO: YVES PREISSLER 2019 BY HUGUES NAMAAR

Our competition need to fasten their seatbelts

Yves Preissler

CEO, AfroFit

Tell us about AfroFit

Our goal is to bring a modern and affordable gym concept onto the African continent, starting in Kenya.

The name AfroFit is speaking to the African population and the concept is designed and built as a brand around African needs and with homegrown talent.

We're inclusive – AfroFit is for any age, gender or fitness level and we're creating a positive, energetic, and friendly atmosphere in all our gyms.

As a brand, we're looking to inspire people for whom fitness has been out of reach so far – we want to make fitness accessible by being present in both local neighbourhoods and online.

We're embracing digital channels and are keeping a personal feel to everything we do.

What's the rationale?

The business case is a high-value/low-cost model, offering everything members need and nothing you don't.

Fitness is not easily accessible and affordable for most of the populations of the East African countries, as the current fitness market is underdeveloped and overpriced. A fair pricing model, allowing everyone access to health and fitness is needed.

We'll also offer franchising opportunities following the launch of the first club and proof of concept.

What types of members are you targeting?

The consumer demographics are two-fold: first-time gym users who will be able to afford membership due to our competitive pricing and

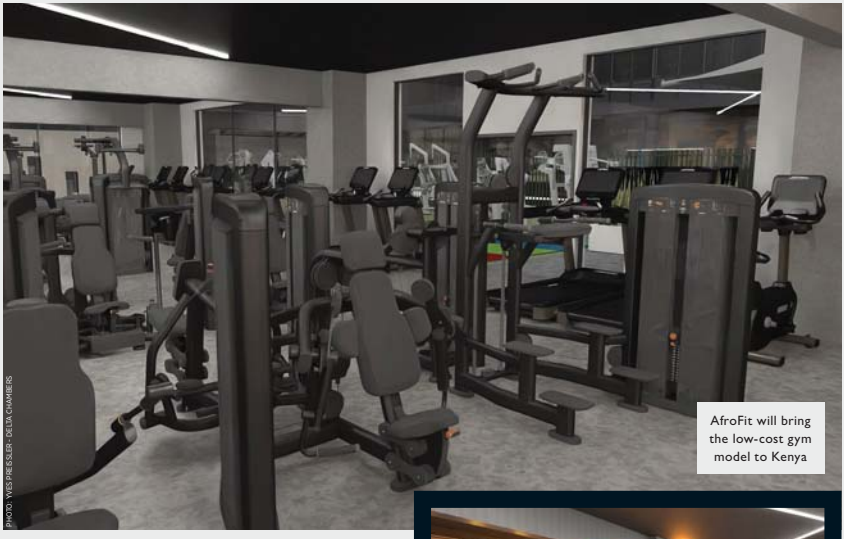


PHOTO: YVES PRESSLER - DELTA CHAMBERS

AfroFit will bring the low-cost gym model to Kenya

PHOTO: YVES PRESSLER - DELTA CHAMBERS

existing gym enthusiasts who don't want to pay the high rates offered in the current market and want a gym that offers more than other gyms.

We'll have superior equipment in terms of brand and volume, as well as great classes.

The population of Kenya has an average age of 20.1 (www.HCMmag.com/Kenya) and so we're targeting the younger population – people who are entering the workforce, as well as professionals between the ages of 20 and 40.

Who's backing the company?

A number of investors including a Kuwaiti Private Investment Company.

Who will be delivering it?

The members of our central management team are experts with deep knowledge of the fitness industry and other supporting disciplines such as law, marketing and branding.

With my own background in fitness and business consulting for global projects, I feel confident that with our combined expertise, we'll deliver a successful concept for this market in the timeline we have planned.

The teams running the gyms will be onboarded and trained to international standards and our focus will also be customer-centric. We know great service leads to member retention and the team knows how to achieve it.

What facilities will the clubs have?

Multi-brand equipment on the gym floor, a HIIT studio and sparkling clean changing rooms.

The flagship club – launching on 1 January 2022 – will also have an outdoor gym with 16 pieces of strength outdoor equipment and a café managed by a third party.

This first site will be a lifestyle location, while subsequent units will be scaled up.

How many locations are you planning?

Conservatively, 10 locations in four years – a combination of owned and franchised.

The opportunity is significant, yet we will do the launch correctly and diligently – before pressing the expansion button.

If the market shows a bigger appetite than we expect, plans can be adjusted.

How will you be different from the competition?
The market in Nairobi is underdeveloped and scattered, with 60 gyms – mainly independently-owned and with one small chain.

Most are overpriced and many are poorly maintained. There's a lot of potential for gyms with better customer service and operations. Even in those with higher pricing, a great experience isn't always guaranteed, so we believe we'll see some gym members switching over to the AfroFit brand as well.

Our clubs will be accessible – not only financially, but also in the way they inspire anyone to train.

What will your pricing be?
We will be super affordable, offer flexible membership pricing with monthly or rolling contracts members can cancel anytime. Our price point for what's on offer will be a surprise to the market and our competition need to fasten their seatbelts.

Tell us about plans for your staff
As mentioned, part of the AfroFit venture is building an education platform and systems.

Our teams will be multi-skilled and fitness-educated to provide a fun, safe and educational environment for members. The number of staff will be optimised and we'll use the same approach as with the entire business – everyone you need and no one you don't.

Online content on the website and social media will educate members, while the teams in the clubs will continue to support them on that journey while ensuring safety and delivering services.

What other areas will you venture into?
AfroFit will have various supporting divisions and with the gym as the core business, we're also venturing into the supply of fitness equipment, clothing and supplements.

There's also little accredited industry education available in Kenya, so we'll be delivering training in the fitness industry so we can offer the community jobs, add value with knowledge and supply our own clubs and franchisees with educated talent.

What is the current market like for fitness in Africa?
The market potential on the African continent is enormous. High-speed internet is now widely available, median incomes are rising and I've had a lot of interest from people in my network wanting to explore collaborations.

There's existing development happening in South Africa with Planet Fitness and Virgin and in North Africa with Gold's Gym and UFC in Egypt, there's room in most other African countries to enter the market. Being mindful that Africa has 54 countries.

Median incomes are rising in Africa, and so is the demand for gyms

PHOTO: YVES PRESSER - RETA CHAMBERS

The gym will be the core business, supported by education and retail

PHOTO: YVES PREISSLER - DELTA CHAMBERS

The market is there for the taking. We can lay the groundwork to prevent the region and continent from joining the statistics of the global obesity crisis by instilling fitness awareness

Why East Africa, and why Nairobi?
We've considered the population and the population increases that have been forecast over the next few years, the continuous increase in average salaries over the past years and the potential we have to become a market-leader by pioneering with an African concept.

There are many independently owned clubs in the region, which means we have the opportunity to acquire or rebrand these. We've also had a great deal of interest in investment. The market is there for the taking. We can lay the groundwork to prevent the region and continent from joining the statistics of the global obesity crisis by instilling fitness awareness.

Nairobi is the gateway to East Africa, as well as being the location of the UN headquarters and having a relatively stable currency. Kenya also has a growing economy and an increasing focus on the service industry.

Do you expect other investors to target Africa?
The African continent and Sub Saharan Africa has been on the map for investors due to their unexplored markets, dense populations and lack of competition, so it's only a matter of time before other players will want to enter this space.

The next decade may see players pushing into the market, however, due to the 'unknown' factor, I don't expect to see fierce competition just yet.

What are the challenges of developing in Africa?
Market awareness and penetration rates are low, while import regulations and taxes are stiff and increase the total investment required.

Availability of fitness talent is also an issue, while African customs and unforeseen curveballs can present challenges that only make this project more fun.

However, we're used to dealing with rocky roads as a result of working in the Middle East for 17 years.

What's the bigger picture?
While many gym brands are focusing on increasing their market share in developed regions of the world and competing head-to-head, we believe it's important to explore new territories.

I moved to Kuwait in 2005 and we're still making a difference in the Middle East market all these years later – now we've added the East African market to our portfolio, as the next stage in our success story.
More: www.afrofit.life

Screens display power generated from each piece of equipment, allowing people to compete against each other for kilowatt hours produced

Tim Mayer

MDL Fitness

PHOTO: TIM MAYER

MDL Marinas – the UK's largest marina operator – is launching into the health and fitness market – tell us what's happening
We're creating a new gym chain under the MDL Fitness brand to optimise our land and property holdings and extend the services we offer our existing customers, while reaching new audiences.

What's the philosophy behind the new brand?
For operators to bounce back and continue to grow from the golden age we were in back in 2019, we all need to provide more than just health clubs, pools or gyms. We must all ensure the experiences we provide tap into the belief systems and 'wants' people now have.

PHOTO: MDL FITNESS

The first MDL gym is sited at the marina in Plymouth

It has to be about more than just achieving personal goals – it's about being able to hold your customers' attention and ensure they have a connection with the values you as an operator hold. MDL Fitness is all about making fitness sustainable and as straightforward as possible. It's about helping people appreciate new environments they may not have been lucky enough to experience before and ensuring they're open to people, no matter their personal circumstance.

What synergies do you see between the different elements of the business?
People are at the centre of everything we do. The more activity we can drive the better people feel and the more profit we make. Everybody wins.

Tell us about the first location
The first gym, at our marina in Queen Anne's Battery, Plymouth, has a mix of different types of equipment, where most are capable of converting energy expended by the user into electricity to supplement the building's power supply.

I chose SA Green Fitness – the UK agent for power-generating equipment line, SportsArt – as our equipment supplier, to ensure each workout reduces our carbon footprint, while lowering power consumption at the facility.

PHO TO:NAB CREATIVITY

As a marina operator, MDL is championing active lifestyles

It's a 35-station gym with group cycling and some great free weight and resistant equipment. Screens mounted on the walls and integrated into the website display the power generated – both as a total and from each piece of equipment – allowing people to compete against each other for kilowatt hours produced. This feature along with the panoramic views of Plymouth Sound sets this facility apart from others in the city, creating a USP for this health club.

The addition of a gym to our site at Queen Anne's Battery also improves the marina offering and ensures people can also start to appreciate that getting out onto the water to increase activity levels is easier than you might presume.

How long has this plan been on the cards?

I presented the fitness proposal to my board in May 2020 and the doors to the first health club opened in September 2021. I feel very lucky to have such a forward-thinking and supportive MD and owner and of course the wider board who could have very easily pulled the plug, given the uncertainty of the times we're in.

The launch is happening in part to optimise your landholdings. Will each of your marinas eventually have a health club?

We have plans for another three health clubs in the short-term, but will look at all opportunities across our estate. This will include more dry side facilities and more options around the wet side and other activity-led endeavours.

What mix of customers do you expect?

We're open to all. Ignoring the torrid time we all had in 2020, we know that 2019 saw the rate of growth for members and market values grow across the public and private sectors, with the UK reaching over 7,000 gyms with a member base of over 10 million.

I think we'll get a pretty even split between male and female, with our core demographics being dictated by the local population and with most members aged between 25 and 45. Having said that, we have a good opportunity with the local student market and also with the armed forces stationed nearby, so we could see an increase in penetration for the 16-25-year-old sector. We're certainly priced to make it affordable.

> *Putting gyms in marinas will ensure people appreciate getting out onto the water to increase activity levels is easier than you might presume*

What's the price point and how will you upsell?
We're priced at the higher end of the low-cost segment of the market – or more accurately, the good value end. We offer a non-contract membership option which can be paid daily, monthly or annually with the monthly option costing £24.99. Revenues will be grown from online options such as the ability to earn green rewards, general retail and of course some exciting options in the future incorporating more marine-based activities.

What's your catchment?
The clubs will vary but the first location is a 1,000-member club. We expect the base to be local but also expect to see quite a lot of casual use from passing boaters, the local marine industry and contractors. The latent demand is very strong within a two-mile radius of the facility.

Tell us about the eco aspect
As an organisation MDL has always had a focus on the development of green, sustainable initiatives, working with partners such as the Green Blue and The Blue Marine Foundation for over 10 years, installing Oyster cages under our pontoons and working with suppliers to ensure products are from sustainable sources wherever possible.

With much of MDL's core revenue coming from our customers' enjoyment of the marine environment, water quality has and continues to be a big focus, as are the management of waste streams, separation of recyclables and green energy through the roll-out of solar cells. There are, however, more opportunities to develop our green credentials and MDL Fitness is part of bringing these opportunities together, highlighting not only the environmental but also the commercial and marketing benefits to the company.

SportsArt is the only manufacturer offering fitness machines that recover energy expended by the user. Using this equipment gives us a green competitive advantage over other suppliers and we plan to extend this project beyond Plymouth

With boat ownership declining since 2009, diversification was key

PHOTO: MDL FITNESS

Eco-Powr bikes used for 47 hrs in total can power a laptop for 74.8 hrs

PHOTO: SPORTSART

by creating further MDL fitness sites using the SportsArt Eco-Powr equipment in 2022.

I want us to be the UK's most sustainable marina operator, developing a culture of environmental awareness and care amongst both our customers and teams. The development of a new health club chain is one aspect of that statement.

This activity complements our current energy saving strategy which – until now – has been focused on solar cells. We now have solar installations at our Cobb's Quay, Ocean Village, Saxon Wharf and Hamble Point marinas. Last year the installations at Hamble Point, Cobb's Quay and Ocean Village generated 120,346 kwh of electricity. At Cobb's Quay Marina we've saved 44,809kg of CO_2 emissions, which is the equivalent of 969 trees being planted.

This activity reduces our carbon footprint and leads to lower energy costs and all this information will be displayed on a live basis through our website to motivate more reductions in emissions across our portfolio.

Will eco gyms become a new industry category?

I very much hope so!

Does being an eco gym operator give you a competitive advantage?

It does, but not a happy one. What I really want to see is more operators working with government departments or industry bodies, to see if any projects or investments qualify for grant money to help everyone upgrade existing equipment.

I want to see all the big operators move away from the comfortable fitness equipment brands we all know and start talking to the change makers. This is happening in the independent sector with operators such as SO51 fitness in Romsey and some of the UK's universities, but the bigger operators choose to ignore the option of becoming more sustainable based on kit fulfilment.

Customers of all types are now interested in business sustainability, people – particularly millennials – say they want sustainable products and brands that embrace purpose and sustainability. Indeed,

Gyms that generate their own power

What are the hard facts of the new MDL Fitness gyms?

Putting into perspective how much electricity can be generated by kinetic equipment, when tested, two SportsArt Eco-Powr bikes used for a collective total of 47 hours produced enough electricity to power a laptop for 74.8 hours or a LCD flat screen TV for 32 hours.

By plugging in its new Eco-Powr treadmills, cross trainers and bicycles into a standard outlet, MDL Fitness will be able to send AC power generated by gym members back through the gym's power grid to offset its energy consumption and reduce its carbon footprint.

By working out on an Eco-Powr treadmill for an hour twice a week for a year it's possible to create a CO_2 emission offset equivalent to 62 lbs of coal burned, 138 miles driven in a car or 7,197 Smart phones charged.

one recent report revealed that certain categories of products with sustainability credentials showed twice the growth of their traditional counterparts.

In one recent survey 65 per cent of people said they want to buy purpose-driven brands that advocate sustainability, yet only about 26 per cent actually do so. This is a challenge for all of us. How can we operate a business without impacting the environment negatively and still make it work commercially? Each of us can begin to make that journey to zero carbon with forward thinking ideas that are flexible enough to be developed alongside changes in government policy and fitness related legislation.

What persuaded you to leave the mainstream fitness sector and join a marina business?

I loved working in the health and leisure markets. Firstly with Esporta where I met my wife Heidi – who incidentally just passed her yoga qualifications and now teaches classes in the area we live – and then with Everyone Active.

Everyone Active is a great organisation. I loved working for their MD David Bibby, I had a great relationship with Jon Senior who was my direct boss for most of my time there. My last couple of years with Ben Beevers as the head of commercial and digital were fantastic.

> *What we do as an industry is change lives for the better and we should all be proud of that*

All the team there are superb and I made lots of connections I continue to engage with. Funnily enough my now new competitor, Dave Greenwood, who runs the Plymouth leisure contract for Everyone Active is one of them.

I also saw an opportunity of being based on the coast with a chance to expand my knowledge and commercial input. The team at MDL are brilliant and the ethos very similar, with many transferable ideals.

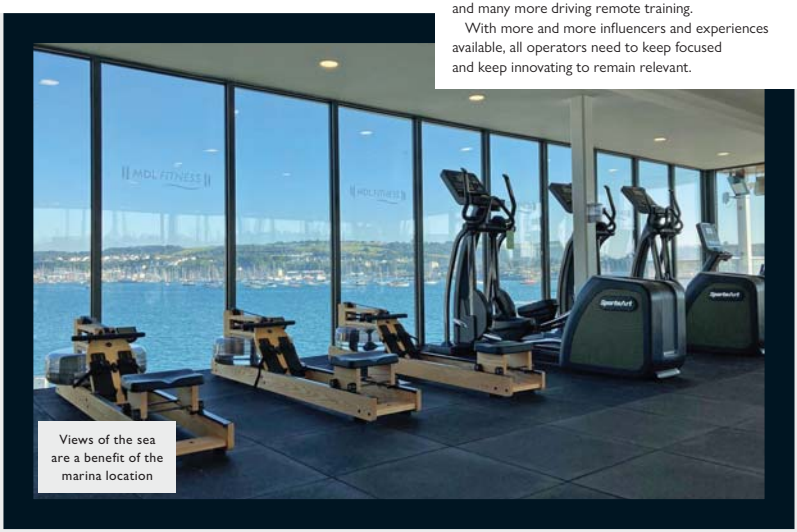
Do you think more competition like this will come from outside the sector?

I think it already is – where companies have been disrupting mainstream fitness we've already seen an increase in retention.

It all started with operators adding in things such as Speedflex (Bannatyne), Blaze (David Lloyd Leisure), thé Yard (énergie Fitness) and Everyone On Demand (Everyone Active).

We've also seen Technogym, Les Mills, Peloton and many more driving remote training.

With more and more influencers and experiences available, all operators need to keep focused and keep innovating to remain relevant.



Views of the sea are a benefit of the marina location

PHOTO: MDL FITNESS

PHOTO: MDL FITNESS

MDL is aware that today's customers want sustainable brands

Who designed the club?
I first met Roger Eldergill from SA Green Fitness in 2017. I was looking at the idea of portable/temporary gyms that could be sustainable and dropped into low income areas to help get kids and those who couldn't afford fitness centres interested in activity. So I was chuffed when the initial nod to explore the MDL fitness concept got the green light. Roger pulled together the first iteration and it has grown from there.

Have you created COVID-secure operations?
With restrictions now lifted, we haven't had to implement COVID-secure protocols to the extent that many other operators have over the course of the pandemic – although we've obviously worked through it with our marina business.

We're ensuring everybody acts carefully and remains cautious and when customers visit us, they will notice that our face mask signs remain in place.

Our toilet and shower facilities are fully open and we're continuing with our enhanced cleaning regime. We've also enhanced gym equipment cleaning, with a request that customers also clean their equipment after each use. Hand sanitiser also remains available, while COVID-19 QR codes continue to be displayed around all areas for customers wishing to check in using the NHS COVID-19 app.

What was your advice to the board of MDL when it came to making this investment?
I advised that 2019 had been a strong year for the UK private fitness market. All four key metrics had shown year on year growth and reached all-time highs: number of clubs, members, market value and penetration rate.

The private fitness industry had been healthier than it had ever been. However COVID-19 fundamentally shifted the industry, giving opportunity to those in a position to enter the market and act as a replacement for those operators who haven't survived the period.

Prior to COVID the industry was healthier than ever and one of the only markets to continue growing on our high streets in the last 10 years. So despite COVID, people will continue to want to get active, there is still 90 per cent of the population to go at, we can do it in a sustainable way, so what is not to love?
More: www.mdlmarinas.co.uk/mdl-fitness

Our vision is a future with ethnic diversity in aquatics

Danielle Obe

Chair, The Black Swimming Association

Why is the Black Swimming Association needed?

Swimming isn't just a sport, it's a gateway into the world of aquatics and most importantly, an essential life skill everyone should have for their safety and wellbeing.

In spite of this, however, our research shows that 95 per cent of Black adults, 80 per cent of Black children, 93 per cent of Asian adults and 79 per cent of Asian children in England either can't or don't swim.

Between 2016 and 2019, of the 10 per cent of athletes funded by UK Sport who were of Asian, Black and mixed heritage, only 1 per cent were Black, while among the aquatic workforce only 3 per cent of lifeguards, 3 per cent swimming volunteers and 2 per cent of swimming coaches are of African, Caribbean and Asian heritage. There is no representation at senior leadership or board level.

