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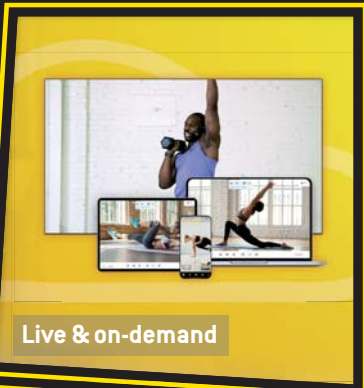
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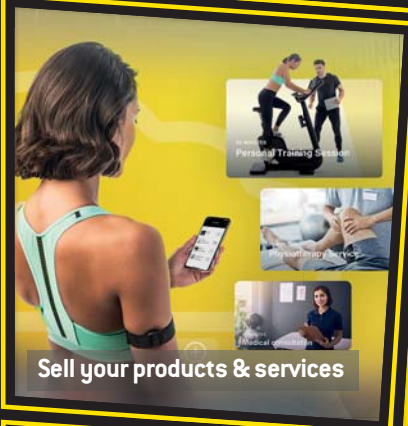
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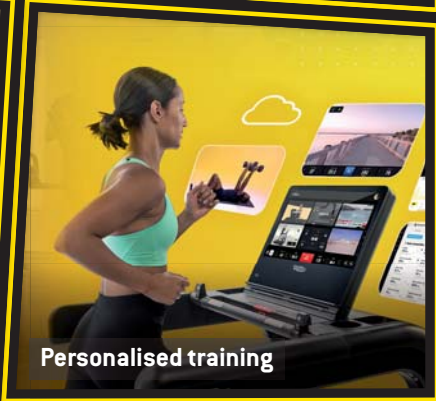
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Into the Metaverse

Since Mark Zuckerberg renamed Facebook Inc – calling it Meta – the tech world has accelerated the development of the Metaverse, opening up new opportunities for the fitness sector

The Metaverse has landed in the fitness industry this month with the news that Trib3 is to launch its brand in The Sandbox – a Blockchain-based decentralised Metaverse where consumers and businesses can own, build and monetise virtual experiences to be enjoyed by consumers (page 31).

Trib3 will partner with Australian tech company, OliveX, which has bought space (or 'land') in The Sandbox and named it the Fitness Metaverse. The Sandbox is already home to content from companies such as Adidas and Team GB.

Although Trib3 is a first mover, the deal is not exclusive and OliveX is expected to strike agreements with other fitness brands to join this space.

The deal will see Trib3's workouts and group fitness classes delivered in the digital world – along with the first-ever Trib3 NFTs (non-fungible tokens), which will enable the company to develop revenue streams.

CEO, Kevin Yates, says players can expect to experience Trib3's industrial luxe 'feel' in the Metaverse, along with added extras: "They'll be able to swap the Trib3 Sweat Points they earn in the gym for Dose tokens which can then be spent in the Metaverse," he said. "And when they go for a run, they'll be able to have their friends running with them as avatars."

Yates said the operating processes behind the Trib3 concept lend themselves to the gamification and tokenism which is synonymous with the Metaverse.

This emerging platform presents the industry with both opportunities and threats – the opportunity to develop new revenue streams, undertake innovative brand extension and explore new digital frontiers, but also the threat that non-facility based businesses will develop rival brands or leverage existing properties to build competitive businesses.

It's another medium to learn and understand, to allocate resources to, as well as to monitor and refine, all of which takes bandwidth which some operators just don't have at present. However, as with the early days of the web, we'll see a land grab by those who see the potential of being early adopters, even if defensively.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/CREATIVA IMAGES



Consumers can experience workouts in virtual worlds

“The Metaverse presents the industry with both opportunities for new revenue streams and the threat of competition”

The Metaverse is not new, having been first conceptualised in the 1992 sci-fi novel *Snow Crash* and brought to fruition by *Second Life* in 2003, but since Mark Zuckerberg renamed Facebook Inc – calling it Meta – development has accelerated, with huge investment pouring into the building-out of this emerging platform.

Now's the time to be making your brain ache thinking through what the Metaverse will mean for your business and making or refining your plans when it comes to how the technology can be applied and how you respond, both aggressively and defensively.