We can't drive forward inclusion and diversity in aquatics without first tackling inherent systemic and institutional inequalities – we need to address the economic and social disparities between ethnic groups in the aquatics sector in the UK, which have led to these disproportionately low participation rates within African, Caribbean and Asian communities.

Established in 2020, the Black Swimming Association (BSA) began with a single commitment – to be the bridge between the aquatics sector and these disenfranchised communities.

Obe (left) and the BSA board want to spread their mission worldwide

PHOTO: DANIELLE OBE, THE BLACK SWIMMING ASSOCIATION

PHOTO: EMMPIXEL.COM/SHUTTERSTOCK

95 per cent of black adults in England don't or can't swim

This isn't a simple boardroom activity or quick fix, neither is it a one-size-fits all approach, the sector must take a systematic, long-term and integrated approach to change.

This begins with community engagement, research and collaboration to build trust, accountability and most importantly, build bridges into these disengaged communities the sector wishes to attract.

What inspired the establishment of the BSA?

The opportunities and benefits of participation in all types of aquatics are truly phenomenal and unmatched – from sport, careers and physical and mental wellbeing, to all important water safety

The mission of the BSA is to ensure everyone – regardless of age, gender, status or ethnicity – should have equal access, feel included and have a quality and safe experience in and around water.

According to the World Health Organization, a person – usually a child or young adult – dies by drowning every 90 seconds around the world. That means that on average, every hour of every day, more than 40 people lose their lives this way.

In the UK, 19 per cent of people living within 1km of waterways are from African, Caribbean and Asian heritage – that's above the national average of 14 per cent.

Although there's been no data captured to date on drowning by ethnicity, the disproportionate number of people of African, Caribbean and Asian heritage who don't swim is a nationwide issue which puts these communities at a higher risk.

How are things going?

Our first year was spent engaging with key stakeholders as we embarked on a journey of discovery to understanding exactly where the sector is in regards to ethnic diversity.

We've built strategic partnerships with governing bodies, operators, aquatic brands, swimming bodies, lifesaving agencies and other charities in the aquatics sector.

We've also been championing the need for more inclusion and water safety education for ethnically diverse communities and more visibility when it comes to access and awareness for both participation and career pathways.

Following the global impact of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020/21, awareness of inequalities is high, as is the collective need to do something tangible to urgently address these issues.

This context represents a 'moment in time' and an opportunity to drive the aquatic agenda for under-represented communities in the UK.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES/ ALICE DEARING TEAM GB

BSA has commissioned research (academic, social and scientific) with the core aim of understanding the aquatic behaviours and attitudes of African, Caribbean and Asian communities and addressing and removing barriers that preclude them from participating in aquatics.

How can health and fitness and sports facility owners and operators help and support the BSA?

Through direct community engagement, messaging campaigns, research and co-creation with the BSA. We're actively welcoming collaboration and engagement, so please get in touch.

How will you measure success?

We've set ourselves a number of goals between now and 2024.

Firstly, to reduce the number of drownings in Black and Asian communities in the UK by 20 per cent – we also want to see drowning data recorded by ethnicity.

We're also aiming to increase the number of children and adults from Black and Asian communities who swim by 30 per cent and to increase the number of Black and Asian people in the aquatic workforce by 25 per cent.

Why have Black people traditionally not got involved with aquatics?

There are a number of underlying reasons why they're disengaged – this can be to do with a wide range of factors, such as access, culture, finance and representation.

As a result, many people from these communities believe the sector is 'not for them'.

In addition, the aquatics sector hasn't accommodated the specific needs of Britain's diverse populations, thus it becomes a catch-22 situation.

As the BSA, our ongoing work with governing bodies in the aquatics sector has given us a unique perspective. We're finding that although there's a willingness to work towards swimming being a more inclusive sport, there

Team GB's Alice Dearing is inspiring a younger generation

> *For the first time, thousands of Black British children see someone who looks like them in a sport that isn't as inclusive as it could be. It's about representation*

is very little knowledge and understanding of the unique aquatic barriers, behaviours and attitudes that preclude Black communities from engaging widely in aquatics.

This is why the BSA has commissioned industry pioneering research, as mentioned, through direct community engagement with the under-represented communities we want to see represented.

You've had a bad decision from FINA about the wearing of the Soul Cap in international swimming competitions. Tell us what's happening

FINA's original ban on the Soul Cap [the swimming cap designed to accommodate Black hair] was about much more than just these types of products, it was about the message FINA is sending not only to African, Caribbean and Asian communities, but also to elite swimming NGBs on a national and international level that the sport is not for everyone.

The Soul Cap decision is in direct breach of Section C4 of FINA's own constitution and objectives which concern the promotion and encouragement of aquatics in all possible regards throughout the world and the encouragement of participation in aquatic disciplines at all levels, regardless of age, gender or race.

We believe putting a ban in place on products such as the Soul Cap, that make the sport more inclusive, will discourage younger athletes from ethnic minority backgrounds from not only pursuing swimming competitively, but also from engaging with aquatics.

> *This isn't just a British issue – it starts at home, but it's a global one*

The BSA is aiming to work with FINA to build bridges into disenfranchised communities, so they too have equal access, feel included and can have a safe and quality experience in the water.

We already know the vast majority do not swim. We can't afford to have more children from these backgrounds feeling disengaged.

Do you think FINA will back down and change the ruling about the Soul Cap in light of public outrage?

FINA has already released a statement indicating its intention to review the original statement. The BSA, British Swimming, Soul Cap and FINA have been in dialogue to agree a resolution and next steps.

How important is it that Swim England are backing the BSA?

Swim England is our primary NGB and we hope our partnership can help Swim England to increase visibility, representation and participation of African, Caribbean and Asian groups. This partnership is enabling us to look forward and work more closely to increase the impact of its work.

The strength lies in our working together to understand, address and overcome significant age-long barriers.

A Black swimmer [Alice Dearing] was in the GB team at the Tokyo Olympics. What impact is this having?

Alice Dearing qualifying for the Olympics as the first Black woman to represent Team GB is a huge milestone in British elite swimming.

For the community, her achievements are all about representation. For the first time, thousands of Black British children are seeing someone who looks like them in a sport that isn't as inclusive as it could be. It's about representation.

Do you see BSA becoming a global organisation and if so, what's your vision?

Absolutely! Our vision is a future with ethnic diversity in aquatics. In the long term the vision remains the same.

This isn't just a British issue – it starts at home, but it's a global one.

PHOTO: DEAN DROBOT/SHUTTERSTOCK

PHOTO: MISSOULA HISTORY MUSEUM

The origins of the freestyle

Swimming has never been 'all white'

Swimming has long been thought of as a white sport but right from the conception of the strokes, swimming has been ethnically diverse.

In 1844, the British Swimming Society invited the two men, Wenishkaweabee (Flying Gull) and Sahma (Tobacco), of the Ojibwe people from Canada to swim a race in London. Their swimming style was different from anything they had ever seen before and much faster.

Instead of being wowed by their impressive times, the British press found the swimmers' movements to be "totally un-European," and "grotesque." One paper reported that the Ojibwe men "thrashed the water violently with their arms, like sails of a windmill, and beat downward with their feet, blowing with force and forming grotesque antics."

So even though the revolutionary style of Flying Gull and Tobacco was considerably faster, it was not copied and British swimmers continued paddling along in their accustomed manner.

Yet this revolutionary advancement was really centuries old. The original inhabitants of the Americas, West Africa and some Pacific islands had been using a version of front crawl for generations.

It wasn't until three decades later that John Arthur Trudgen, a British swimmer, took the prize for the 100-yard race in a major British swimming competition, using a stroke that combined the arm movements of the front crawl with the frog kick of the breaststroke. He had learned to swim the new style in Brazil and combined the speed of the front crawl's arm movements with the accepted breaststroke kicking style. His stroke was less "un-European" and his time to cover 100 yards was 1 minute and 16 seconds.

Trudgen began teaching others the new arm movement and even though swimmers continued using the frog kick of the breaststroke, the overhand arm action gave them significantly more speed and power.

Using the Trudgen stroke – as it came to be called – swimmers whittled the record for the 100 yards down from 70 seconds to 60 seconds.

© Atlas Obscura, courtesy of the Black Swimming Association

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Pullman and Citroën create mobile fitness pod

French car manufacturer Citroën and hotel brand Pullman Hotels & Resorts have partnered to create an autonomous "urban mobile platform" concept, designed to allow people to explore cities while working out.

The Pullman Power Fitness Pod would act as a miniature gym, mounted on The Citroën Skate, a self-driving electric vehicle.

Designed for a single exerciser at a time, the pod features a rower on one side and a static bike on the other, enabling the user to work out while travelling through a city.

PHOTO: ACCOR/CITROËN

The pod is mounted on The Citroën Skate, a self-driving electric vehicle

A holographic coach encourages and guides the user through their workout, while also providing route information and entertainment during a "next-level cardio session".

The pod has a glass bubble incorporating dichroic patterns in the form of blinds, protecting the occupant's privacy while maintaining a view of the outside.

Sébastien Bazin, chair and CEO, Accor, said: "Our group is active in the local ecosystem and committed to offering exclusive experiences."

PHOTO: ACCOR

Our group is active in the local ecosystem and committed to offering exclusive experiences

Sébastien Bazin

More: http://lei.sr/8N5Y5_H

Life Time goes public – valued at US$3.6bn

Health club operator Life Time Group, led by Bahram Akradi, has become a publicly traded company again, after it was listed on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE).

An initial public offering (IPO) completed on 7 October saw the company sell around 39 million shares at US$18, raising US$702m and valuing the company at around US$3.6bn.

Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley and BofA Securities acted as joint lead book-running managers for the offering.

The group, which operates 150 Life Time athletic resort destinations in the US and Canada, previously traded on the NYSE from 2004 until 2015, when it was taken over by a group of investors. Life Time becomes the latest fitness group to go public this year, following the listings of Xponential Fitness, F45 Training and Beachbody – since its listing, shares in Life Time have dipped slightly and were valued at US$17.20 at the close of trading on 12 October.

PHOTO: LIFE TIME

Life Time operates 150 large fitness resorts across the US and Canada

More: http://lei.sr/v2p7K_H

1,000th club for Basic-Fit – plans 250 new sites

Basic-Fit has officially opened its 1,000th club, with the launch of a new site in the Dutch city of Tilburg.

It marks a significant landmark for the Netherlands-based brand, which is now Europe's largest fitness operator and listed on the Amsterdam stock exchange in 2016.

CEO René Moos said the latest opening forms part of a period of rapid growth for the company, as it looks to open 250 new sites over the next 14 months.

"We're extremely proud to open our 1,000th location – it is a milestone that we owe to our loyal members and employees, without whom this could not be possible," Moos said.

"As soon as we were allowed to reopen after the lockdown, the number of memberships increased enormously in a short period of time. It really confirms the significant role we have in society.

"We will continue to grow and work towards our goal of 1,250 clubs by the end of 2022."

More: http://lei.sr/6q5p6_H

PHOTO: BASIC-FIT

We will continue to grow and work towards our goal of 1,250 clubs by the end of 2022
Rene Moos

PHOTO: BASIC-FIT

The 1,000th Basic-Fit club is located in the town of Tilburg in the Netherlands

Romania Active launches to promote sector

A group of leading health and fitness companies in Romania have joined forces to launch a new industry body for the sector.

Called Romania Active, the new entity will act as the Romanian health and fitness association and promote the role physical activity plays in society.

Representing the interests of the physical activity sector, it will work towards getting more people, more active, more often.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/SHAUTH ISAC

Romania Active has been set up as the official industry body for fitness

The founding of Romania Active is a crucial step forward for the fitness sector
Kent Orrgren

Among Romania Active's stated aims is to be at the forefront of all new legislative changes concerning the health and fitness sector – and to ensure members are involved in the development of the changes.

The nine founding members of Romania Active are World Class, StayFit, Viva Sports Club, SmartFit, Stejarii Country Club, 4Moving, Elite Gym, Lotus Sport and Habit 30 Fitness.

Romania Active will be led by president Kent Orrgren, CEO of World Class Romania.

Orrgren said: "The founding of Romania Active is a crucial step forward for the fitness sector."

More: http://lei.sr/D9j6A_H

Tanni to hand over as chair of ukactive in 2022

Tanni Grey-Thompson has announced she will hand over her role as ukactive chair in August 2022, after more than six years driving the success of the organisation from the heart of government.

Huw Edwards, CEO of ukactive, said: "It's been an incredible honour to work with Tanni during her time as chair – she's been the greatest champion our members could possibly have had over the past six years, with an unrivalled belief in and enthusiasm for the role physical activity plays in improving people's lives. She's taken this belief and enthusiasm into every meeting and to every event she's attended on behalf of our members and been unrelenting in her quest to help them grow and develop."

PHOTO: UKACTIVE

Tanni Grey-Thompson (centre) at this year's National Fitness Day

PHOTO: UKACTIVE

Tanni's been the greatest champion our members could possibly have had over the past six years

Huw Edwards

The 11-time gold medallist Paralympian, who's a peer in the House of Lords, will use her last ukactive Conference speech on 13 October to outline the progress made by the sector during her tenure, to set out plans for her final year as chair and to give her vision for the growth of the industry, to set future direction.

More: http://lei.sr/h2e6K_H

Gym visit link to COVID-19 continues to weaken

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/GORGEV

For every 100,000 visits to clubs, only one person goes on to test positive

New data shows that for every 100,000 visits to UK health clubs and leisure centres between April and August 2021, only one person went on to test positive for COVID-19.

The figure of one positive case per 100,000 visits is 60 per cent lower than the 1.7 cases per 100,000 visits to fitness facilities reported between July 2020 and the end of December 2020.

It's also in dramatic contrast to COVID-19 rates among the general population – as reported by the UK government – of 160.6 cases for every 100,000 people living in the UK during the same period and means that non-gym goers are 160 times more likely to get COVID-19 than gym-goers.

The report was published by the ukactive Research Institute, which has tracked COVID-19 reporting and health club visits throughout the pandemic – and has continued to collect and aggregate data on a weekly basis from more than 1,500 facilities across the UK since facilities reopened in April.

Researchers studied a sample of 77 million visits from April to August.

Importantly, the study tracks how many people who visit a health club also develop COVID-19, it does not indicate that transmission happened during the visit.

The data will help inform the picture in Europe, feeding into the second THiNK Active study on COVID-19, which is due to be published soon.

More: http://lei.sr/p2t3n_H

UK fitness sector could gain 5m new members

VAT reform, adjustments in business rates and a fitness-led high street regeneration push could see the UK's fitness sector gain five million more paying members by 2030.

Growth modelling suggests that the number of active memberships at health clubs, swimming pools and leisure centres could grow by more than half – if the government puts the right support in place.

The analysis by ukactive projects that the number of members at fitness and active leisure facilities could increase from the current 10 million to more than 15 million in less than 10 years.

Huw Edwards, CEO of ukactive, said the unlocking of the "true potential" of the physical activity sector would lead to a raft of benefits felt across society, with actions identified as being the most impactful including VAT relief, business rates reform, infrastructure investment, health incentives, procurement reforms, and high street regeneration with fitness services at its heart.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ALISSIALC1

Modelling shows that memberships could grow to 15m by 2030

More: http://lei.sr/p2j7t_H

Barclays: UK set for £3.5 billion leisure boost

New research by Barclays Corporate Banking reveals that the fitness, spa, leisure and hospitality industries are bouncing back and look likely to contribute £3.5b (€4bn, US$4.7) more to the nation's GDP this year than in 2019.

Based on projected sales figures for the period from April to December 2021 – when the sectors have largely been open again – this equates to £3.5bn more in Gross Value Added (GVA) than in the equivalent period in 2019.

Data from Barclay's Leisure Rediscovered report shows that the vast majority of businesses (94 per cent) are confident about their growth prospects for this year following a post-lockdown surge in trade.

Gym and leisure centre managers are most likely to be very confident (45 per cent), with spas and wellness retreats (42 per cent) also especially positive.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/OTOLIMPO

91 per cent of leisure operators are now prioritising 'healthy' products and services

For gyms and spas, recovery was gradual following lockdown, but by the year-end they still predict significant revenue rises of 18 per cent over 2019 levels for spas and wellness centres, and 24 per cent for gyms and leisure centres as trading begins to pick up following reopenings.

More: http://lei.sr/2K9e3_H

World's first Blue Zones Centre for Miami

Downtown Miami's upcoming mixed-use development Legacy Hotel & Residences has signed a joint venture deal called Blue Legacy Ventures (JV) with faith-based non-profit integrated health system Adventist Health.

Together the JV will lease and operate a first-of-its-kind 120,000sq ft health and wellbeing facility, named Blue Zone Centre.

The location marks Adventist Health's and its subsidiary Blue Zones' first flagship centre for wellbeing.

PHOTO: BLUE ZONES

The 120,000sq ft Blue Zones Centres' services will include fitness programming

PHOTO: BLUE ZONES

The journey begins with a highly personalised medical evaluation by your physician
Stephen Watson

Blue Zones employs evidence-based ways to help people live longer, better.

The company's work is rooted in explorations and research done by National Geographic fellow Dan Buettner, who identified the 'blue zones regions' around the world where people live extraordinarily long and happy lives.

Stephen Watson, managing partner of RPC Health, which envisioned and lead the development of the centre, said: "The journey begins with a highly personalised medical evaluation by your physician, followed by a unique and customised high-tech programme."

More: http://lei.sr/z3J8c_H

Everyone Can to study disabled fitness provision

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ZURIELIA

Everyone Can will look to support operators become more inclusive

A consultation has been launched to review the current provision of fitness and leisure facilities available for disabled people.

The consultation will study the measures that fitness and active leisure facilities have implemented in order to cater for disabled people and better facilitate their participation.

Designed in collaboration with disabled people and partners across the disability sector, the consultation – called Everyone Can – will lead to the publication of "clear, implementable and practical measures" for fitness operators.

The work forms part of Everyone Can agenda, which is supported by Sport England and ukactive and aims to help remove the barriers to physical activity for disabled people by ensuring fitness operators are supported to continue to improve access to their services.

PHOTO: ROGER HARRIS PHOTOGRAPHY

Our ambition is to create a fitness sector that is freely accessed and used by all
Tanni Grey-Thompson

Chair of ukactive, Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, said: "Our ambition is to create a fitness sector that is freely accessed and used by all."

More: http://lei.sr/K5u9A_H

DLL goes on acquisition trail – plans 40 sites

David Lloyd Leisure (DLL) has reorganised its top team in order to expand its estate through acquisition, after seeing a "remarkable" bounceback in membership levels since reopening its clubs earlier this year.

CEO Russell Barnes – speaking exclusively to *HCM* – said his move to CEO, with Glenn Earlam taking up the role of executive chair, has been driven by the need to exploit a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for growth.

"As a company, we have three priorities," he said. "The first is bounceback, the second is a need to keep digitalising our offering...and the third relates to mergers and acquisitions.

"Coming out of the pandemic, lots of companies find themselves having to let go of assets to keep their core businesses afloat. This provides an opportunity for M&A the likes of which we're unlikely to see again, in our working lifetime. DLL has a chance to accelerate its growth – but this requires clarity."

PHOTO: DLL

There are opportunities for M&A the likes of which we're unlikely to see again, in our working lifetime
Russell Barnes

More: http://lei.sr/h4h4n_H

PHOTO: DLL

DLL currently operates 122 clubs

CIMSPA partners with Google and Joe Wicks

Physical activity professionals in England will soon be able to access free, one-to-one learning with Google to get their digital marketing strategies in line with current trends.

The collaboration is part of a free Digital Marketing Hub for the sector, which launched in September.

The opportunity has been made possible thanks to a strategic partnership between the tech giant and representative industry body CIMSPA.

PHOTO: JOE WICKS/YOUTUBE

Joe Wicks became a household name thanks to his pandemic fitness sessions

The partnership with Google will add enormous value to the Digital Marketing Hub
Tara Dillon

Sport, physical activity and fitness professionals will be able to access free advice and resources from experts at Google, to help enhance their digital marketing skills.

Anyone signing up to the Digital Marketing Hub will benefit from tailored one-to-one mentoring from Google's digital experts and a series of 12 Google Digital Garage live webinars – designed to help businesses get discovered online and find new customers.

Tara Dillon, CEO of CIMSPA, said: "The partnership with Google will add enormous value to the Digital Marketing Hub for everyone in the sector."

More: http://lei.sr/q7X4k_H

Until to launch high-end fitness workspaces

A new high-end workspace, designed for the use of personal trainers, coaches and other health and wellness professionals, will open in central London in November.

Called Until, the 8,500sq ft space – located within the new Ilona Rose House near Tottenham Court Road Station – includes 3,000sq ft of gym floor space.

There will also be nine treatment rooms, eight coaching rooms, changing rooms and a performance suite. Other specialist areas include podcast studios and private booths for video calls.

PHOTO: UNTIL

The 8,500sq ft space will provide a shared workspace for wellness professionals

PHOTO: UNTIL

We want to help wellness professionals run their businesses successfully

Alex Pellew

The space will also double up as a private members' club for the professionals, with a "clubhouse" area to connect, collaborate and co-work in when not delivering sessions.

Until is the brainchild of Vishal Amin and Alex Pellew.

Pellew said: "Wellness professionals are great at serving their clients but all the tasks that go into running a business – marketing, accounting, business admin – that's often the bit that they struggle with. We will take that work off their plates."

More: http://lei.sr/k8g6F_H

ComRes: half of Brits 'not as fit as they'd like to be

Half of UK adults aren't happy with their physical fitness levels, according to a study by Savanta ComRes.

A poll of more than 2,000 adults gauged people's exercise habits and their attitudes towards fitness during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked if they were as physically fit as they would like to be, exactly half (50 per cent) said they were not.

Only 27 per cent reported being happy with their fitness levels – the remaining 23 per cent were either unsure or neither agreed nor disagreed.

Worryingly, more than a quarter (27 per cent) of people taking part in the poll reported being less active than before the pandemic.

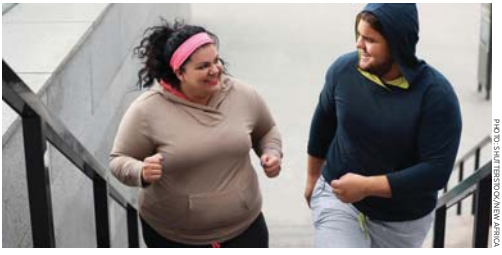


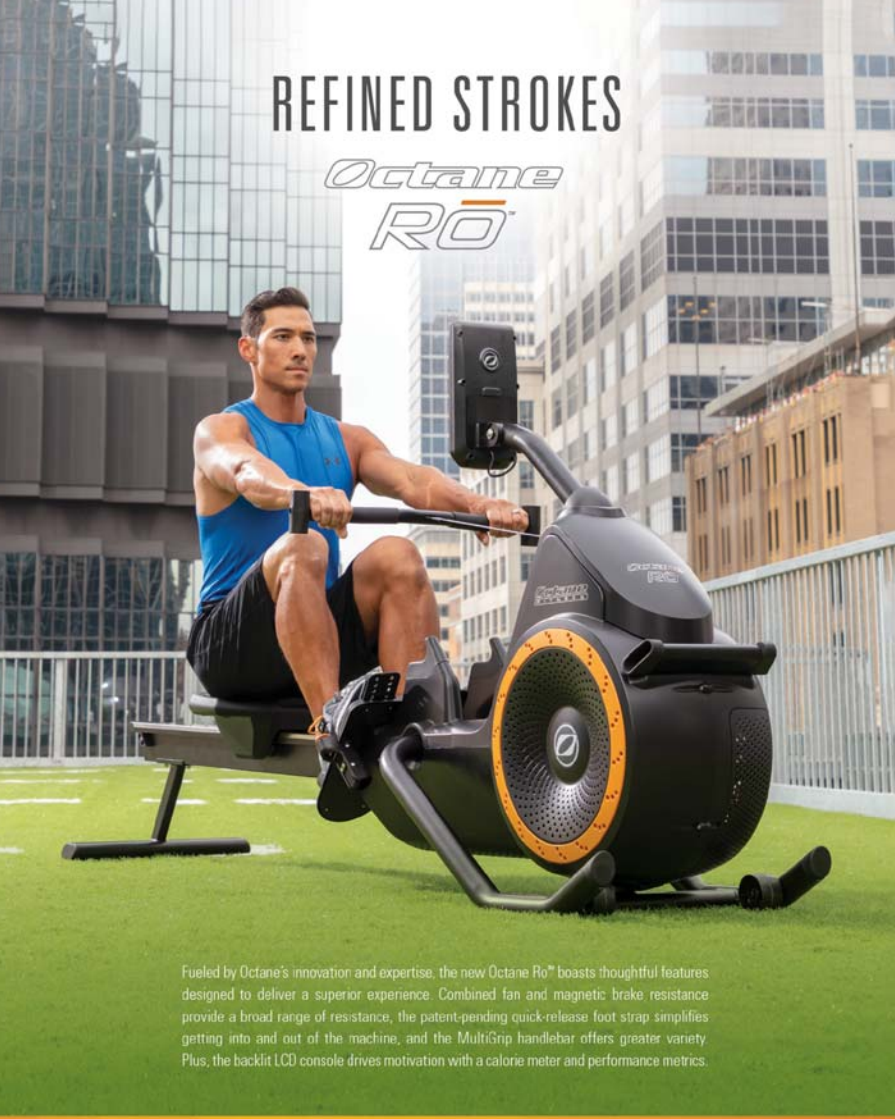
PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/VISUAL AFRICA

Only 27 per cent of UK adults reported being happy with their fitness

Of the remainder, roughly half (51 per cent) reported the same activity levels and 17 per cent said they were now more active than in March 2020.

Of those unhappy with their fitness levels, 12 per cent said their lack of fitness is even stopping them from doing gentle everyday activities – such as showering and getting dressed, undermining their quality of life.

More: http://lei.sr/e8r9M_H



Fueled by Octane's innovation and expertise, the new Octane Ro™ boasts thoughtful features designed to deliver a superior experience. Combined fan and magnetic brake resistance provide a broad range of resistance, the patent-pending quick-release foot strap simplifies getting into and out of the machine, and the MultiGrip handlebar offers greater variety. Plus, the backlit LCD console drives motivation with a calorie meter and performance metrics.

Octane FITNESS

sales@octanefitness.com | 888-OCTANE4 | OCTANEFITNESS.COM

We start with people's pain points and give them a pathway to move away from that – to heal and be a force for good in their own lives

Delaney was awarded an MBE in June of this year for her work in fitness

PHOTO: GEORGIE DELANEY

GEORGIE DELANEY

The co-founder of The Great Outdoor Gym Company has a vision to inspire communities to become healthy and sustainable, both environmentally and personally. She speaks to Kate Cracknell

You founded TGOGC in 2007 with your father John and husband Matt. What was the vision?
London had won its bid to host the Olympic Games just a couple of years before, so at the time, our vision was very much focused around getting the nation active in the run-up to London 2012. We wanted our gyms to be part of the Games' Legacy.

We had an amazing boost for a small company when Adidas sponsored our first five Olympic-branded gyms. This was followed by securing government funding to roll out another 70 Adizones across England between 2008 and 2012.

During that time, we invested in R&D and moved our manufacturing to the UK. The basic concept for these outdoor gyms came from China – where they had helped drive a 1 per cent per annum rise in physical activity levels following Beijing 2008 – and we originally manufactured over there, but we wanted to improve the quality.

Manufacturing in the UK increased our cost threefold, but it wasn't about profit. We wanted to build a trusted brand with safe, inclusive, best practice equipment. Quite simply, moving manufacturing to the UK was the right thing to do – something that's been a key theme of the company since its inception.

My father, who was chair for 12 years, also encouraged me – as head of design – to establish standards for outdoor gym equipment and I created these from an amalgamation of playground, IFI (Inclusive Fitness Initiative) and indoor training standards.

How has the equipment range evolved?
We launched the second, now UK-manufactured edition of our equipment in 2009, which was a step on from the Chinese kit not only in terms of quality, but also in range: our equipment felt much more like the kind of thing you'd find in a gym, with cardio and resistance options, good ergonomics and so on.

As part of the move back to Britain, we also looked at improving our cardio range and had a lightbulb moment: this was popular equipment, getting a lot of usage, and we realised we could harness human power to generate energy. By 2012, we were rolling out gyms with energy-generating elements built into them.

Power Smart – our newest range – is the next evolution of this, where you can now vary the resistance. We're also launching an interesting range of weights – the Street Barbell – which isn't manufactured by us, but for which we have the exclusive distribution rights. And we've launched new kit along the way such as rigs, pull-up bars, assisted pull-ups and so on.

We're constantly pushing our quality up, evolving and redesigning our equipment, and have been open to innovation at every step of the way. For example, in 2017 we collaborated with recycling charity TerraCycle to make two gyms out of recycled aerosol cans, each with a rig in the middle and four pieces of power-generating kit. One now sits in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, the other outside Right Guard's headquarters near Hemel Hempstead. ▸

We've also had to create new processes for export markets such as the UAE and Australia, where coastal locations require highly durable, galvanised equipment.

Who are your customers?

Overseas, our sales partners work with everyone from councils to consultants and architects responsible for designing new landscapes.

In the UK, our customers are predominantly local authorities, although not exclusively. We recently opened a gym at St Thomas's Hospital in London, for example, which was inspired by one of the nurses there who is also a PT.

We see this project – a hospital so clearly recognising the importance of movement for physical and mental health – as a major milestone. Because, while WHO is telling us we must move more and the CMOs talk about movement as a wonder drug, in everyday practice the healthcare sector still doesn't see activity as being part of its landscape – even though everyone recognises lifestyle as a major factor in non-communicable disease. It's why 'Movement Medicine' is one of our straplines and an agenda we want to drive forward.

We've also worked very symbiotically with leisure operators before now, placing outdoor gyms in front of leisure centres, for example. We very much see ourselves as part of a collective funnel that draws people into health and wellbeing. We all have to work together to get more people more active.

We're keen to always have a free element to our gyms, but we'd be open to collaborating with leisure operators on paid-for concepts too, where on-site trainers could offer advice and run sessions. There's definitely value in that model.

PHOTO: THE GREAT OUTDOOR GYM COMPANY

Georgie Delaney working out at the Olympic Park in London

PHOTO: THE GREAT OUTDOOR GYM COMPANY

At TGO-Activate people can now purchase classes and courses

Who uses your outdoor gyms?

We focus first and foremost on inactive people, helping them start a journey by providing free access to our facilities. We get people with health issues, families, people from ethnic minorities, people who haven't used – and often can't afford to join – an indoor gym.

It isn't even about fitness at first. We start where people are, addressing their pain points – whether that's disease, obesity, a stressful family life, financial issues – and giving them a pathway to move away from that, a route to heal and become a force for good in their own lives.

It's a step-by-step process and something we're going to develop further in the *Fit for 2030* framework we're working on at the moment – a framework that will offer people easy, tangible steps towards a happy, healthy lifestyle.

We also aim to make it as convenient and straightforward as possible for people to take these steps, and we'll continue to work on our user experience design to make it even more so – with improved designs and more information on how to use our gyms.

We're still a small company: we've turned over £35m since we launched, which if you think about it, is the sort of price tag it takes to build a single leisure centre. For that sum we've built 2,000 gyms around the world – for 101 different customers in 37 countries, as well as hundreds of UK customers – with an estimated reach of 10 million people.

How do you ensure people get the most out of your gyms?

We see our gyms as a tool to achieve better health, but we know we need to provide the right instruction to help people get what they need from them.

Our new smart screens are key, but I need to rewind the story to explain how we got here.

In Slough, in the UK, we have around 30 gyms, so we were keen to build a strong relationship there with lots of aftercare. We created The Big Community Workout and trained local volunteer 'activators' to deliver the programme. This weekly workout attracted exactly the community we wanted to target, but over time we lost a few of our volunteers – one very sadly passed away from cancer, another got a job in the fitness sector – and we needed to find a way to keep it going.

This is where our on-site smart screens come in: the workout is delivered on-screen, so the activator's role is more about bringing people along in the first place. The screen is also useful for others using the gym – people running GP referrals and so on – because we now have various programmes available that they can tap into.

Programmes include some short sessions delivered by Eat, Shop, Save's Marvin Ambrosius and a series of programmes – created in partnership with Kesson Physio – that are tailored to beginners and those with health conditions. One example is 'Move Type 2', which helps people prevent and manage Type 2 ▸

diabetes, focusing on lean muscle mass in a way that directly addresses those who are new to exercise.

How do you measure your impact?

Our energy-generating kit has been very valuable in this respect. Users could already charge their phones while they worked out, and we used human power for lighting our gyms, but we started looking at other ways to harness the energy in a useful way and realised we could use it as information.

What I mean by that: the energy showed us what people were doing on the equipment, so we defined what counted as a 'hit' – a single use, which is basically continued movement with no pause longer than 30 seconds – and are able to provide this, along with user data from our app and on-site surveys, to our customers.

We're looking at other strategies at the moment to further evidence people's engagement with our gyms.

There is much evidence to support ecotherapy – being outdoors

PHOTO: THE GREAT OUTDOOR GYM COMPANY

> *Our equipment doesn't consume power but does generate it, recycling human energy*

You've just launched TGO-Activate.com. Tell us more

Our vision today is to help communities become healthy and sustainable, but to really get people to change their habits, they need an understanding of what to do in our gyms. This is why – alongside our on-site smart screens – we've also launched TGO-Activate.com, a website where people can purchase specially created classes and courses.

These aren't just about health and fitness. They're about wellness and connection to our planet – we've worked with organisations such as Diabetes UK to quality assure our content.

For example, I've created a course called Heal, Care, Move, which is rooted in a belief that over-consumption is the cause of both lifestyle disease and damage to the planet. Building on that, I believe it's the wounds we gather as we go through life that lead us to over-consume, so we start by addressing this – helping people find joy in movement and the great outdoors, so they become the best version of themselves – before helping them do good in their own spheres of influence by caring for others.

TGO-Activate.com prices currently start at £2.99 for a class, up to £12.99 for a course, and we plant at least one tree for every purchase; for Heal, Care, Move we plant 20 trees. You can keep track of 'your' trees on your dashboard, which helps people feel part of what we're doing.

We're launching TGO-Activate.com with a variety of partners throughout the rest of this year, starting with a partnership with Marks & Spencer (M&S) which ran to the end of September. This offered free taster sessions, then a 50 per cent discount on the rest of the content, and gave us exposure to three million people. Importantly, it was also free to everyone: you could download the M&S Sparks app for free and didn't need to make a purchase at M&S to access our content.

The GOGC goal is to help people live healthily and sustainably

PHOTO: THE GREAT OUTDOOR GYM COMPANY

These discounts won't be forever – we have to fund our tree planting! – but it's a great way to launch. Launching as a separate company also leaves us more flexible as an organisation, not least in terms of fundraising.

Let's talk more about your environmental ethos

As The Great Outdoor Gym Company, we have an obvious connection with the great outdoors.

We've always supported tree planting, for example: we've planted 29,000 trees so far. It started with the Rainforest Foundation, then the NHS Forest – planting a tree for every piece of equipment installed – and now also the Eden Rainforest Project in Kenya, which has the additional benefit of helping people out of poverty.

As already mentioned, our equipment doesn't consume power but does generate it, recycling human energy. Our new Power Smart range is doubly efficient in this respect, which is great, as sustainability is key to all our markets.

But it goes deeper than this. At TGOGC, we believe our own wellbeing is wrapped up in nature and the positive impact we can each have on the health of the planet. There's so much evidence to prove the beneficial effect of ecotherapy – of being outdoors – on our mental and physical health, and our gyms are a tool to achieve that all-important connection with nature. But as I mentioned before in my point about over-consumption, our own health is also linked to the health of the planet. We want to help communities live healthily and sustainably both personally and environmentally.

You attended COP21 and COP22. Tell us more

We were invited to COP21 in Paris by Catherine Berthillier, founder of the NGO Shamengo, who put us forward as one of her pioneers. We just exhibited that time, but for COP22 – this time in Marrakech – we were invited by the UN to install a gym in the city.

So much of the meeting goes on behind closed doors, on the outskirts of the city, but we were right there among the locals. The students in particular were so excited by it, asking what they could do next, and I realised people power was the missing link.

My belief now is that we need to support people to take action in their own spheres. We need to help them feel they can make a difference. In this way, we can meet government halfway. We can support local authorities as they work towards net zero carbon by encouraging communities to take their own steps towards a more sustainable, healthy lifestyle. ▸

Delaney is driven by a desire to help people reach their full potential

PHOTO: GEORGE DELANEY

> *At TGOGC, we believe our own wellbeing is wrapped up in nature and the positive impact we can each have on the health of the planet*

How significant is your export business?
In terms of number of sites, it's significant: around 800 of our gyms are in the UK, with the rest of the 2,000+ are overseas. This will continue to grow, too, not least thanks to a new deal with HAGS that has a goal of building 5,000 gyms across the UK, Sweden, Denmark and Spain over the next five years.

HAGS is owned by US company PlayPower, too, which gives us a relationship to leverage that market in the future. We're in a position now where we could roll out globally.

Of course, we work with partners overseas, which means revenue-wise the UK – where we also get to do the installs – remains our bread and butter. But we firmly believe in the power of partnerships: export has helped grow our network and make our small company, bigger.

We also have a great relationship with the team at the Department of International Trade, which supports us with advice, planning and general morale boosting. It's a unique relationship – we feel as though we're part of Team Britain!

Where will the company be five years from now?
We'll have a very slick user experience, adding even more value to people. We'll have an expanded physical network and digital content, and a much more integrated marriage between the two. And we'll be better connected to a bigger community with deeper engagement; I hope, in five years' time, the TGOGC community will be clearly evident.

That community will continue to bring in families, will continue to be inclusive. We won't leave anyone behind as we encourage people to be healthy, sustainable and a force for good.

You were awarded an MBE in June. What did this mean to you?
When the letter arrived, it was one of those dream letters. I kept re-reading it and asking myself: 'Am I really seeing this right?!'

It has value professionally, too. Of course, there are many men out there championing women, but – while it's quite hard to explain – there are still biases. As a young female entrepreneur, it's sometimes difficult to be taken seriously. The kudos of an MBE – of having the Queen's backing – helps break down those layers of bias.

What drives you?
My education was driven by my mother and then my father was behind me in setting up the company, giving me self-belief that anything was possible. My parents were so supportive of me, but they divorced and my father suffered various lifestyle diseases: heart attacks, diabetes, cancer. I saw first-hand the effect of a bad lifestyle on both health and marriage.

He had faith in being able to turn things around, though. He gave up alcohol and smoking and inspired me with his 'we can do this, you can do this' belief, as well as his ethos of giving back and doing the right thing. So, that was my inspiration in the early days.

Now, what drives me is a desire to do something positive and use my life for good. I want to unleash people power, helping individuals to activate their potential to improve their own health and that of the planet. That is my purpose, and tapping into it enriches my life. ●

More
- www.tgogc.com

Bio: Georgie Delaney studied at University College London and the Milan Politecnico and gained a First Class Honours Degree in Industrial Design and Italian in 2004. She joined the Communications Department of Sport England in 2005 and supported projects including their national fitness campaign 'Everyday Sport', before founding The Great Outdoor Gym Company in 2007. She was awarded an MBE in 2021.

Premium VISION

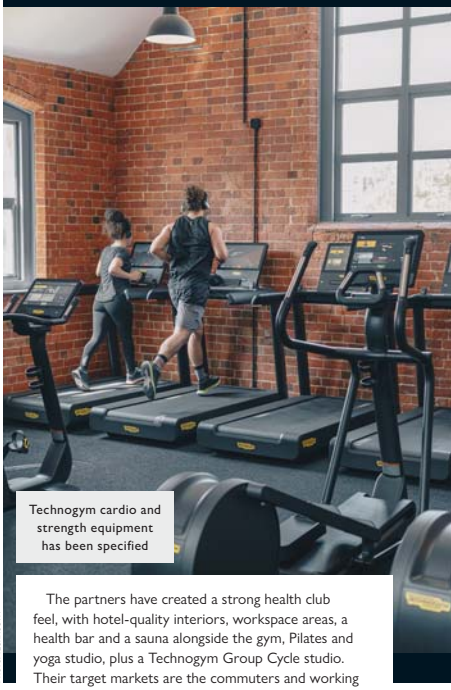
iST Fitness has launched the first of five new premium health clubs with Technogym Excite Live at its heart

The new Caversham Health Club by iST Fitness is focused on delivering a premium experience and co-owners, Isaac Smith-Tibby and Sophie Melton, chose Technogym to create an exclusive offer to support their brand vision.

Smith-Tibby has been in the fitness industry for over 10 years, as a personal trainer and then a small studio owner. Owning a premium health club chain has always been his ultimate goal, and when the opportunity arose to open the first site by taking on a historic building in Caversham, Smith-Tibby and Melton – a Pilates instructor – were all in.

Caversham Health Club by iST is located in a stunning 1800s building that has a history of serving the community as a school, community centre, and now a premium health club.