Liz Terry, editor
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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/BRZHAMER



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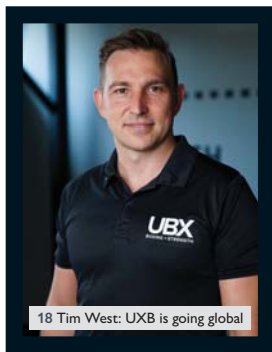
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PHOTO: QUINCY



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2022, YOUR YEAR OF TRANSFORMATION

Double down on digital to drive live fitness with Les Mills.

Majority of members prefer a 60:40 split between the gym and home workouts, with gym members being twice as likely to use digital fitness options compared to non-members (36% vs.18%). Omnichannel fitness is the way to win in 2022, how does your membership offer cater for them working out with you, wherever they are?

*Source: 2021 Global Fitness Report, Les Mills

Live. Virtual. At Home



Write to reply

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



Our right to continue improving the health and wellbeing of communities will be linked to the degree to which we can demonstrate our commitment to doing so safely

Demonstrating that our impact is irreversible

Professor Alfonso Jimenez

Head of Think Active, Europe Active's Research Centre

As a scientist, I've seen more than enough of this virus to know that until we reach a stage of 100 per cent vaccination coverage across the world, we'll face more mutations and disruptions to our lives, our businesses and our operations.

We must expect disruption but plan to thrive regardless.

Evidence-based approach

A central pillar of maintaining the confidence of our stakeholders and customers has been our robust evidence-based approach to assessing risk and reducing the risk of transmission in our facilities. This evidence has contributed to the position we've been able to establish as an industry via the *Safe Active* study, which is conducted by Think Active, the research unit of Europe Active.

Working in partnership with the Advanced Wellbeing Research Centre, the Centre for Sport Studies at King Juan Carlos University in

Spain and the UK Active Research Institute, Think Active released the first edition of the *Safe Active* study in December 2020. It has proven critical in providing an evidence base with which to engage policymakers across Europe.

For this reason, while hoping we were on an irreversible path into the new normal, we've also been working to ensure we're in the strongest position possible as we enter what's clearly a new and dangerous phase in our management of the pandemic.

The second *Safe Active* study

The *Safe Active* study second edition released in December 2021, shows a reported rate of positive COVID-19 cases in the gym population as being 0.88 cases per 100,000 visits when taking into account numbers in the combined *Safe Active* study 2021 and the UK Active 2021 data sets.

These numbers were taken from a total sample of 185 million visits



PHOTO: ALFONSO JIMENEZ

across nine countries. The self-reported data suggests again that fitness clubs and leisure centres (where industry-standard mitigation is in place) provide safe public spaces in which to exercise, with very low self-reported connections with cases of COVID-19.

This does not mean we should demand governments leave us alone to operate without consideration of the fact that we remain in the grip of a pandemic.

It's essential we maintain the very highest standards of operation, as there's no way we



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ALAPPOINT

Safe Active studies show gym operators across Europe are being effective in controlling COVID-19

can deny the evidence of risk of aerosol transmission. Instead, we must redouble our efforts to ensure adequate ventilation in all our clubs. And we must also recognise the inequality that we see in our usage patterns and work tirelessly to build confidence in those customers who remain insufficiently comfortable to return.

Benefits outweigh the risks

Our right to continue improving the health and wellbeing of communities will be linked to the degree to which we can demonstrate our commitment

to doing so safely, and evidence that the benefit we provide far outweighs the risks that might be faced.

In that context, the only irreversible thing must be the commitment of the leaders of our industry to high-quality evidence-based research that helps us understand where we are today, and what we must do to arrive at where we want to be in the future.

Our sector has the opportunity to be among the primary drivers of wellbeing across Europe. Let's keep making strides in that direction.

Within GO fit, an organisation I serve as chief scientific officer, we've

taken a conscious decision to evolve our approach in line with the virus, with a focus on ensuring the safety of our customers and our team.

Throughout the crisis, we've worked with colleagues across the industry to build confidence in our safety and our professionalism.