PHOTO: IST FITNESS



Technogym cardio and strength equipment has been specified

PHOTO: TECHNOGYM

The partners have created a strong health club feel, with hotel-quality interiors, workspace areas, a health bar and a sauna alongside the gym, Pilates and yoga studio, plus a Technogym Group Cycle studio. Their target markets are the commuters and working professionals of Caversham, who are delighted to have a different fitness offering in their local town.

"Our vision was to create a premium space that feels like a retreat," explained Smith-Tibby, "where members will come to work out, but also want to stay to relax, work, or spend time with friends."

Isaac Smith-Tibby and Sophie Melton

We've always aspired to have Technogym equipment in our facility
Isaac Smith-Tibby

Next generation offering

Caversham Health Club's gym floor is a large open space kitted out with Technogym equipment, including the Excite Live cardio range, Selection strength equipment, Olympic lifting and a full range of free weights.

"We needed next-generation cardio options for our members and Excite Live brought a level of innovation that supported our vision," says Melton, "we wanted members to have access to content and entertainment during their cardio sessions and were impressed by Excite Live's capacity to coach the user during their workout."

Excite Live Routines and Sessions content ensures the end-user always has quality guided programming to follow, which takes the pressure off personal tainers and allows them to engage with members elsewhere on the gym floor.

Technogym Group Cycle is worlds apart from traditional indoor cycling

PHOTO: TECHNOGYM

PHOTO: TECHNOGYM

The first iSF Fitness location is in an 19th century building in Caversham

"Members have been astounded by how innovative Excite Live cardio kit is. The variety of support helps keep every type of member moving, regardless of their mood or motivation," says Smith-Tibby. "Not everyone needs the specific coaching content – some choose to visit the gym to simply catch up on their favourite TV show while keeping their body moving. It's a game-changer in helping people stay active.

"I've used Technogym equipment throughout my career as a PT and have always known it's the best on the market," he says. "Nothing compares to it for innovation, functionality, and looks. We've always aspired to have Technogym equipment in our facility – and our next location will be wall-to-wall Technogym!"

Studio training experiences

Caversham Health Club's three studios include a HIIT bootcamp studio, a Pilates and yoga studio and the flagship Group Cycle studio.

The stunning studios are a major selling point for the facility, and Group Cycle proved a big hitter throughout pre-launch, while also having huge impact during member visits and on word of mouth recommendations.

Smith-Tibby knew he needed an indoor cycle offer, but wanted something so fresh and innovative that it would function as a USP. Caversham is home to a significant number of cyclists and triathletes who are impressed by Group Cycle's carry-over into their outdoor training and competing. Group Cycle's equipment provides members with an unparalleled cycle workout experience.

"I knew that if I hadn't personally come across anything to match Technogym Group Cycle, then my members also would be blown away by it," he said. "It's worlds apart from traditional indoor cycling. It's new, exciting and gives our members an experience they can't get anywhere else locally."

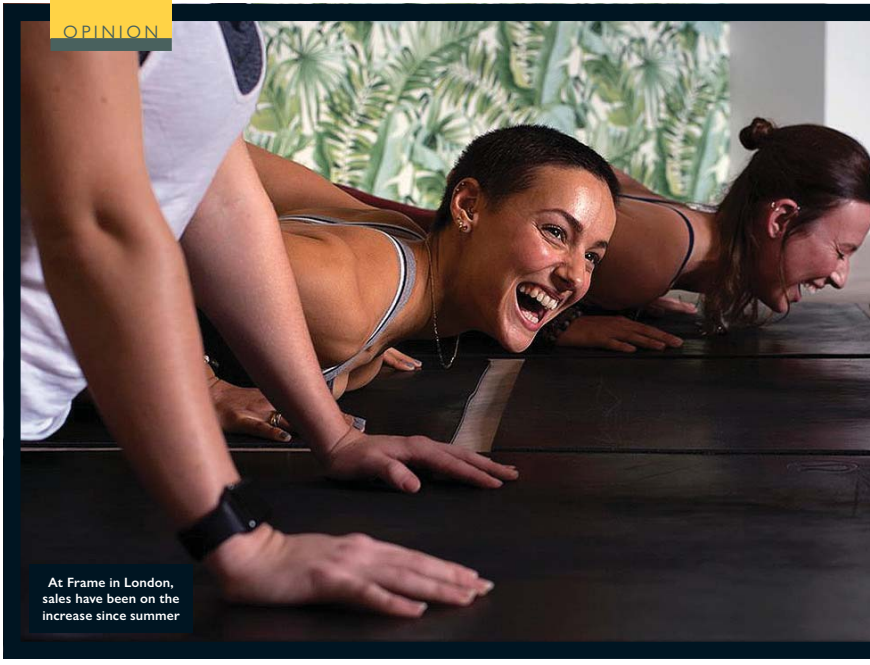
Partnership to deliver the vision

Caversham Health Club's members aren't the only ones impressed by the choice of Technogym equipment. The staff, including personal trainers and class instructors, love the equipment's versatility and ease of use.

Smith-Tibby and Melton teamed up with Technogym at the start of the project, and the team helped them map out the space to optimise the layout, advising on products and creating an environment that would serve members. As the project progressed, Technogym offered training and ongoing support, plus marketing support for pre-launch through advertising and social media content.

As iST Fitness grows, Smith-Tibby and Melton plan to open four more locations, all of which will use Technogym as equipment supplier and proud partner.

More: www.technogym.com/HCM3



At Frame in London, sales have been on the increase since summer

Everyone's talking about
Studio bounceback

In the last issue of *HCM*, we checked with big box operators in the UK to see how trading has been going since restrictions were lifted. This month we turn our attention to boutiques and urban studios to find out how they're faring. Kath Hudson reports

London has been quiet since the pandemic hit – some days in September 2021 it was estimated office occupancy was as low as 11 per cent.

This lack of footfall has had an impact on attendance at studios – as well as bars, restaurants, takeaways and theatres. The summer holidays exacerbated the problem, with many London workers choosing to decamp and work elsewhere.

However, now we're into Q4, holidays are over and people are returning to their offices. The first Monday of September was the busiest morning rush hour since the pandemic hit. Tube traffic before 9am jumped by 19 per cent compared to the previous week and bus travel by 43 per cent. Hopefully this is a sign we're moving back towards the old normal.

So how are urban and city-based operators faring through this difficult time? We ask our panel.

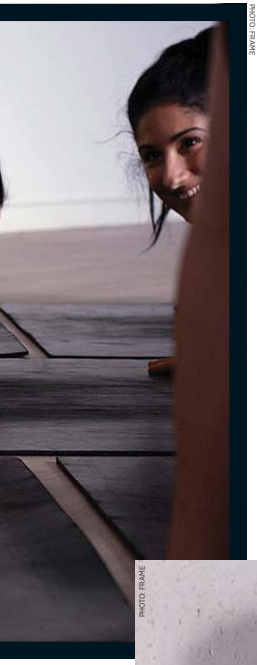


PHOTO: FRAME

Joan Murphy

Frame

At the beginning of the pandemic, like most fitness operators we quickly pivoted online with both on-demand and live stream content. We call this Frame Studio 8. This studio has supported both new revenue during the pandemic but also retention of current Framers and supporting the community with charitable campaigns. Frame Online has been key to delivering on our brand vision of getting more people moving for mental and physical wellbeing.

> Pre-pandemic we were exceeding budgets and we expect to be back to that level during 2021

Studio sales this summer were up on the same period last year and we're now driving sales into Q4.

Pre-pandemic we were exceeding budgets and we expect to be back to that level during 2021. For now, we're focusing on rebuilding the communities at each of the studios.

Our physical locations are all central London-based, so it's hard to see what consumer behaviour will be like once offices return in the longer-term. In the short-term, we've seen people blending online and in-studio, with online our best performing 'site' at present.

We've seen a trend away from HIIT and more intense classes towards the more fun and lower tempo classes. There could be a lot of reasons for this, but pandemic fatigue is definitely a contributor.

We haven't seen a change in profile, however we're seeing a lot of new acquisition from people who haven't exercised in a long time. We have a long way to go to build back from the pandemic, but the more we as an industry can break barriers to using our facilities the more society will benefit.

PHOTO: FRAME

Murphy says the trend has broadened beyond HIIT to include more fun workouts

PHOTO: CLASSPASS

Zach Apter

ClassPass

We've seen some shifts away from central business district usage as commute patterns have changed – more people are working from home, and therefore more likely to work out in suburban residential areas. However, we've observed that both usage and reservations are trending upwards, regardless of geographical location.

In both suburbs and cities, people are eager to return to their pre-COVID fitness routines and among users who have returned to class, average usage is 10 per cent higher than it was before the pandemic, and that number is consistent across suburban and urban areas.

During a recent survey, two-thirds of respondents told us that equipment is one of the driving forces for heading back to studios.

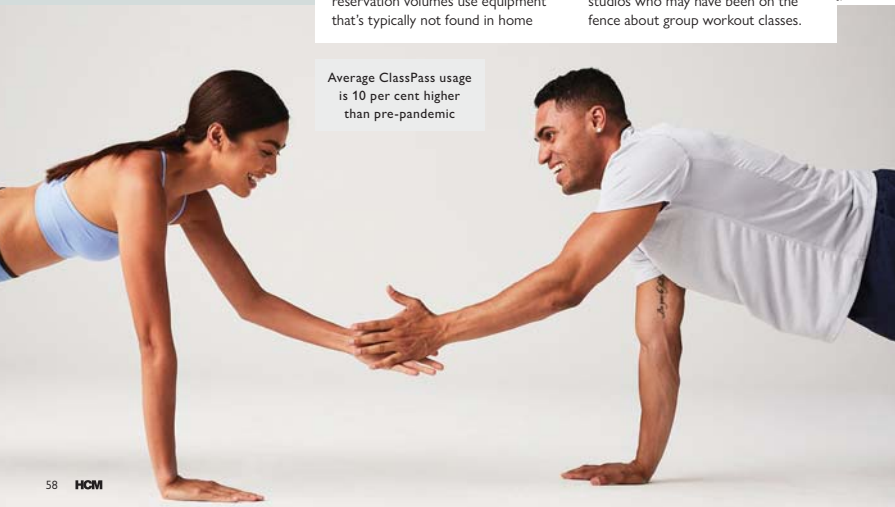
In fact, four of the top five fitness genres with the highest recent reservation volumes use equipment that's typically not found in home gyms and even less likely to be found in city apartments. However, even those in suburbs who may have been able to invest in equipment during the pandemic are eager to get back to studios, with 81 per cent of people saying they push themselves harder in a group setting than they do on their own. We imagine bookings will continue to grow as vaccinations continue and more people feel comfortable heading back to class.

We're also seeing a growing trend of vaccine-required classes, especially in cities such as New York and San Francisco, where vaccines are now required for all indoor fitness studios.

In a recent survey, we found 69 per cent of fitness fans strongly prefer returning to classes that require a vaccine, and 18 per cent plan to only return to studios with vaccination requirements. We believe these vaccine-required classes will be an important step to get people back to studios who may have been on the fence about group workout classes.

> We found 69 per cent of fitness fans strongly prefer returning to classes that require a vaccine

PHOTO: CLASSPASS



Average ClassPass usage is 10 per cent higher than pre-pandemic

PHOTO: CORE COLLECTIVE

> Another six months of this and London will look like Kosovo in the 1990s

Jason De Savary

Core Collective

We're at about 60 per cent of pre-pandemic revenues, which is a problem. It's below expectation and something we expect to continue for at least the next seven months.

The damage caused by the UK government's response to COVID-19 will be long lasting and could even be structural. Freedom Day turned out to be freedom from the hell that England has become and our customers fled to sunnier climes. The challenges associated with travel also mean some people now go away for three weeks to three months to optimise their trip or work from home overseas, so London is much quieter than usual.

We only have residential locations and these have been better used at certain times of day – we've noticed that middle-of-the-morning classes and normal off-peak sessions have picked up, which potentially bodes well for the future.

Clients are returning, but there's still a 'malaise' in London

PHOTO: CORE COLLECTIVE

Those who are coming back to the studios are coming more often and are more engaged and, thanks to the vaccine, people are less scared of COVID-19, so government willing, we could go back to normal very quickly.

However, London still seems to be suffering from a malaise and unlike 2020, there's no push from the government to get people back to their old routines, or back to the office. The closures in March 2020 triggered the most unprecedented government financial response because a three-week closure would be a monumental shock to businesses like ours. However, here we are in month 19, having been closed for 308 days in the past 500-odd, and it's a miracle anyone is still here. Another six months of this and London will look like Kosovo in the 1990s.

PHOTO: UNITED FITNESS BRANDS

Robert Rowland

United Fitness Brands

Since we've been allowed to open up, trading has been largely in line with expectations, which is encouraging, though of course we're all hoping to be able to return to some form of normality/pre-pandemic trading levels across the estate as a whole sooner rather than later.

We've seen there's a strong demand for fitness facilities, and with the easing of self-isolation rules and the ongoing facts that fitness facilities are safe places to be, we feel the future is still bright.

Pre-COVID the whole sector had been on such an upwards trajectory, we're hoping to return to those days, especially as exercise plays such a key role in physical and mental health.

With office occupancy in major cities estimated to have gone as low as 11 per cent at some points, our suburban sites are performing the best. However, we're hearing from our many corporate clients that office attendance is likely to increase during Q4.

> We've seen a good uptick in new customers who had not been into fitness before COVID-19

Our customer demographic remains the same as pre-pandemic and we've seen a good uptick in new customers coming through who had perhaps not been too into fitness before COVID-19 and have since realised how vital it is.

Although our suburban studios remain an important part of our footprint, we're looking forward to seeing all studios in our sector come back to life with increased office occupancy. With excellent ventilation and thorough cleaning we know studios are very safe places to work out, so we're looking forward to delivering more classes for more people and creating safe community spaces for people to feel part of something again. ●

With good ventilation and cleaning, studios are safe places to be

PHOTO: UNITED FITNESS BRANDS/CONNOR MCBOX

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If the fitness industry grew its membership base from the current 1% to 15% of members aged over 65, it would double in value and size

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/MONKEY BUSINESS

Never too late

David Minton says the healthy movement industry is ten times bigger than the health club sector, and the care industry four times bigger and ask why we're not rushing to collaborate?

In 2019 there were over 14.3 million Baby Boomers in the UK, making it the largest generational group. Boomers – people born between 1946-1964 in 2021 – are currently aged 57 to 75. Boomers don't want to get old. I'm a boomer, I should know. That's my first qualification to write this article.

Boomers followed the Silent Generation – born between 1928 and 1945 and the wealthiest generation ever seen. This cohort followed the Greatest Generation – defined as people born from 1901 to 1927. This was my mum's generation, being born in 1923.

My second qualification for writing this article is the experience I gained helping my mum extend her disease- and injury-free life by 15 years, meaning she was able to live a full life well into old age.

Females across England in 2020 have a life expectancy of just 82.7 years, or 78.7 for males. Mum compressed all her impaired-quality of life into the last six months of her 97 years, compared to the average 'decline' which is quoted by The World Health Organization and the UK's National Health Service as being the last 17 years of life.

She did this by remaining active, including doing regular sequence dancing until she was in her mid 80s, as well as yoga, working with a personal trainer and doing elderly judo to help prevent injuries on the occasions when she did fall.

Local authorities, such as Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council in the West Midlands, where my mum lived, have improved the way social care, health, community and leisure services are brought together to support independent active ageing through social prescribing, which forms part of the NHS Long Term Plan.

Many of us will come across situations where 'care' means feeding, washing and personal hygiene, while sitting for long hours in a chair. Not in Sandwell, where the many parts of the health care systems have been joined up and focused on keeping people independent, contributing to society, active and busy.

Reversing the decline in muscle mass is a priority for older adults

New initiative

The movement to keep older people active is leading to a number of fresh initiatives. Power Plate and the Berkley Care Group recently shared the outcomes of an initiative designed to encourage healthy movement in elderly people.

Over 12 weeks, around 250 residents in six care homes took part in the programme, which included vibration training and simple stretches to counter the negative effects of inactivity.

Measurable improvements were found in activities of daily living and fall prevention, following as little as five minutes' vibration training a day.

Power Plate instructors around the world are now listed on the Remote Coach app – one of the top 30 European start-ups based in London and backed by Google with both cash and in-kind support. Remote Coach has grown the number of trainers on its platform to over 20,000, offering live interactive sessions that track progress and motivate users.

One of these trainers is based at the Asics Sports Complex in Tokyo Bay, Japan, where Power Plate vibration training in low-oxygen environments is being used to prevent and alleviate lifestyle-related illnesses.

On my last visit to Japan, November 2019, I had the opportunity to try vibration training in a low-

> **The older population is now bigger than the working age population**

oxygen environment and would highly recommend it. With the oxygen in the air normalised, the complex is also used for active ageing programming.

All this activity is part of a joint research programme between the Asics Institute for Sports Science and the Ritsumeikan Trust, a Japanese educational institution which provides education to around 50,000 students and pupils from primary school to university.

Research papers galore show similar conclusions. The older you get the more likely you are to be inactive, but it doesn't have to be that way. Research presented at the cardiology conference, ESC Congress 2021, from a study of 33,576 patients with an average age of 62 showed that it's never too late to start exercising to reduce the risk of dying from heart disease.

As exercise expert Daniel Lieberman from Harvard University points out, more research is required to understand the 'dose' of activity that switches people from being in a negative feedback loop to being in a positive one, where exercise becomes necessary and fun.

Declining muscle mass is part of ageing, but that doesn't mean you're helpless to stop it. I wrote my first article on active ageing in 2006 and concluded that the research is there – if we want to find it – to build the case for doing more for the ageing population. Unfortunately, the fitness industry hasn't changed that much since then, but health providers have, meaning we're not keeping up.

The Kings Fund estimates the government in the UK spends around £22 billion a year on adult social care on behalf of around 850,000 people who are either living in care homes or being supported to live independently in their own homes. It's also estimated that unpaid caregivers save the state around £10bn a year by supporting friends and family. Around 1.5 million people work in the care sector.

This scale of expenditure means the care sector is four times larger financially than the fitness industry and yet it's generally ignored by the sector in spite of the fact that social prescribing,

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/JUICE VERVE

David Minton – personal

To improve my own healthy movement I'm taking mobility classes in Hyde Park with outdoor training provider, Be Fearsome. Indoors I'm enjoying LIIT (Low Impact Interval Training) with SoulBody and in Jubilee Hall, Covent Garden – which has been at the heart of the community since 1978 – I'm doing Active Jubilee classes which caters for the older community and also took part in national Silver Sunday – the national day for older people on the first Sunday in October.

Staying fit and healthy is crucial to the enjoyment of the 'age of perfection'

care homes and care packages are multi billion pound opportunities for the fitness industry.

New source of funding

In February 2021 the Department of Health and Social Care published the White Paper, Integration and Innovation: working together to improve health and social care for all in which it outlined plans to focus on improving lifestyle in older people to reduce the burden of ill health.

The government has yet to announce the details of how these new funds will be allocated, but the potential savings are becoming obvious. The UK National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has stated that if people lose weight, drink less alcohol and become more active it could save up to £3 billion a year on the care budget.

If the fitness industry grew its membership base from the current 1 per cent to 15 per cent of members aged over 65, it would double the value and size of the industry. It would also become a major partner in local care provision.

But are training providers ready to upskill the workforce to optimise this generational gold mine, at the point where health and activity merge? It seems appropriate to ask if the industry will be ready.

With over 15 million people living with at least one long-term health condition social prescribing provides a huge opportunity for the industry and

More research is required to understand the 'dose' of activity that switches people into a positive feedback loop

ActivelQ's Level 3 Diploma in working with clients with long-term conditions – devised in partnership with Nuffield Health – brings the latest thinking and current best practice into this new qualification. It's good to see PTs will have a more advanced set of skills and deeper understanding to support this growing client group.

New partnerships and qualifications will also help move the national conversation on following the pandemic. Some of the most important conversations the industry needs to be having are around how we can age better and how we can liberate the fitness industry from its ageism.

In the physical activity space I find the fitness sector the most ageist – and that's me talking from experience.

Age of perfection

As people move from thinking about work-life balance to healthy movement-life balance, the Boomers, Silent and Greatest Generationalists will have reached what John Maynard Keynes described as the 'age of leisure and abundance'. Staying fit and healthy is crucial to enjoying this 'age of perfection', yet where and what to do for the best? Inspiring people who survive it to improve their personal fitness levels could be COVID's backhanded gift to humanity, as new industries spring up to cope with the growing demand.

Some sports, such as triathlon, are organised by age group categories in five year age bands up to 80+ and divided by gender. Hiromu Inada from Chiba prefecture in Japan became the oldest finisher of the Ironman World Championship at the age of 85 and at 87 years of age, he won a Guinness World Record for being the oldest person to compete.

Marie Dorothy Buder is the female oldest finisher aged 82, while Edwina (Eddie) Brockleby became the oldest British woman to complete an Ironman triathlon aged 74.

She's also the founder of Silverfit, a charity formed as part of the summer 2012 Olympic legacy and dedicated to the promotion of the healthy benefits of physical activity for older people.

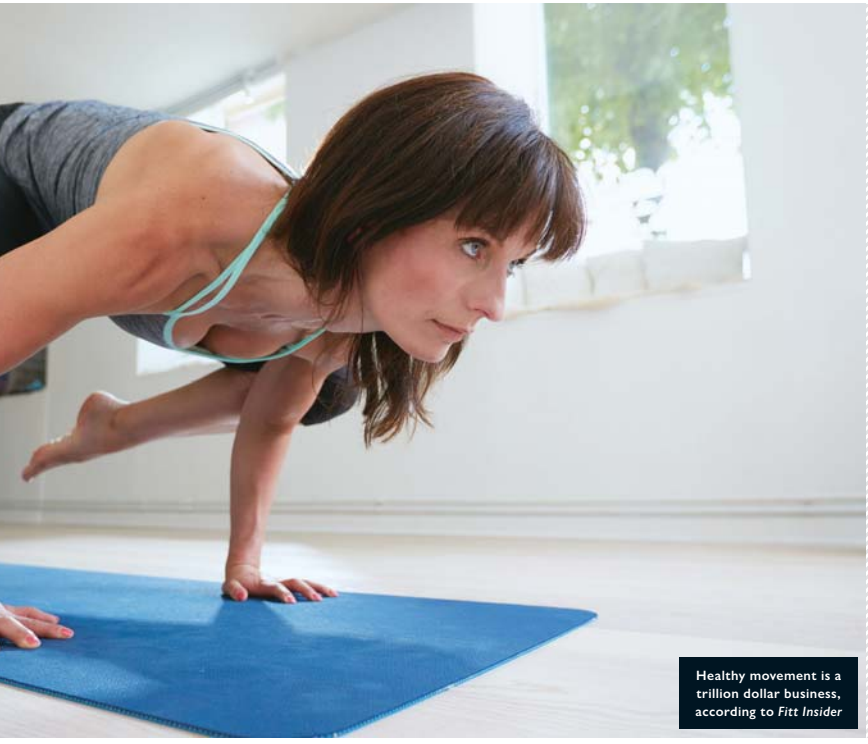
PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/JACOB LUND

Silverfit now organises 13 activities across 14 venues around London. (Check out Silverfit@home on YouTube).

Up to £10m of National Lottery money, distributed by Sport England, is supporting projects encouraging inactive older people to move a little more each day. The aim of Ramblers Walking for Health, for example, is for everyone to have access to a short, free and friendly healthy walks to help people become and stay more active, while Oomph!, one of 20 funded projects, is a wellbeing business for older adults, providing training for care home staff in delivering exercise, activity classes and healthy movement.

Healthy movement

Analysts at *Fitt Insider*, estimate that 'healthy movement' is a trillion dollar business, around ten times bigger than fitness and so prioritising healthy, balanced movement has become the focus of both the largest companies in the world and countless start ups.



Healthy movement is a trillion dollar business, according to *Fitt Insider*

Amazon, for example, has introduced Movement Health as a new feature on HALO, its wrist-worn health and activity tracker. This combines artificial intelligence, computer vision and machine learning to produce personalised programming of everyday movements we mostly take for granted and do without thinking.

Understanding ageing

Ageing is now the predominant cause of disease worldwide and yet it remains poorly understood. The Institute of Healthy Ageing at University College London is the centre of excellence for research on the biology of ageing and ageing-related diseases – one of the most important challenges in biomedical research today.

Harvard Health and the American Society for Bone and Mineral Research have worked with fitness suppliers, Keiser and Power Plate, to publish a considerable amount of research on older adult fitness, including fall prevention, increasing bone density, preventing and controlling osteoporosis and increasing strength and muscle mass, to name a few, so our knowledge is increasing.

The NHS encourages some type of physical activity every day and the more you do the better. However, these guidelines – along with retirement ages, which are 66 for both men and women in the UK, rising to 67 by 2028 and 68 by 2037 – perpetuate the myth that 65 is old when it's not.

The majority of Boomers are still working, like me, and staying active. In just ten years time 27 per cent of the UK population will be aged 70 plus. For many, 70 will be the new 60 and 60 the new 50 with one message everyone agrees on – it's never too late to start exercising.

David Minton is founder of The Leisure Database Company www.leisuredb.com

Global fitness

Research firm Qualtrics surveyed 12,157 consumers across 15 countries in seven languages to create the *Les Mills 2021 Global Fitness Report*, highlighting the ways consumers are choosing to work out as we emerge from the pandemic. Jak Phillips reports

The *Les Mills 2021 Global Fitness Report* explores how the pandemic has changed fitness habits and spotlights the trends that will shape workouts in the years to come.

The study reached consumers in the USA, Brazil, the UK, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, China, Japan, Russia, Australia and India.

It found gyms around the world are experiencing a 'live revival', with fitness fans eager to get back to working out with friends for motivation and social connection after months of solitary home workouts. As well as the return of live workouts, the report explores how digital offerings are likely to evolve beyond the pandemic and what strategies fitness operators can deploy to provide the optimal mix between live and digital offerings to meet the increasingly sophisticated needs of members.

"As the fitness industry continues its rapid expansion, the margin between success and failure becomes ever finer," notes Les Mills founder and executive director, Phillip Mills, in the report's foreword.

"Against a backdrop of fierce competition and fast-changing trends, razor-sharp insight and excellent execution are the keys to stealing a march on your rivals."

PHOTO: LES MILLS

The pandemic has prompted consumers to prioritise their health

> *Class occupancy has reached 120% of pre-pandemic levels in markets where capacity restrictions have been lifted*

After 'enforced' workouts at home, live classes are booming again

PHOTO: LES MILLS

Here's a snapshot of seven key trends highlighted by the report:

1. The new fitness industry landscape

Gyms worldwide are making strong recoveries in terms of member returns and financials

COVID-19 has forced all businesses to re-think their go-to-market strategies. For fitness providers, this has meant using the pandemic as a catalyst for a completely new approach to meeting people's fitness needs.

The pandemic has prompted consumers to prioritise their health, with 50 per cent of the sample focusing more on their wellbeing in 2021 than previously, while 82 per cent regularly exercise (or soon plan to).

Of those who exercise, 75 per cent do gym-related activities, making fitness the world's biggest sport. This presents growth opportunities for fitness providers as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and their clubs return to full capacity.

The report finds clubs worldwide making strong recoveries since reopening and in markets where restrictions have lifted, operators are reporting increased member activity compared to pre-COVID levels, and decisive eagerness among new joiners.

Major players such as David Lloyd Leisure in the UK (see www.HCMmag.com/RussellBarnes) have already surpassed pre-COVID membership levels, while Planet Fitness, Pure Gym, and The Gym Group have all released strong earnings reports in recent weeks, demonstrating resurgence among club operators in some world regions.

2. Live revival

Class attendances are at 120 per cent of pre-COVID levels in markets where restrictions have been lifted

Despite fears the COVID-inspired home fitness boom would spell the end for fitness facilities, research suggests social live fitness experiences are driving the club recovery, with 85 per cent of gymgoers stating they're interested in trying live classes in their health club. Meanwhile, class occupancy has reached 120 per cent of pre-COVID levels in markets where capacity restrictions have been lifted.

After a year of enforced home workouts, appetite for live fitness experiences in groups ▸

PHOTO: LES MILLS

59 per cent of people surveyed favour a 60:40 split between gym and at-home workouts

KEY FINDINGS

84% of gym members also **work out at home**

Gym members are more than **twice as likely** to use **at-home fitness options** when compared to non-gym goers

86% of group fitness participants are **doing a branded class**

On average, **27%** of fitness consumers consider themselves **absolute beginners**. This ranges from **69%** in **Japan** to **14%** in the **Middle East**

67% of beginners say they prefer to **work out alone**

35% of the sample **exercise to reduce stress**

59% of those who have access to **fitness and wellness services through their employer** make use of them

59% of people surveyed favour a split of **60:40** between **gym and at-home workouts**

is soaring. Two-thirds of gym members (67 per cent) say they prefer working out in groups, while live classes in club are nearly twice as popular as doing livestream classes at home (favoured by 44 per cent of members vs 23 per cent).

"After months of being stuck at home, people can't wait to get back to fitness facilities and enjoy their favourite workouts with familiar faces," says Phillip Mills, Les Mills founder and executive director.

"Much like bars, restaurants and sports events, fitness is experiencing a real 'live revival', as people make up for lost time with a renewed appreciation for real-world social settings.

"Many people have missed the thrill of a busy class and the extra motivation you get from working out with others while being led by a rockstar instructor."

3. The human factor

Two-thirds of gym members prefer working out with others as opposed to alone, with live fitness classes cited as the most popular offering at the gym

With strong consumer demand for social connection driving the live revival, it's inevitable the people working in clubs will have a vital role to play.

Great instructors are identified as the single most important factor for gym-goers when choosing a live class, favoured by 28 per cent, ahead of the quality of music (24 per cent) and type of

Great instructors are cited as the single most important draw

PHOTO: LES MILLS

class (21 per cent). Quality instructors are cited as a key component of the live revival, meeting strong consumer demand for added motivation and deeper connection in their workouts.

Having great people is particularly important for winning new members – 30 per cent of club prospects say "a good atmosphere" is a key factor in choosing a gym to join, while 59 per cent say staff are also a consideration.

"Despite the digital advances made during the pandemic, it's our people who drove members to join clubs in the first place, and as you'll see in this report, it's our people who are proving the key to bringing them back," says Phillip Mills.

4. The secret sauce

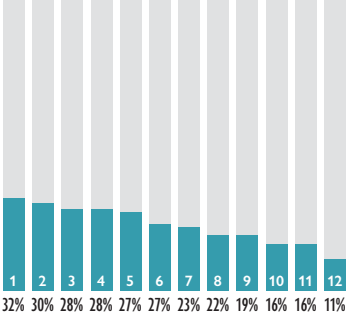
Live classes are more than twice as appealing as livestream options at home, although 80 per cent of gym members plan to continue using digital workouts in addition to live workouts

What's the perfect blend of live and digital workouts in the new age of fitness? It's a question taxing many club operators and one which the report sets out to answer through the latest data and examples of success from various markets.

Omnichannel fitness – a blend of in-gym and digital home workouts – is tipped to gain traction as we emerge from the pandemic, with the majority of exercisers (59 per cent) favouring a 60:40 split ▸

> *Nearly 60% of exercisers favour a 60:40 split between gym and home workouts*

Most popular fitness class



1	HIIT
2	Indoor cycling
3	Dance
4	Stretching / mobility
5	Core conditioning
6	Step aerobics
7	Strength training
8	Other cardio / aerobics
9	Pilates
10	Martial arts
11	Yoga
12	Boxing
13	Functional circuit training

between gym and home workouts. Far from being simple stop-gaps to tide the industry over during the COVID pandemic, livestream and on-demand have become vital additions to clubs' long-term digital offerings, with 80 per cent of members planning to continue using them post-pandemic.

And though live fitness experiences remain the pinnacle, the digital fitness boom and the growth of home working mean today's fitness consumers demand a connected fitness experience that offers convenience and enables them to maintain a more active lifestyle.

Seamlessly linking live and digital will be key to club success. High-class digital offerings can help clubs win new fans online, build brand affinity, and then eventually convert them to becoming full members of the club.

5. HIIT is still hot

HIIT is the most popular fitness class, favoured by 32 per cent of participants, closely followed by indoor cycling at 30 per cent and dance classes at 29 per cent.

In an industry as notoriously trend-driven as fitness, HIIT is proving the exception to rule. Having dominated most of the last decade, HIIT is hotter than ever, with 32 per cent of consumers listing it as their favourite class format.

But it's not just HIIT-heads who are loyal – 58 per cent of members say they would likely cancel their membership if their gym took away their favourite class, regardless of the genre.

Participants are also highly discerning, with 86 per cent choosing to do branded classes, and 62 per cent stating the presence of quality elements (the quality of music,

PHOTO: LES MILLS

Members will continue to blend live classes with digital classes

instructors, equipment, choreography) are key to deciding which classes they attend.

In a world of endless quantity, it's never been more vital to focus on quality, particularly from a digital perspective. With Youtube chock-full of free, average fitness content, clubs need to ensure they're providing world-class content to keep members engaged and willing to pay.

6. Beginners are embracing fitness

Lockdowns have also spawned a new generation of fitness fans, with 27 per cent of regular exercisers describing themselves as 'absolute beginners'

Lockdown saw a new segment of fans who have taken tentative first steps into health and fitness and are now deciding what comes next, with 27 per cent of regular exercisers describing themselves as 'absolute beginners'. But who are these new market entrants? And what do they want from a fitness experience?

Opportunities abound for the health and fitness operators who can appeal to these groups and understand the unique barriers to exercise they face. Although 81 per cent of beginners are interested in group activities, 66 per cent say they currently prefer to exercise alone, suggesting a confidence chasm that needs to be bridged before beginners feel fully comfortable.

Instructors and wider staff have a key role to play in ensuring they feel welcome, while helping beginners find intrinsic motivation to exercise will be key to their long-term adherence.

7. Total fitness transcendence

The workplace wellness market is opening up new opportunities for health club operators

As home working becomes more prevalent and the boundaries between work and play are blurred, so too are the distinctions around the provision of fitness services, creating significant opportunities for clubs.

Employers are increasingly recognising the benefits of an active workforce and their responsibility to support this, while employees are gravitating towards companies that care, so the offer of quality fitness services is becoming a key differentiator.

The impact that wellness offerings can have on both work performance and employee health is also accelerating their prevalence, creating lucrative opportunities for omnichannel fitness providers to reach lucrative new audiences.

For clubs, the ability to demonstrate the scientifically proven impact of workouts will place you in a strong position to succeed in the workplace wellness market, where return on investment (ROI) carries great weight among decision-makers. ●

More: www.HCMmag.com/LMGFR

A new Benchmark

"With restrictions continuing to plague fitness clubs in some parts of the world, it's challenging to quantify the full impact of COVID-19 on the global health club industry," explains Melissa Rodriguez, director of research at IHRSA. "However, in creating the latest *IHRSA Global Report*, we've taken insights gathered from the closures, feedback from leading operators and information from publicly traded companies, to identify the key takeaways from 2020 and understand the outlook for the future."

PHOTO: IHRSA

> We've taken insights gathered from the closures, feedback from leading operators and information from publicly traded companies, to identify key takeaways from 2020
>
> *Melissa Rodriguez, director of research, IHRSA*

***This year's edition of the* IHRSA Global Report *which addresses performance from 2020, is a valuable record of the tremendous impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector, creating a benchmark from which to understand the recovery. Kristen Walsh reports for* HCM**

Key IHRSA research takeaways

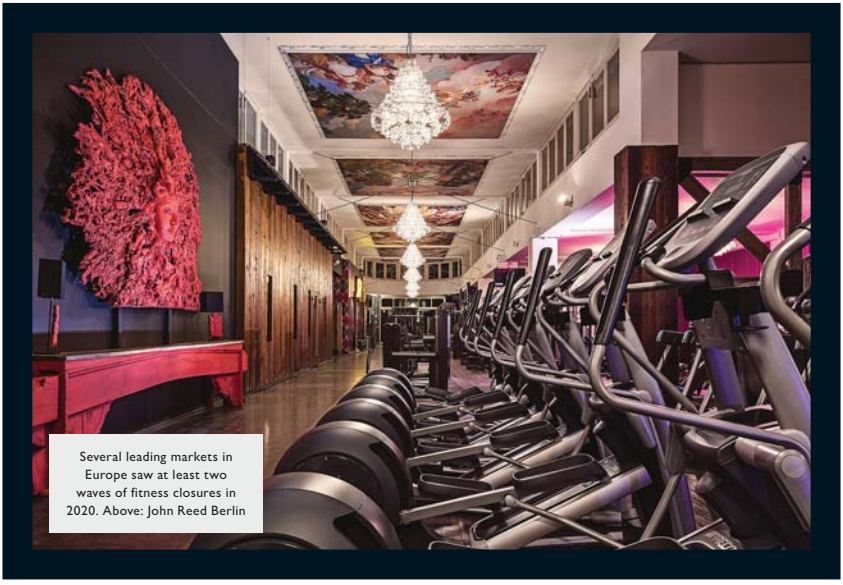
1. Closures and restrictions overwhelmed the industry worldwide in 2020

In North America, while restrictions had been loosened in some regions, capacity limits remained in the majority of states and provinces. Around 17 per cent of health club establishments in the US permanently closed in 2020, as the industry lost 58 per cent of its revenue when compared to the previous year.

In Canada, shutdowns led to closures lasting up to six months for many health clubs. In 2021, Canadian businesses are still grappling with capacity restrictions across multiple jurisdictions.

The top Latin American fitness club markets encountered prolonged shutdowns, some continuing into 2021. Gyms in Colombia and Peru contended with maximum capacity restrictions of 30 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively, while clubs in Mexico and Argentina were closed for up to eight months. Fitness centres in Chile were still closed as of April 2021, with restrictions continuing in some parts of the country by August 2021.

Several leading markets in Europe endured at least two waves of fitness closures in 2020, with some such as the UK dealing with three.

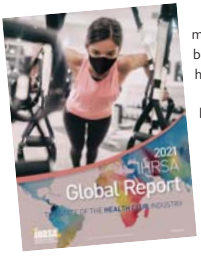


Several leading markets in Europe saw at least two waves of fitness closures in 2020. Above: John Reed Berlin

PHOTO: IHRSA - JOHN REED BERLIN

The most recent wave of lockdowns in 2021 has dictated closures in Germany, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Denmark and some regions of Spain.

Fitness club closures in the Asia-Pacific region varied in 2020. In China, a nationwide lockdown lasted about two months, including the Chinese New Year, when most businesses traditionally close. Clubs in India were extremely challenged during national lockdowns, with some regions being closed for more than seven months.



2. Recovery will be a long-term effort across the industry worldwide and uneven across segments

Budget gyms seem poised for a quicker comeback where they're allowed to resume in-person business free of harsh restrictions.

With locations spread across geographic markets and with varying closure durations and restrictions, Planet Fitness and Basic-Fit 2020 membership levels decreased by only 6 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively, relative to 2019. Both brands grew their number of locations in 2020, despite the global pandemic.

Ongoing closures and restrictions may be more severe in terms of lost business for studios, especially if they have a pay-as-you-go business model.

YogaWorks, The Flywheel and Cyc Fitness – studio brands that filed for bankruptcy in the US – closed all their locations in 2020 and as we went to press, some of SoulCycle's nearly 100 facilities were still closed in the US.

Expanding to hybrid with digital fitness was especially critical for smaller footprint studios, while liquidity has been key to recovery for clubs enduring ongoing shutdowns and reduced membership levels, which may elevate the closure risk of small businesses. Mature club operators with liquidity and access to capital are withstanding the pandemic far better.

The annual reports issued by publicly-traded health club companies have all emphasised the importance of liquidity as the means to endure economic uncertainty due to prolonged closures and restrictions.

A study from JP Morgan of more than 500,000 small businesses showed that the typical small enterprise has less than 30 days' worth of expenses in reserve.

> *While nearly 20% of clubs closed for good in the US, the number in Germany decreased by only 1.4%*

PHOTO: XXVXXG/SHUTTERSTOCK

3. Fitness clubs located in regions either less impacted by COVID-19 or with access to government relief are positioned for recovery

Markets with ongoing, multiple closures face an uphill challenge for recovery relative to markets with short-lived lockdowns, such as China.

Based on *The 2019-2020 China Health & Fitness Market Report* by Deloitte, China's leading health and fitness brands report their membership attendances and group exercise participation in June 2020 was at 67 per cent and 84 per cent respectively, when compared to June 2019.

In Latin America, key markets struggled with closures ranging from a few months to a year and counting as we go to press. Latin American clubs that participated in the survey for this year's *IHRSA Global Report* cited a double-digit percentage loss in both memberships and revenue. Grupo Sports World, for example, reported year-on-year membership and revenue declines of 38 per cent and 54 per cent, respectively.

Annual results from full-service operators, SATS and Leejam Sports Club Company, suggest an imminent turnaround for clubs in countries less impacted by COVID-19.