Within our home market of Spain, this has resulted in a designation as an essential service in many regions, being protected as a consequence and able to remain open so we can continue to strengthen the wellbeing of the communities we serve. ●

● www.hcmmag.com/jimenez

HCM people



'Longevity is the next disruptor' is my new trademark

Dr Michael Roizen

Chief wellness officer, the Cleveland

Clinic and GWS co-chair



Roizen believes 90 will be the new 40

PHOTO: MICHAEL ROIZEN

With a background in allopathic medicine, the chief wellness officer of the Cleveland Clinic has spent his working life to date championing and proving the value of exercise and healthy living to long-term wellbeing. He talks prevention with Jane Kitchen

Tell us about your journey from the world of allopathic medicine to the world of prevention. What have been the ah-ha! moments?

When I started out, I wanted to run an intensive care unit, so focused on internal medicine and anaesthesia.

By 1979, I was asked to co-run the cardiovascular anaesthesia section at the University of California San Francisco and I soon realised surgeons were



The RealAge app shows people how to reverse their physiological age

difficult to deal with but cared deeply about their patients' outcomes and about them returning to normal function as soon as possible.

When I looked at the data, I saw the most important factor for reducing complications was the patient's age. Ten years made a three-fold difference to survival rates – regardless of the surgical team. I started to study how we could change the physiological age of people to make them 10 years younger in the period surrounding their surgery.

In learning how to do this, I figured we could make surgical outcomes significantly better by helping them get healthier before surgery. We focused on managing

their blood pressure, getting them to eat a healthy diet and doing physical activities such as walking.

These were simple changes people could easily do on their own, but most people still don't do them. So the next step was figuring out how to motivate people, and that's when I started working on my book *RealAge* (www.hcmmag.com/RealAge), which helps show people how you can change your physiological age with some simple lifestyle adjustments.

By 1993, I started to spread the word through a series of additional books, and we've now developed *RealAge* into an app that's been downloaded by 72 million people worldwide.

You've led many significant improvements to the health system, what further changes are on your to-do list?

There will very likely be a major change in longevity in the coming decade and this is one of the things I'm focusing on now. 'Longevity is the next disruptor' is my new trademark – and passion – we need to help people understand what's very likely to happen.

Medicine and public health have expanded the average lifespan – through sanitisation and immunisation initially, then by management of chronic diseases with things such as stents – by about 2.5 years every ten years since 1890.

We think, based on the research out there, that there's an 80 per cent chance that by 2035, there'll be a great age reboot. I've told people in the past that 60 can be the new 40, but in the near future, you could be 90 and have a physiological age of 40.

I'm working on an app to help people understand this and to show them how the choices they make now can impact their future.

The most important thing to learn is how to manage stress – stress ages you in every system, from the cardiovascular system to the brain.

Are the worlds of medicine and wellness aligned and if not, what can be done to bridge the gap?

They can be well-aligned, and that's what the Cleveland Clinic did by starting a wellness institute, to be sure that at least in our system they're aligned.

Clearly, the health and fitness and spa and wellness industries have a major role to play in teaching people how to manage stress, and they're doing a wonderful job of that in some aspects.

A lot of things that start in the wellness space take a while to make their way into mainstream western medicine – mindfulness, or using nutrition to change cardiovascular health, for instance.

Getting well-done studies to back these things up is necessary, but requires pioneers in wellness to drive progress.

What do you say to critics of your stance on exercise and healthy living?

If you don't have critics, you're not far enough advanced! I don't think anyone now doubts that 60 can be the new 40, but in 2004 I had a lot of critics when I said that.

I'm now saying that by 2035, 90 is likely to be the



Roizen wants wellness accessible for the masses

Stress is a major factor for ageing, so people must address it



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/MONDOZEN

new 40, and there are plenty of people who think that's crazy. But there will be a lot of people living younger for longer. Already we're seeing the beginnings of this, where through advances such as CRISPR, we're able to edit out the genes that cause sickle cell disease, for example.

Longevity will not just be 'the next disruptor', it will be the biggest disruptor – it will give us life itself.

What do you view as your greatest achievement so far in life?

I've driven a lot of innovations in life, from being one of the first to use echocardiography in humans, to advances in pre-op testing. But my work with RealAge and getting people to understand how much power they have over their own health – that each person is really the greatest genetic engineer for their own bodies – is by far my greatest accomplishment to date.

What role can health and fitness and spa and wellness operators play in supporting people to make improvements to their own wellbeing?

So far, these services have appealed to the middle and upper-middle classes – and the wealthy. We must figure out how to make them available to all.