SATS is the number one ownership group in terms of number of health and fitness clubs in Norway, Finland and Sweden, where shutdowns were relatively brief in terms of the whole of the west of Europe.

The company grew by five locations and lost nine per cent of membership – a modest decline by COVID-19 standards. Leejam Sports Club Company, based in Saudi Arabia, grew its number of clubs and lost only six per cent of members in 2020.

The Gym Group, a low-cost gym operator in the UK, lost 27 per cent of its members in 2020, when its clubs were closed for 55 per cent of trading days. Revenue dropped by 47 per cent – the highest decline among publicly-traded low-cost club companies.

However, by the end of June 2021, the company was reporting that memberships were getting close to pre-pandemic levels, with total numbers having increased from 547,000 at the end of February 2021 to 734,000 as of 28 June, versus 794,000 in December 2019.

Access to adequate government relief may have played a critical role in keeping clubs open in some developed markets. While nearly 20 per cent of clubs closed for good in the US, the number in Germany decreased by only 1.4 per

The *2019-2020 China Health & Fitness Market Report* by Deloitte showed the market in China has coped well with the pandemic

cent. The Paycheck Protection Program in the US – an employment-related relief measure – did not fully address the fixed costs associated with running a health club operation, which are expenses the proposed Gyms Act covers [IHRSA's proposed legislation to protect the sector in the US www.HCMmag.com/gymsact]

In Germany, lawmakers approved a number of relief measures, including a reduced VAT rate, up to 12-months' wage subsidies for furloughed workers and the suspension of obligation to file for insolvency, which gave businesses more time to apply for government aid or to make restructuring arrangements in order to continue operations.

Conclusions

These takeaways highlight that although there will be regional hotspots of rapid recovery, overall, it will take time for the global health and fitness industry to get back to pre-pandemic trading levels globally.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of health and physical activity, auguring well for the long-term outlook of the industry. The boom of digital fitness and home equipment sales in 2020 speaks to the growing awareness and increasing demand from consumers.

Pre-COVID-19, the global industry served more than 180 million members at 205,000 clubs in nearly 70 global markets and we expect these numbers to be regained as the industry recovers, as the health club industry remains uniquely positioned to meet the fitness and wellness needs of communities around the globe.

More: www.ihrsa.org/publications

Social Prescribing

I'd like to see the gym sector help champion the social prescribing agenda, as a route to getting more people engaged in physical activity

PHOTO: JAMES SANDERSON

James Sanderson

Gyms have a role to play in collaborating with the social prescribing movement to improve the nation's health, the CEO of the UK's National Academy of Social Prescribing tells Kate Cracknell

What is social prescribing and how does it work?

Social prescribing is a great new way to help people look after their physical and mental health. GPs and other agencies can refer patients to a social prescribing link worker, who in turn can connect them to a variety of community groups and activities for practical, social and emotional support.

This creates a powerful bridge between health services and the local community and allows people more control over their wellbeing in a way that suits them. The services offered are wide-ranging but can include things such as physical activity, healthy eating advice, arts activities, gardening, cooking classes and befriending schemes.

Prescriptions can range from walking and gardening, to befriending

PHOTO: JAMES SANDERSON

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/MAGEN SIVIRYK

Social prescribing link workers can help address a person's social needs

Is social prescribing the answer to growing health inequalities across the UK?

The National Health Service is moving towards more personalised care and social prescribing is a key part of that – particularly in tackling health inequality. At least one in five GP appointments are about wider social needs rather than just medical issues.

Through social prescribing, we can support people facing these problems by connecting them to community groups, support services or activities that can address these wider issues, on top of improving their physical and mental health.

What's the relationship between NHS England and the NASP?

Essentially, NHS England and NHS Improvement's role is to implement commitments made in the *NHS Long Term Plan* and set the future direction.

We support social prescribing link workers, primary care and integrated care systems to implement social prescribing right across England. We work with a number of partners to achieve this, including the National Academy of Social Prescribing (NASP).

NASP was launched by the UK government in October 2019. It creates partnerships across a variety of sectors to promote the kind of services we've talked about and is a brilliant champion for social prescribing and the work of local communities.

What's your personal vision for social prescribing?

I think the social prescribing movement gives us a unique opportunity to rebalance health and wellbeing activity. It provides us with clear ways to deliver psychosocial support alongside more traditional, medical interventions. There's growing evidence of the power of social prescribing to transform lives and I hope we can enable as many people as possible to achieve their health goals through the programme.

Can you give some examples of best practice social prescribing?

I was personally really moved by the story of Patrick, a 75-year-old dad and husband from Stockport who had retired and felt he'd lost his purpose in life (www.HCMmag.com/patrick). He said he felt he couldn't carry on and his wife made him an appointment with his doctor, who was able to give him a social prescription and put him in touch with his link worker.

Patrick subsequently joined the bowling club, did a Men Matters holistic health course, managed to cook his wife a meal after a cooking lesson ▸

There's growing evidence of the power of social prescribing to transform lives – I hope we can enable people to achieve their health goals through the programme

and now joins others on weekly walks. He says he's now in a much better place and for me, it's hearing stories like this that makes me so proud of the programme and what can be achieved.

How localised are the networks, and how will you scale best practice?

NHS England & Improvement (NHSE/I) has committed to rolling out social prescribing and funding link workers across England. The ambition in our long-term plan is that over 900,000 people a year will be referred to social prescribing by 2023/24, which would mean organising approximately 4,500 social prescribing link workers.

NHSE/I and NASP work closely together to spread best practice around the country. In addition to NHSE/I's regional support for health and care systems, NASP also has a great regional Thriving Communities programme. This programme works with the NHS to support small community organisations, bringing together a whole host of partners such as Sports England, the Arts Council, the Money and Pensions Advisory Service, Historic England and Natural England.

What will be the role of social prescribing in the aftermath of COVID-19?

I think social prescribing will be a key tool in recovering from the pandemic, which has sadly had a huge impact on the nation's physical and mental health. The programme not only helps us address health inequalities but also wider determinants of health, such as stress and loneliness. Ultimately, it helps people connect or reconnect with their local communities.

In particular, I think green social prescribing – with a focus on nature-based activities – will be vital in the coming months and years. This can range from things such as walking schemes and community gardening projects, to green gyms, forest bathing and outdoor arts activities.

The goal is for 900k people a year to benefit from social prescribing

As part of a £5.77m government project – working with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Health and Social Care, Natural England, Public Health England, NASP, Sport England and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government – we've launched seven 'test and learn' sites across the country this year to see how green social prescribing could be implemented more widely.

At what point in the process do you see health clubs and gyms having a role?

Lockdown has meant more inactivity and simultaneously fewer opportunities to access services such as gyms, which will now hopefully play a significant role in restoring access to traditional physical activities.

Our partnership with ukactive is an important step in connecting social prescribing with fitness and leisure activities. With free gym and leisure sessions being offered for up to 100,000 people through social prescribing, more people will be able to access a whole range of local physical activities to help them stay fit and healthy. This can only be a good thing.

I'm sure we're also going to see gyms and similar services finding new ways to deliver

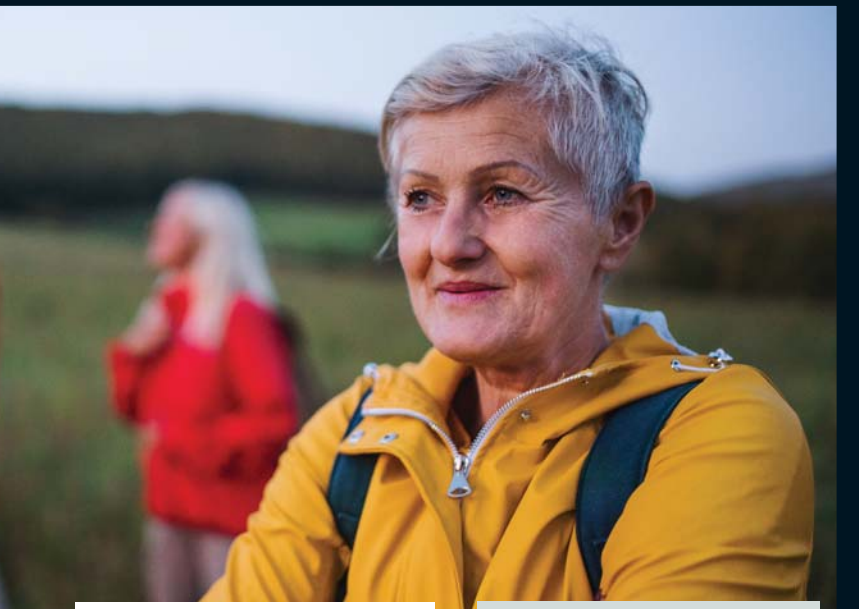


PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/HALFPOINT

services to encourage more people to become more active. There are great opportunities for gyms to work alongside social prescribing link workers, health and wellbeing coaches and local communities to develop creative alternatives that can boost physical and mental health outcomes.

What other things can the health club sector do to support the NHS agenda?

For me, it's about planning leisure opportunities around what matters to the community and being less prescriptive and more willing to develop bespoke services – designed with local people – to create community-led services to address the challenges.

It's also really important for the health club sector to support employees in developing new skills, as well as allowing them to take a more personalised approach. There are clear opportunities here for the NHS and the sector to work closely together, particularly as we're all working towards similar goals.

What would be your call to action to the health club sector as a whole?

I'd like to see the sector help champion the social prescribing agenda, as a route to getting more people engaged in physical activity.

Collaboration is ultimately at the heart of the programme. Social prescribing's strength is built on working alongside the communities where people live their lives. It's not just the opportunity to bring people together, but about creating interactions that are social, active and fun. ●

James Sanderson is CEO of the National Academy of Social Prescribing and director of personalised care for NHS Improvement and NHS England

FURTHER READING

Test & learn

Seven locations will receive a share of a £5.5m UK government investment pot to research how nature can be used to improve mental health and wellbeing.
www.HCMmag.com/nature

ukactive partnership

Physical activity will play a greater role in helping people look after their health and wellbeing due to a partnership between ukactive, NHS England and Improvement Sport England and the National Academy for Social Prescribing to highlight the role of fitness within social prescribing.
www.HCMmag.com/100k

Social Prescribing

Forging new pathways

As the UK government's social prescribing initiative gains momentum, Kenny Butler calls on the sector to step up and get involved

PHOTO: KENNY BUTLER

NHS England's ambitions for social prescribing are moving away from a one-size-fits-all health and care system, towards a set-up which gives people greater choice and control over the services they need to help support and improve their mental and physical health.

Social prescribing is now linking across sectors, including health and fitness, the arts and the natural environment and as a result, ukactive is working on a number of initiatives to link the fitness sector to opportunities that support the wider social prescribing infrastructure.

Working in partnership

The first ever partnership between NHS England and ukactive, announced by chair Tanni Grey-Thompson in 2020, saw the sector pledging 500,000 hours of physical activity provision at no cost to the end user, via the social prescribing services which are being rolled out across England.

These hours are being delivered in various forms, such as one-to-one or group exercise sessions, coaching time, use of facilities and staff time, use of libraries and digital and hybrid fitness offerings.

This initiative highlights the key role the health and fitness sector has to play when it comes to integrating with NHS healthcare pathways and maximising support for the healthcare sector at a time when both the health service and social care systems are under huge pressure.

Our sector has a huge opportunity to develop strong partnerships with the NHS and other health agencies, given we have a breadth of programmes that can play a direct role in improving people's physical, mental and social wellbeing.

We're the engine room of physical activity in this country, with gyms, pools, leisure centres and equipment suppliers already playing an essential role. Our role can grow further through the development of pathways which enable people to get into activity via their doctor or their social prescriber – or through referrals from health care professionals, such as physiotherapists.

Now we want to diversify our programmes and link the healthcare sector to the

The first ever partnership between NHS England and ukactive saw the sector pledging 500,000 hours of physical activity provision at no cost to the end user

thousands of gyms, pools, and leisure centres that exist within every community.

Great work already underway

Social prescribing already exists within the fitness and leisure sector, but we recognise that the healthcare sector doesn't have a full inventory of all the things we can contribute as an industry and so ukactive has launched the social prescribing consultation to rectify this.

Although the research will focus on social prescribing, it will also explore the sector's existing links – formal or otherwise – with the NHS and healthcare, capturing pathways such as rehabilitation, prehabilitation, falls prevention, dance and other social and physical activity interventions.

We aim to identify any form of delivery that connects what health and fitness operators are providing within the realm of social prescribing and health, as well as gaining insights into the job roles of people who are delivering programmes.

We also intend to create a geographical and organisational map of what's on offer, to raise awareness and gain the confidence of doctors, social prescribers and health professionals, when

PHOTO: ROBERT KNESCHKE/SHUTTERSTOCK

The activity sector could take some of the pressure off healthcare

We aim to cement the sector's reputation as an essential service, secure access to long-term funding and position the sector as a socially-driven industry

it comes to referring people to our services. The consultation findings will be analysed and compiled into a report with recommendations to identify social prescribing 'test and learn' sites which are timed to launch across England in 2022.

We're also working closely with NHS England to map out where clinical requirements and resources best match the bank of donated hours which have been given by operators – this insight is then being used to inform the creation of these test sites.

ukactive will also be delivering sessions advising on social prescribing as part of its Together webinar series, to help operators learn more about social prescribing and its ambitions. These webinars will also offer the opportunity for people to raise questions and provide input.

Ongoing commitment

This initiative will enable the sector to enhance its visibility and role in supporting social prescribing, and better understand how activity can be linked into health and social care delivery more widely and effectively.

This has not been planned as a one-off project, but as an ongoing programme, requiring multiple partners to develop, co-design and align with NHS and sector ambitions. The goal is to enable the industry to play a major role in supporting new pathways to improve every patient's choice and control over how they become more active.

The past year has increased the profile on the essential services we provide. It's vital our sector shares its evidence with the health sector and we bring our findings to life, working with members and partners across the sector and the wider health community to showcase our role in improving the nation's health and wellbeing, building on the great work already taking place.

I'd encourage all those who are interested in social prescribing to sign up for newsletters and updates from the National Academy of Social Prescribing (NASP) at www.rsecovidcommission.org.uk and – like ukactive – become part of its Thriving Communities Network.

The NASP is dedicated to the advancement of social prescribing through promotion, collaboration and innovation.

Making a contribution

I also urge you to tell us what you're doing in the social prescribing space and about your healthcare links, as well as registering your interest in donating hours to the social prescribing pathway, by emailing us at kennybutler@ukactive.org.uk or matthewwade@ukactive.org.uk.

With this information and your help, we aim to cement the physical activity sector's reputation as an essential service to the nation, unlock referral mechanisms, secure access to sustainable and long-term funding to improve business operations, diversify your membership base, acquire new members and position the sector as a socially-driven industry.

Through clear governance, culture change and building the business case, this programme will bring together fitness and leisure managers, funders and end-users into partnership.

This is vital to ensure that we position the sector as a viable option for commissioned physical activity interventions, giving people the choice and control to become more active physically, mentally and emotionally within our spaces.

Kenny Butler is strategic lead for health and wellbeing at ukactive

Webinars by ukactive are educating operators on social prescribing

PHOTO: UNKNOWN/SHUTTERSTOCK

Onwards & upwards

Research confirms the role health clubs can play in supporting people in nurturing their mental health, as Victor Brick explains

PHOTO: UNSPLASH/ GERT-PETERS

Three decades of science make it clear: exercise should be integrated into the prevention and treatment of mental illness and the promotion of mental wellness.

Routinely moving our bodies helps us build mental and emotional wellbeing – whether pumping iron, owning the treadmill, strengthening the core with yoga or tai chi, or performing less rigorous activities, such as walking, motion is indisputably associated with mental health benefits.

These are the findings of the John W Brick Mental Health Foundation's *Move Your Mental Health Report*, which analyses more than 1,000 scientific studies published over the last 30 years on the link between exercise and mental health.

These findings could not have come at a better time. According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, in any given year, 26 per cent of adults in the US suffer from some form of mental illness. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that percentage has doubled since the start of the pandemic.

This is because the two things that support mental wellness most powerfully are connectivity and coping skills, while the two things COVID-19 is causing are loneliness and lack of access to coping skills: quarantines separate people, creating loneliness, while they also block people from those who can provide them with coping support, such as fitness trainers, yoga instructors, and other wellbeing professionals.

Mental health is the ability to navigate and recover from emotional, social and psychological

stress. It's the resilience to cope with life events and maintain a general sense of happiness, contentment and wellbeing. As a result, it's more of a journey than a destination.

What role do health clubs play in mitigating the mental health crisis? Traditionally mental health has been thought of as a horizontal continuum with little or no mental illness at one end, mild mental illness in the middle, and severe (high) levels of mental illness at the other. The main forms of treatment in this model are medication, psychoanalysis, and institutionalisation.

A new approach

In the new Dual Continuum Model, developed by the Global Wellness Institute, (as shown in Fig 1) there are two continuums.

The first is the traditional 'horizontal' approach which treats mental health issues as being pathogenic in nature and deals with the 'disease' of mental illness. This approach is focused more on the physiology of the condition and involves conventional clinical care.

The Global Wellness Institute has created a new model for understanding mental health and exercise

Vigorous exercise has been shown to be the equivalent of an entry-level dose of an antidepressant such as sertraline

The second, vertical continuum is salutogenic in nature – this is an approach that focuses on health and not on disease and involves more holistic approaches such as self-care. This model ranges from 'languishing' at the bottom to 'flourishing' at the top.

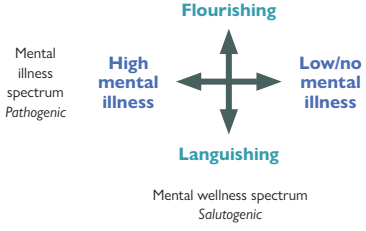
A person can be struggling with mental health issues (languishing) due to external factors such as poor lifestyle choices, external stress, and life events, even though they don't have a clinical mental illness (sse Fig 2).

This is the case with gymnast Simone Biles and tennis pro Naomi Osaka. They're experiencing challenges that arise more from external factors than pre-existing physiological ones.

Conversely, a person can be flourishing even if they have a clinical mental illness. For example, if they have a good diet, exercise regularly and have manageable stress in their life they can be happy and productive, even while having a mental illness such as schizophrenia.

At times, treatment in these circumstances could require the combination of pathogenic ▸

Fig 1 **Dual continuum model of mental wellness and mental illness**



People who exercise 3-5 times per week show better mental health

and salutogenic approaches, such as both medication and healthy lifestyle choices.

The law of positive stress

Much of the salutogenic/wellness continuum is related to the Yerkes-Dodson Law of Positive Stress. Simply put, this law states that performance improves when people are subject to the right amount of physical and mental stress. Too little stress and there's no improvement. Too much stress and there's a drop-off in progress, including in mental health improvement. Again, this is what happened to both Simone and Naomi: too much stress.

The health club industry has an essential part to play in the vertical continuum. Exercise and physical activity are salutogenic – they are all about wellness and self-care.

Most health club members who are suffering from mental health issues will be languishing because of external factors and/or poor self-care, not because of clinically diagnosed mental health issues. These are the people who will benefit from exercise the most.

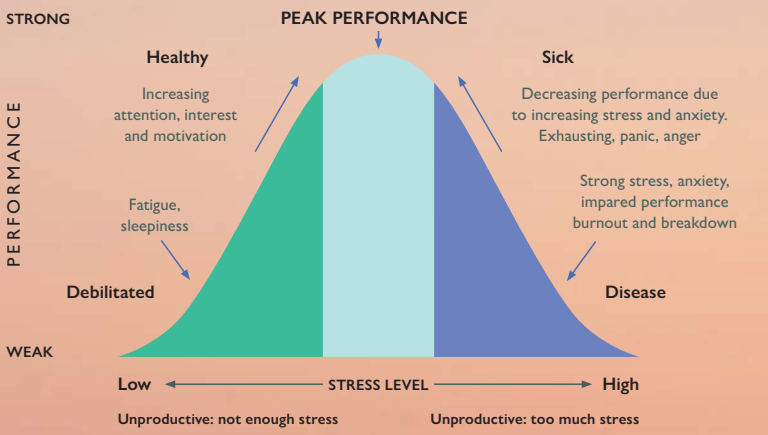
The *Move Your Mental Health Report* analysed research studies by type of exercise and physical activity and rated them as to their effectiveness in benefiting mental health. The research overwhelmingly supports the beneficial role of exercise and physical activity in addressing mental health issues, particularly depression and anxiety – the two conditions that have been most exacerbated by the pandemic.

The report is not meant to imply that exercise and physical activity are the only way to improve mental health – although these were the two areas studied, there is still so much to learn when it comes to ways of improving mental health – but this much we know for sure; exercise and physical activity benefit mental health.

10,000 consumers surveyed by Euromonitor cited better mental health as the main reason for working out

PHOTO: DREAMSTIME/PARIN KIRATATTHAKUN

Fig 2 **The effects of stress**



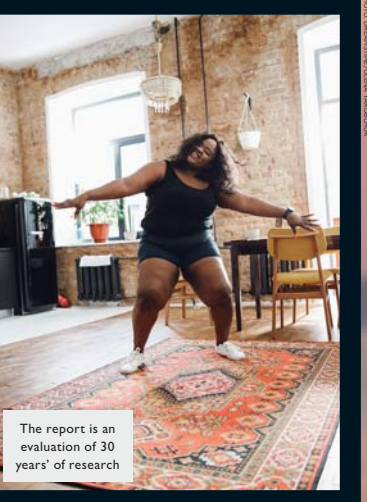
Source: www.HCMmag.com/peak

More than ever before, health club members are seeking support for their mental health. In 2019, when asked by Euromonitor, the international market research firm, why they work out, 10,000 respondents across all four major age groups: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z, gave mental wellbeing as their main reason. These survey results were reported before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The need to support mental wellbeing is undoubtedly even higher now after 18 months of high stress levels being experienced by people all around the world.

Let's take the opportunity to help change the way the world treats mental health. **If not us, who? If not now, when?**

About the John W Brick Mental Health Foundation
The Foundation was founded in 2015 by Victor and Lynn Brick to help give individuals and loved ones struggling with mental health issues the possibility of enjoying a better quality of life. The organisation was conceived following the death of Victor's brother from complications relating to schizophrenia.
More: www.johnwbrickfoundation.org



The report is an evaluation of 30 years' of research

PHOTO: DREAMSTIME/OLENA YAKOBCHUK

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Move Your Mental Health Report

- Exercise is strongly associated with general mental and emotional wellbeing, including reduced stress and improved mood and quality of life
- Evidence strongly supports cardiovascular/aerobic exercise for reducing depression
- Yoga and other mindful exercises such as Tai Chi and Qigong show strong evidence for reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression
- Frequency is more important than duration. Three to five 30-45-minute moderate to vigorous exercise sessions per week appear to deliver optimal results. The key words are 'moderate to vigorous'. This supports the concept of positive stress
- More exercise is not always better. There appears to be a bell curve where people who exercise 3-5 times per week show better mental health than those that exercise less than 3; or those that exercise more than 5. Too much exercise can increase anxiety
- High intensity exercise is generally more effective than low intensity in improving state of mind and enhancing mental health.
- Vigorous exercise has been shown to be the equivalent of an entry-level dose of an antidepressant such as sertraline
- Cardio is the best individual form of exercise for depression and anxiety, but a combination of cardio and strength is even more effective
- Initially, individual instruction is most effective for improving mental health, probably because new exercisers develop a connection with the instructor and learn the new coping skills more easily in a one-on-one environment. Over time, group training can be just as beneficial due to the increased connectivity of being part of a group
- Mindfulness-based activities such as yoga and tai chi – though they can be lower intensity forms of movement – deliver more mental health benefits than walking
- Team sports, cycling, and aerobic or gym-based exercise are the top three forms of exercise associated with over 20 per cent fewer 'poor mental health' days per month

Implementing Change

What are the implications of the *Move Your Mental Health Report* and how can you implement change to support your members and teams?

Explain the model to the team

- We recommend holding a team meeting and educating all your people on the growing mental health crisis and the role health clubs can play in mitigating it.
- Discuss the dual continuum model and the essential role exercise and movement plays in the salutogenic/wellness continuum. Emphasise the importance of positive stress in improving physical and mental wellbeing – understanding that positive stress

Mind-body classes are a powerful tool in the quest for wellbeing

PHOTO: DREAMSTIME/FIZKES

is different for each individual. For some, walking might be positive stress, for example. Also emphasise the point that too little stress is as undermining as too much stress.

Connect with your members

- Promote individual and group personal training as a mental health benefit to members, not just as an effective way to get in shape.

- Offer a wide variety of shorter 30- to 45-minute classes to encourage more frequent visits and workouts. This includes small group personal training, yoga, and group classes – lack of time is usually given as the main reason for not exercising.

- Combine cardio with strength training for optimum results and the most efficient use of time. The best way to do this while incorporating the concept of shorter workouts is to utilise interval training in shorter cardio workouts, combined with appropriate moderate to strenuous strength workouts.

- You can get a very good workout in 12-15 minutes on a piece of cardio employing proper interval training techniques based on heart rate. The first Lifecycle had a 12-minute interval training programme, for example. Circuit training is also an effective way to combine cardio and strength training in a short, efficient workout.

Ensure they're recovering

- A proper schedule of workout days and complete rest days is important. Like my good friend, Jamie Hayes, a fitness veteran in Australia, would say, "Sometimes I just sits and thinks, and sometimes I just sits". Sometimes, it's important to do nothing.

- Be keenly aware of the role of rest and recovery in maintaining good mental health. Encourage members and your team to include Yin activities such as stretching, yoga and Tai Chi in their exercise routine, as well as Yang activities such as cardio, strength training and swimming.

- No matter where people are on the mental health spectrum, they can move themselves toward greater mental wellness by creating an ecosystem of mental wellness that includes the interlocking 'building blocks' they need to build their mental and emotional resilience.

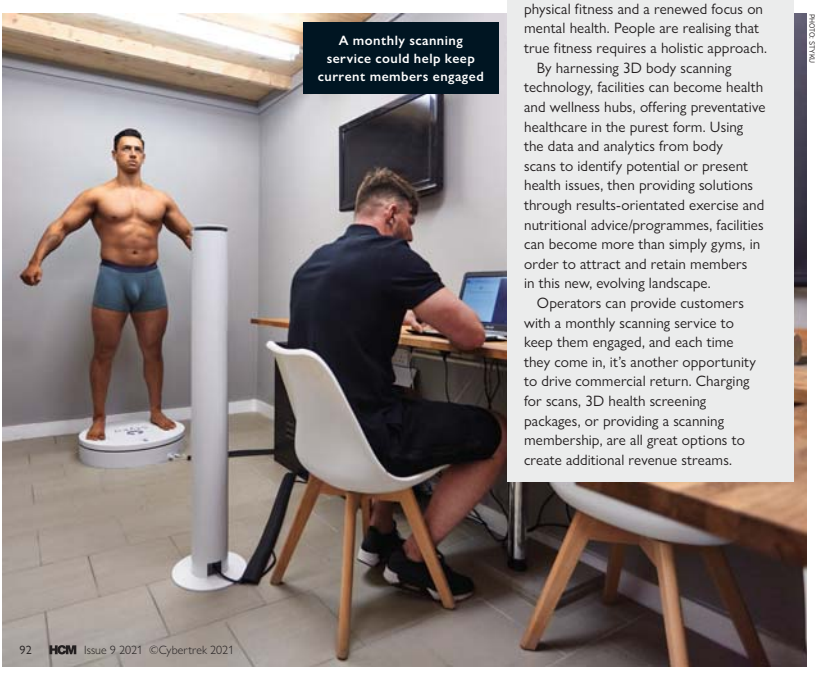
These include exercise, a social support network and good diet, among many other factors. The more building blocks are added, the more people find themselves moving toward greater mental and emotional wellbeing. ●

SCAN IN

Suppliers tell us how body scanning can be used as a revenue generator, as well as an incentive to draw former and new members back into health clubs, where they can track their progress and reach their goals

> **By harnessing 3D body scanning technology, facilities can become wellness hubs, offering preventative healthcare in its purest form**

PHOTO: STYKU, TRACY MORRELL



A monthly scanning service could help keep current members engaged

PHOTO: STYKU

Tracy Morrell
React Fitness/Styku

Operators should market their 3D body scanners as tools for enhancing the 'whole-person health' of members. COVID-19 has given us a fresh appreciation for physical fitness and a renewed focus on mental health. People are realising that true fitness requires a holistic approach.

By harnessing 3D body scanning technology, facilities can become health and wellness hubs, offering preventative healthcare in the purest form. Using the data and analytics from body scans to identify potential or present health issues, then providing solutions through results-orientated exercise and nutritional advice/programmes, facilities can become more than simply gyms, in order to attract and retain members in this new, evolving landscape.

Operators can provide customers with a monthly scanning service to keep them engaged, and each time they come in, it's another opportunity to drive commercial return. Charging for scans, 3D health screening packages, or providing a scanning membership, are all great options to create additional revenue streams.

PHOTO: INBODY

Terms like 'health analysis' and 'immunity management' add gravitas

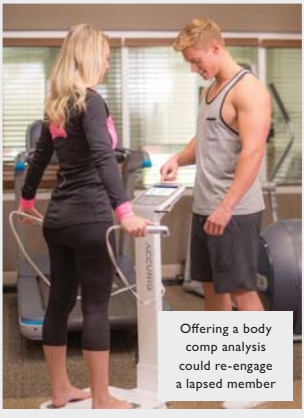
PHOTO: INBODY

To be able to show what is actually happening within the body, rather than just the way a person looks, is paramount

Francesca Cooper
InBody

Gyms need to alter the language in their marketing and communication to ensure it's relevant to how the world is now. It's important to be able to use terms such as 'health check ups' and 'immunity management', 'lifestyle progress control', etc.

Body scanners will become vital for progress – to be able to show what is actually happening within the body, rather than just the way a person looks, is paramount to the health and fitness industry to help provide relevant and meaningful insights to users. Now is the time to educate the population.



Offering a body comp analysis could re-engage a lapsed member

PHOTO: DERWEN VP/PERFECT BODY SYSTEMS

Encouraging members to come to the club for an assessment breaks the ice and gets them back through the door

PHOTO: DERWEN VP/PERFECT BODY SYSTEMS

Philip Middleton
Perfect Body Systems

It's an ideal time to reach out to all members via social media or email to offer an initial free body composition analysis to allow people to see exactly where they are on the restarting of their fitness journey. Encouraging members to come to the club for an assessment breaks the ice and gets them back through the door.

Carrying out a baseline assessment allows you to set goals, while subsequent analysis quantifies changes and increases client engagement with trainers, alongside tracking progress over time. This maintains client motivation and ultimately increases retention.

For clients, being able to see clearly the changes they are making through their efforts keeps them truly focused on their fitness journey.

PHOTO: KELLY WEIDEMAN, EVOLT360

PHOTO: EVOLT360

> **Accountability is a large part of sticking to a fitness regime**

Kelly Weideman
Evolt360

Now is the best time to get members re-connecting with their clubs by incorporating body scans into their memberships and all in-house programmes, and reminding members at the end of a group class that they have access to a body scanner on site.

Always let members know they have access to a body scanner no matter where they are in their health and fitness journey, and that once they perform that first scan they can start up an account with the body scanner's app to keep track of their progress.

Accountability is a large part of sticking to a fitness regime, so allowing direct access to a body scanner may be your answer.

Personal trainers, club/gym owners and staff can combine free body scans with membership renewals, bootcamps and 8-week challenges. ▸

A pre- and post-body scan can be included in fitness challenges

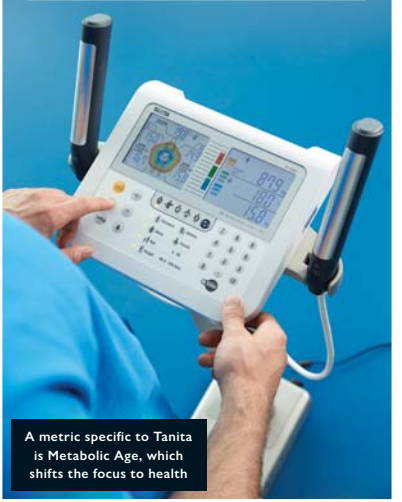
> **No two members are the same, so it's important to find out what appeals to each individual**

Simon Wilkinson
Tanita

PHOTO: TANITA

The 3M wheel put together by Tanita shows just how many different types of members find body composition assessments can appealing. Market to these groups individually and attract more members than ever before. Don't just promote this option to your former members, but to everyone concerned about their health. Not everyone who has a health check will sign up for a gym membership, but they will all see your facility, meet your staff and know exactly the services you can offer to help them live a healthier life.

No two members are the same, so it's important to find out what appeals to each individual. For some, a regular health check will keep them coming back, but for others you need to be more specific. What are their goals, what do they want to achieve by being a member? Once you know this, you can track it and personalise it.



A metric specific to Tanita is Metabolic Age, which shifts the focus to health

PHOTO: TANITA

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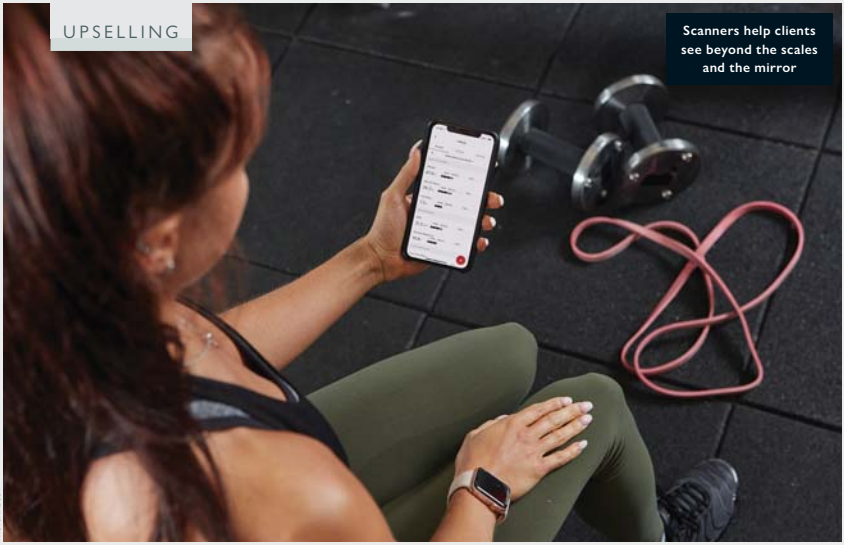

Scanners help clients see beyond the scales and the mirror

PHOTO: INBODY

Body image

After months spent at home, consumers may be feeling particularly sensitive about their appearance. How can operators use body scanning in the most understanding and beneficial way?

Tracy Morrell

React Fitness/Styku

People struggling with body image needn't fear a 3D body scan. Once over the initial impact or uneasiness of seeing themselves replicated in 3D, most are empowered and motivated by the experience, which provides the framework for their health and fitness journeys moving forward. Styku even has a mode that allows the client to self-scan in a private, socially distanced environment – helping operators cater for all types of customer.

Philip Middleton

Perfect Body Systems

By measuring body composition we can both inform and educate clients about their internal body makeup and devise exercise programs to assist them in reaching reasonable goals linked to a more healthy lifestyle, as many unhealthy dieting and exercise behaviours stem from a distorted body image

Francesca Cooper

InBody

For those struggling with body image, education is the key – we need to help them understand that what is happening on the inside is far more important than the outside. Going beyond the scale and looking beyond the mirror are vital messages that InBody uses. You are more than just your reflection!

Kelly Weideman

Evolt360

One of the best advantages of a body scanner is that a full body scan can be done fully clothed. Gone are the days where you'd have to go into a back office of your local gym and strip down to a crop top and your undergarments to have measurements done with a set of calipers, measuring tape and bathroom scales.

Today, a body scanner can sit in the foyer of your local gym and all you need to do is take off your socks and shoes, step on, and hold on for 60 seconds to get your measurements.

Simon Wilkinson

Tanita

The huge benefit of measuring with body composition analysis is it removes all need to assess health based on weight or BMI, which both have significant limitations on an individual level.

A measurement unique to Tanita is Metabolic Age – this is a key tool when shifting the focus away from purely aesthetics. By doing this you remove the potential stigma of fat and provide a unique and easy-to-understand method of tracking progress and health.

Image: https://stylepolstore.com

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Product innovation

Steph Eaves rounds up the latest launches in health and fitness

Xn Leisure's new payment wallet will increase customer satisfaction, explains Penny Southwood

Xn Leisure has released a payment solution designed to be fast and easy to use for both members and operators.

Customers going through the payment process will be able to save their card details in a new system called 'Xn Pay' – providing members with their own online wallet that can store one or multiple cards and a carousel interface enabling users to select the card they'd like to use.

Penny Southwood, MD at Xn Leisure, said: "This is a fantastic way to increase customer satisfaction, as customers don't need to re-type their card information every time they need to pay for something, boosting revenue, enhancing the consumer experience, and increasing the likelihood of them returning".

PHOTO: ANTESPIRE

● Stored card information makes purchases easier

'This is a fantastic way to increase customer satisfaction...and boost revenue'
Penny Southwood

While online payments can sometimes pose security risks, Xn Leisure have ensured the online payment solution is completely secure. Customers need to provide the three-digit CVV code found on the back of their physical card to authorise transactions. All other card details stored are encrypted and any cards stored in the online wallet are only available to the wallet owner and not staff users.

Members can also choose not to store their cards in an online wallet and still pay online, as long as they're happy to input their card details each time.

Xn Pay's Online Wallet is immediately available to Xn customers who have upgraded to version 2.16 of Leisure Hub.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
Xn Leisure

Eleiko's Erik Blomberg says new weight bench line is best-in class

PHOTO: ELEIKO

● The bench design is rooted in pro-sport

Eleiko has introduced a new premium line of weight benches, which includes an assortment of flat, adjustable, incline, decline and Olympic weight benches for performing a range of body weight and free weight exercises.

Eleiko's updated benches have been designed to present a 'refined, timeless' profile that embodies the brand's focus on design, quality, and craftsmanship. The performance, fit and function are rooted in professional sport, with features that cater to the needs of the lifter and facility operator to improve the lifting experience.

The new benches include innovative changes to the customisable positioning, introducing adjustable J-Cups in Eleiko's Fitness Half Rack, with smooth rollers to ensure an optimal lift-off is achieved at racking height for enhanced lifter performance and safety.

"A great bench should support your lifting without limiting your range of motion and enable you to continue improved lifting year after year," says Erik Blomberg, Eleiko CEO. "We've adapted our new lines to reflect how a best-in-class bench should perform. Our line of benches includes improved adjustability and flexibility to get the perfect incline or decline for your presses. The reliable benches ensure a supported and safe lift achieving optimal results without the dreaded leg-wobble."

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
Eleiko

PROMOTION

ICG Connect creates an engaging and social experience for exercisers
Mike Michels, Life Fitness

PHOTOS: LIFE FITNESS

● The interactive system creates an exciting group experience

The ICG Connect System of interactive indoor cycling meets the training needs of all members, says Mike Michels

From the Indoor Cycling Group (ICG), a specialist provider and award-winning leader in indoor cycling, comes the new ICG Connect System. This digital system helps visualise training data for group cycling that can be customised for teams and individual riders. It combines classic indoor cycling with state-of-the-art technology and performance data to create immersive and engaging entertainment.

ICG Connect integrates seamlessly with the complete ICG digital ecosystem, utilising Coach by Color as the foundation of the class, which connects a user's bike console to ICG Connect to create an interactive group experience. Using the ICG app, participants can also save and share their own training results. This unique digital ecosystem promotes social interaction, boosts motivation, and helps riders achieve their personal training goals.

Exciting programming

ICG Connect includes enhanced hardware and added features to set new standards for interactive indoor cycling classes.

No matter the fitness level of class participants or the type of training they prefer – ICG Connect delivers an all-in-one solution for class programming. For studio owners, it provides dynamic programming that offers variety, motivation, interaction, and inspiration.

Instructors will have multiple new programming options to take classes to the next level, from the visualisation of training data to immersing the entire group in breathtaking landscapes or competing in the velodrome.

Class members are inspired by the instructor's motivation and music playlist, combined with shared group experiences, such as the ascent of a mountain pass or the feeling of triumph when your team crosses the finish line first.

Versatile class formats

ICG Connect has three integrated apps that offer a wide range of functions to engage the entire class.

● **ICG Connect Ride** records and visualises group and individual participant's data using various training functions and also displays detailed performance information. To help motivate individuals or the entire group, the system offers breathtaking landscapes with different gradient profiles and Personal or Team Race functions, which allow for visualisation of competitions between individual riders or teams.

● With more than 500 scenic courses, **ICG Tour Coach** uses forward motion video to deliver groundbreaking simulation, interaction, and remote participation capabilities to help riders achieve their fitness goals. It has never been easier to cycle around the world!

● **ICG World Tour's** pre-choreographed ride profiles are based on stunning scenery from around the globe. Instructors also have the option to create their own music playlist and choreography to the predefined routes.

"ICG Connect works seamlessly with the complete ICG ecosystem to create an engaging and social experience for exercisers, the foundation for successful group training," says Mike Michels, senior product manager, ICG. "The immersive and interactive qualities of this interconnected experience drive greater training engagement for both exercisers and instructors in a group cycling session. With the latest upgrades to ICG Connect, we're helping improve studio attendance with invigorating class content to meet the training needs of all members."

● **More: www.teamicg.com**

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
Life Fitness

PHOTO: JONNY CURLEY

'Every indoor and outdoor space can be turned into a mixed reality gaming area'
Jonny Curley

PHOTO: M-TRAIL

● **MultiBall puts physical and digital games together**

MultiBall will be a game changer for facilities, says Hutchison's Jonny Curley

Hutchison Technologies has brought the German-made MultiBall system to the UK, with the aim of getting members more active and engaged by bridging the gap between physical activity and digital games.

Easily installed and designed to be easy to play, MultiBall offers 25 interactive games to engage members and train agility and hand-eye coordination for users of all ages. A quick-play gaming activity, MultiBall offers a gateway to full-time coaching sessions, or an activity within social areas, where kids can be left to play safely without direct adult supervision.

MultiBall consists of a lightweight frame with LED senders and receivers, as well as a speaker and motion tracker. The sensor frame creates a reliable, precise tracking system that detects any kind of ball and player movement in real-time. It can be paired with either a projector or LED panel wall.

"The opportunities are limitless, giving our clients an exciting way to attract and engage new and existing customers. Thanks to a variety of models, every indoor and outdoor space can be turned into a mixed reality sports gaming area within three hours." says director of sales, Jonny Curley.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
Hutchison

Matrix Fitness's Performance Plus Treadmill is durable and efficient, says Andrew Kolman

Matrix Fitness has launched its new Performance Plus Treadmill featuring a shock-absorbing slat-belt and a high-efficiency drive designed to make runs feel comfortable, solid and smooth.

With a 61 x 157 cm / 24" x 62" running surface and a top speed of 25 km/h / 16 mph, and a quick adjustable incline up to 20 per cent, the Performance Plus is built to withstand intense exercise and demanding users.

Engineered to be durable, the Performance Plus can log up to 100,000 miles with minimum maintenance, and operates with lower power requirements than traditional belt-and-deck treadmills. For flexibility, the treadmill is compatible with Matrix's new collection of consoles. "Offering choices when it comes to technology – from simple to sophisticated – was extremely important to us," says Andrew Kolman, senior global director, technology and business development.

PHOTO: ANDREW KOLMAN

'Owners and operators can tailor the equipment experience to guests'
Andrew Kolman

PHOTO: MATRIX FITNESS

● **The Performance Plus can withstand intense use**

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
Matrix Fitness

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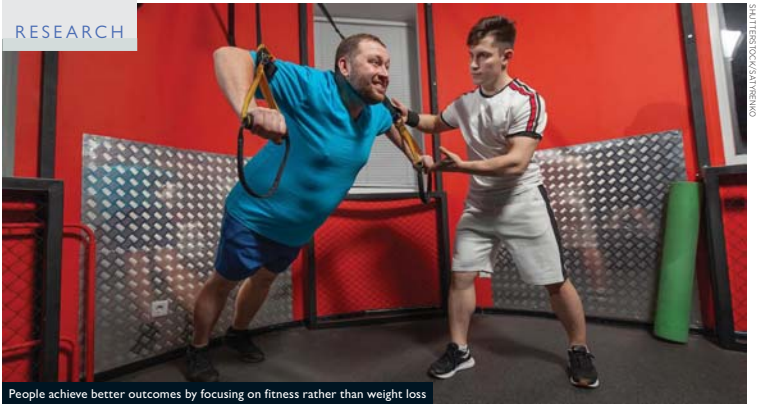


SHUTTERSTOCK/KATREWO

People achieve better outcomes by focusing on fitness rather than weight loss

Exercise trumps dieting

Focusing on dieting has failed to offset the rising tide of obesity, say researchers from the Universities of Arizona and Virginia. A focus on fitness gives better health outcomes

People should concentrate on exercise and staying fit – rather than dieting and weight loss – when it comes to cutting the risks of living with obesity, according to new research.

A study, published in the journal *Science*, looked at existing studies and data and compared the mortality risk-reduction associated with weight loss with that associated with an increase in physical activity and cardiorespiratory fitness.

Risk profiles

The researchers found that the risk-reduction associated with increased fitness and physical activity was consistently greater than that which could be achieved through the use of intentional weight loss programmes, given dieting is commonplace, but obesity levels are still rising.

"Multiple surveys demonstrate a high prevalence of weight loss attempts over the past 40 years, during which time, obesity prevalence has increased approximately three-fold," the report states.

> We're not necessarily against weight loss, we just think that it shouldn't be the primary criterion for judging the success of a lifestyle intervention programme

"Thus, the intense focus on weight loss has not prevented excessive weight gain in recent decades.

"Moreover, repeated weight loss efforts may contribute to weight gain and are undoubtedly associated with the high prevalence of weight cycling, which is associated with significant health risks."

Benefits of exercise

"In contrast to the inconsistent and inconclusive results of decades of intentional weight loss programming and activity, increasing either physical activity or cardiorespiratory fitness is associated with significant reductions in all-cause and cardiovascular disease mortality risk, giving greater benefits."

Called obesity treatment: weight loss versus increasing fitness and physical activity for reducing health risks, the study was authored by professor Glenn Gaesser from Arizona State University and associate professor, Siddhartha Angadi, from the University of Virginia.

Weight obsession vs health

Gaesser said: "We realise that in weight-obsessed cultures, it may be challenging for programmes that are not focused on weight loss to gain substantial traction among weight-conscious populations."

The benefits of fitness when it comes to longevity and all-cause health outcomes are so substantial they should be the priority, said Gaesser: "We're not necessarily against weight loss; we just think that it shouldn't be the primary criterion for judging the success of a lifestyle intervention programme."

More: www.HCMmag.com/gaesser

pulsefitness

pulsebeat

What a summer it's been! It has been fantastic to see everyone come together – amid COVID restrictions – through the power of sport, as we celebrated watching the Euros, Wimbledon and of course the Olympics. These major sporting events have the power to bring people together and given us all a great sense of pride. With it, of course, comes a renewed source of energy and interest in our physical health and wellbeing, something we've seen first hand at Pulse.

The last 18 months has taught us so many different things, but one valuable lesson we have all learned is the importance of our own health and wellbeing and that of our friends, colleagues and loved ones.

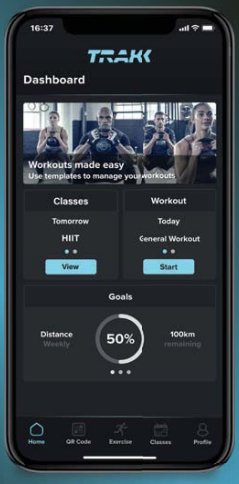
As our sector opens back up, we've been busy behind the scenes working with our partners right across the UK to install our cutting edge equipment. We want to ensure that members return to the gym feeling happy and excited to be back.

I'm also delighted to finally announce the app store launch of our brand new app TRAKK. Our ground-breaking activity tracking app will transform the way both operators and gym goers are able to track and log workouts. Gyms are not the only place for fitness. As an industry, we need to ensure we are staying connected with members regardless of where they are, all throughout their lives. We believe TRAKK, does this better than anyone else.

Looking ahead, I am proud of how far we have come, despite the challenges 2021 has presented. With restrictions eased there is so much opportunity now for our sector to be a driving force and help those recover from this pandemic.

Best Wishes
Chris Johnson,
Managing Director

Contact email



TRIPLE POWERED TRAKK TECHNOLOGY

We are proud to launch our connected fitness app ***TRAKK***.

TRAKK transforms the way both operators and gym goers are able to track and log workouts, keeping members engaged for longer.

TRAKK offers a triple benefit to operators by providing member fitness tracking and programming, easy integration and enhanced member retention. *Read on back page.*

Book your demo today!
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TRAKK
CONNECTING FITNESS

NEWS IN BRIEF

State-of-the-art gym, Premier Gym + Fitness opens its doors

Premier Gym + Fitness, based in Devon, recently opened its doors to the public. Turning to Pulse, the owners were highly impressed by Pulse's design skills and technologically advanced equipment. The facility has been designed to the highest standards, with a striking black and green aesthetic in keeping with the brand.

The club has equipment from Pulse's premium cardio and strength lines complete with 18.5-inch touch screen consoles, giving Wi-Fi, Netflix, and social media access. There's a dedicated functional training space with a bespoke rig and an atmospheric spin studio kitted out with state-of-the-art Pulse Fitness spin bikes.

Members also have access to Pulse Fitness' new app TRAKK, allowing members to track their progress and devise their own workout plans.

Pulse Fitness sees success in Scotland

The Pulse Fitness team has recently won, not one but two new tenders in Scotland.

Firstly, Pulse Fitness has been re-appointed by Sport Aberdeen as their Fitness Development partner for the next four years. The team had been working with Sport Aberdeen over the last five years and this new phase will see Pulse Fitness take all eight health & fitness facilities to the next level. This also includes £4.8m refurbishment and extension of Northfield Swimming Pool which will have a new 40 station fitness suite kitted out by Pulse.

Pulse Fitness has also been appointed by East Lothian Council and its leisure operator Enjoy Leisure to replace all equipment across three sites. Having worked with both for 20 years the team knew exactly what they were looking for. North Berwick Sports Centre, Meadowmill Sports Centre's and Dunbar Leisure Pool will receive equipment from Pulse's top of the range CV line complete with 10.1-inch consoles as well as strength machines from the new classic line and the latest group cycle bikes.

HOW WE CREATED STYLE FROM THE SCIENCE

PRODUCT DESIGN FEATURE

At Pulse we have the privilege of delivering equipment design and build in-house.

In this feature, we take a behind-the-scenes look at the journey of our latest selectorised equipment the 'Classic Strength' line.

The First Article

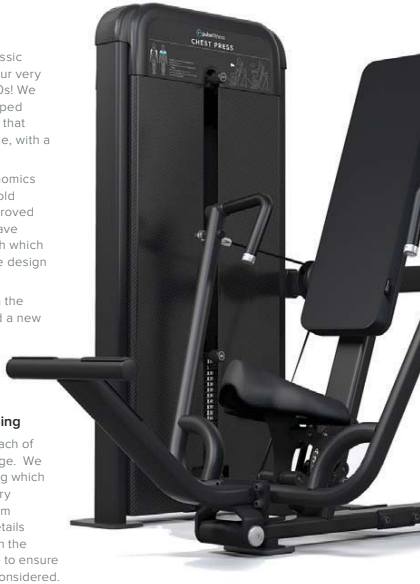
The first article is the first prototype to be made using the tooling. It proves our designs are correct for each piece of equipment in the Classic Strength line. We had three of each piece made, keeping one of each at Pulse HQ and placing the other two with customers to test in a real-life setting.

Ideation

The inspiration for the Classic Line came from some of our very first designs from the 1980s! We wanted to recreate a stripped back range of equipment, that was durable and affordable, with a modern twist.

We started with the ergonomics and biomechanics of the old line and adjusted and improved it. We were fortunate to have historical data to work with which significantly expedited the design process.

Once we were happy with the functionality, we designed a new look for the weight tower using custom casing to give it a modern feel.



Modelling and Prototyping

We made a 3D model of each of the 15 machines in the range. We use 3D computer modelling which allows us to scrutinise every item in detail. We know from experience that missed details lead to service problems in the future, so we take the time to ensure every element has been considered.

In addition to computer modelling we also used old school methods including drawing boards and post-it note walls. This blend of methods allowed us to complete our initial designs in the most time efficient way.

Once we were happy with the models, 1st and then 2nd prototypes were made, which were tested, debugged, adjusted at each stage.

Tooling

From prototyping we move to tooling. Tooling refers to building the components and machinery needed for production of the equipment. For the Classic Strength line, we used a lot of laser cutting and press tools to achieve the desired look.

CLICK HERE VIEW THE RANGE

Pilot Production

The next phase was pilot production where we produced 10 of each of the 16 machines. These were made from the tool to check every part was perfect. Everything has to be precise - even if one screw is the wrong length it can be a disaster!

Mass Production

When we were completely satisfied with the pilot machines, we were ready to begin mass production. At this point we handed everything over to our factory team. Two independent inspectors - both qualified engineers - are on site to carry out a detailed inspection.

The end result in this two year process. We were delighted to have been able to produce a full commercial line of strength equipment, which is **30% cheaper** than our premium range, but which still performs to the max.

When it comes to creating a range of equipment, you can't take it to market until you have 12-16 pieces ready to go. To expedite the process we had three machines in tooling at any one time. At the same time we were also making the plastic part prototypes.

A timeline for creating a new product

- **Conceptual Idea** - our starting point, within this phase we come up with our idea and heavily research it.
- **Conceptual Design** - this is where we start to bring our idea to life, through sketches and design. Typically card or foam models are created and computer aided design (CAD) prototypes are produced.
- **Design Development** - at this point it's all about taking a concept and proving it works.
- **Prototyping** - during the design process the product needs to be evaluated and adjusted, a prototype is created and used to explore what the product will look, feel and act like in real life.
- **Detail Design** - after prototyping a product will then be refined and developed even further and detailing is agreed. Data is transferred to suppliers and any modifications are made to the design to suit production needs or requirements.
- **Electromechanical Engineering** - it's at this phase we start to develop the embedded firmware and software for a product.
- **Testing** (Mechanical, Software, and Regulatory) - as with the main product, all electronic developments need rigorous testing to ensure that they are fit for purpose and function as intended.
- **Supporting Documentation** - to ensure a product complies with industry standards at this phase approval and certification is required from a wide range of bodies.
- **Manufacturing** - after all the fine details of the design have been agreed, manufacturing can begin. This involves sourcing manufacturing partners, analysing production costs and establishing production procedure.
- **Tooling** - it's at this phase we build the components and machinery needed for production of the equipment.
- **First Article** - once a product has been designed and manufactured much work is done to ensure that effective and efficient tooling and assembly is in place. In order to check this, inspections take place across the product.
- **Pilot Production** - at this phase we then run a small production line, for instance in a range 10 of each product would be made and we check every part is correct.
- **Mass Production** - the final stage. Everything is then handed over to the factory to produce.

From concept to mass production the process can take anywhere between 18 months and three years.

EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT... GYM INDUSTRY RECOVERY

We are delighted to see that, on the whole, gyms are recovering well. There have been lots of positive stories reported across the industry. PureGym cited the return of members as 'beating all expectations' and reported a 10% growth in membership 28 days after restrictions lifted. ClassPass recorded a 600% week-on-week increase in the number of new members as lockdown measures were relaxed, and industry data, comparing April 2019 with April 2021, saw a whopping 130% increase in new memberships sold.

Of those new members, although the largest demographic was millennials, the data showed a 143% increase in over 60s, indicating an important area of focus for clubs. At Pulse we are seeing forward thinking clients addressing both marketing and equipment provision for this age group, an initiative we expect will benefit both their acquisition and retention rates.

The industry has also seen sustained growth in the number of people choosing to workout from home, as well as those looking for a hybrid experience to suit their new working routines. A survey of gym members in the US found that 53% are planning to combine their gym membership with online fitness and we expect to see a similar pattern in the UK. Connected fitness therefore has never been more important. Gyms should look for solutions which support their members wherever they choose to workout. You can read more about our connected fitness product - ***TRAKK*** - in this newsletter.

For all the positive stories, we also know some have struggled, and that it's often harder for independent gyms than it is for those that are part of a larger group, with more resources and cash flow available to them. Over the years we have worked with and supported hundreds of independent gyms, and truly believe they are the heart and soul of the fitness industry. Whatever we can do to help, from increased finance options to a chat over a cup of coffee to discuss new ideas and latest industry trends, we will, and also encourage all industry suppliers to do the same.

Here's to a refreshed start for the greatest industry in the world!

The New TRAKK app from Pulse Fitness provides unrivalled member fitness tracking and programming, retention benefits and additional revenue stream possibilities.

TRAKK
CONNECTING FITNESS

Tracking

TRAKK offers gym goers an unrivalled experience for keeping track of workouts in and outside the gym, and it's the ultimate personal training tool. Users can set fitness goals, devise workout plans and track their progress. The app includes over 300 different exercises to choose and log.

For operators, TRAKK, allows fitness teams to set personalised goals and monitor member progress.

Integration

TRAKK integrates with an operators existing member management platform such as Exerp, Gladstone and Legend. It is designed to work seamlessly with Pulse Fitness kit and it can also be integrated with non-Pulse Fitness equipment using QR codes.

Retention

TRAKK, allows operators to improve interaction on the gym floor with its simple colour-coded system that identifies at-risk members and provides a summary of previous contact. Through TRAKK, operators can send personal or automated messages, to help engage members.

Bolt on Services

TRAKK can be customised for operators who want a white-labelled solution. Apple GymKit can also be added as a bolt on service.

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	TRAKK ESSENTIAL (The app ONLY)	TRAKK PROFESSIONAL LITE (For Operators & PTs)	TRAKK PROFESSIONAL PLUS (For Operators & PTs)
Available to anyone, this will allow members to use TRAKK to log and record workouts.	●	●	●
Members can choose from over 300 exercises and create their own workout plans.	●	●	●
Members will be able to track their goals by attendance, calories, distance, weight and duration.	●	●	●
Full integration to services including Exerp, Gladstone, Legend and more.		●	●
Ability to automatically track CV workouts through TRAKK professional software.		●	●
Scan static or live QR codes for Pulse Fitness strength equipment and non-connected products with TRAKK.		●	●
Track body composition stats.		●	●
Manage Pulse Fitness CV through our Asset Manager.		●	●
Access to PT Manager *(ability to set personalised workout plans for members, message members, review performance and more).*		●	●
Access to Asset Manager *(ability to monitor connected Pulse Fitness equipment, promote your gym across screen savers and more).*		●	●
Training & Support.		●	●
Hardware Bolts on available: Apple GymKit, MiraCast.		●	●
Software Upgrades: White Labelling.		●	●
Ability to automatically track strength workouts.			●

What could we do for you? Let's start the conversation today.

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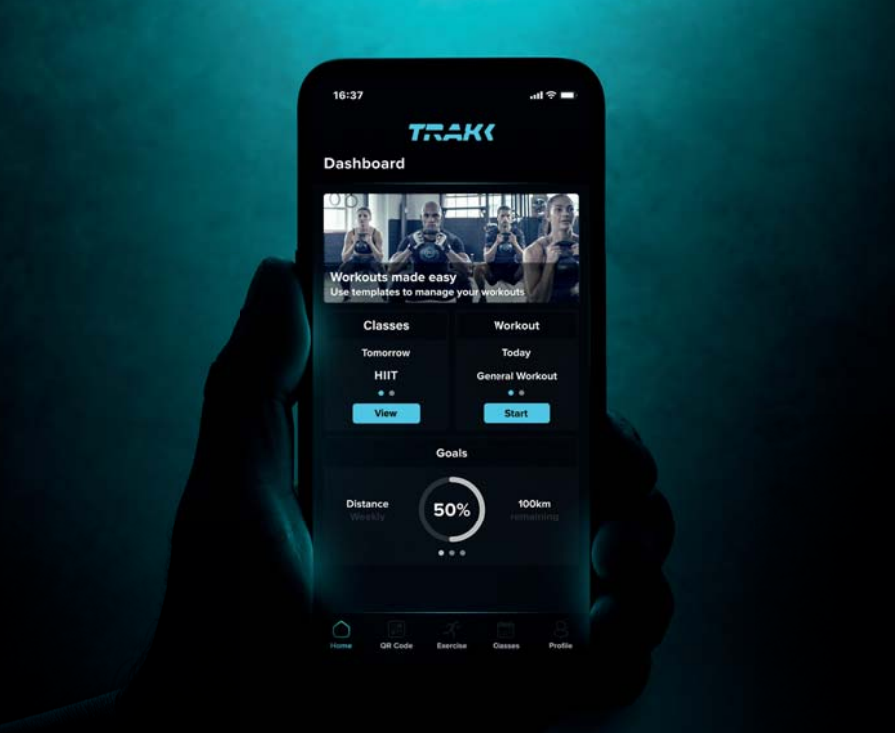
pulsefitness



TRAKK

CONNECTING FITNESS

TRIPLE THE POWER OF MEMBER RETENTION

1. Set goals and create personalised fitness programming for your members.

2. Integrate into your CRM and automatically track workouts - wherever members chose to train.

3. Generate powerful insights which enable the right member touchpoints, to significantly impact retention and drive revenue.

WATCH TRAKK IN ACTION

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