We need a more mass-market approach with McDonald's-style pricing and McDonald's-style



I don't think anyone now doubts 60 is the new 40, but in 2004 I had a lot of critics when I said that. If you don't have critics you're not far enough advanced

reach to make spa and wellness affordable and accessible for everyone. There's also a major role for these industries in continuing to lead. It was these industries that got us to change our emphasis on stress management, for example, and that brought mindfulness to the forefront. It also brought healthy eating and physical activity for all into common practice.

These industries need to keep pushing to bring new wellness ideas to the forefront, and pushing for more scientific studies. They've had a huge impact on people's wellbeing to date and can continue to do so in the future. ●



I think we have an opportunity to do for boxing what F45 has done for functional training

Tim West

Co-founder UBX

UBX
BOXING + STRENGTH

PHOTO: UBX

What's your elevator pitch?

We started UBX (you-box) with one aim in mind: to let everyone experience the transformational power of boxing.

We realised the biggest challenges people face with exercising are the inflexible nature of group fitness and the high cost of one-on-one training, so we designed a model that combined individualised boxing workouts with convenience.

A UBX workout consists of 12 rounds of boxing-led strength and cardio training, delivered by expert trainers who advise on form and technique and adapt the workouts to suit people of all fitness levels – we train anyone from professional athletes looking to push themselves to the limits to new parents getting back into exercise.

How did you come up with the idea?

I grew up boxing and loved the sport. As I moved through roles as a strength and conditioning coach, personal trainer and gym owner, I used boxing as a conditioning tool for myself and my clients. In my experience, boxing is the ultimate workout.

Despite its proven effectiveness and popularity, however, no one had developed a product that combined all the benefits of boxing with a science-based strength programme. My clients also struggled with committing to a workout programme, as life often got in the way.

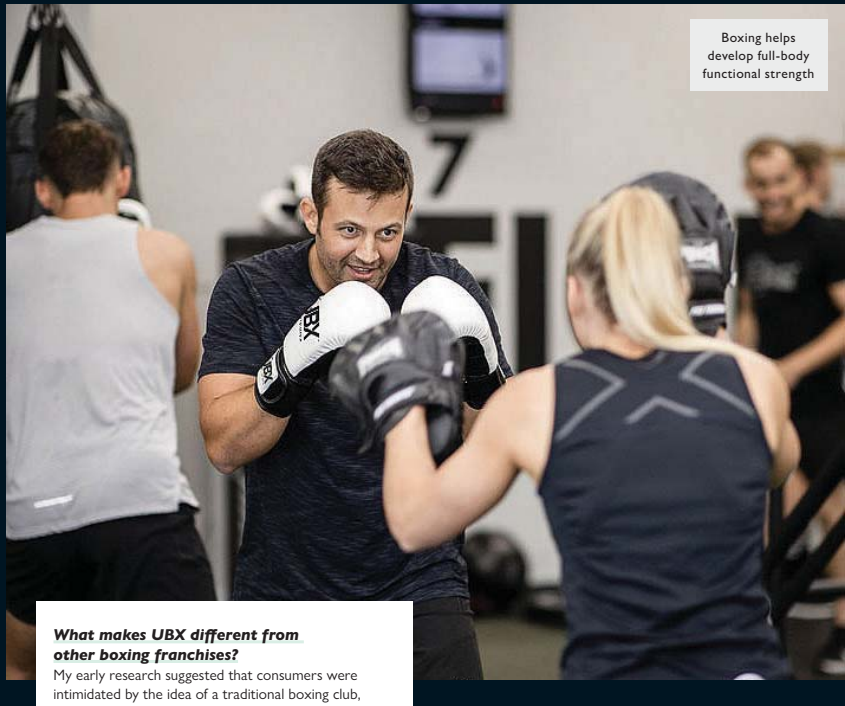
I wanted to create a place where people could experience world-class boxing and strength training workouts at any time that they wanted, so I approached Danny Green (four-times world boxing champion) for feedback on the concept. He embraced it, saying: "This is the way I trained throughout my entire career" and invested in the company as co-founder.



UBX aims to bridge the gap between group classes and 1-2-1

PHOTO: UBX

Boxing helps
develop full-body
functional strength



What makes UBX different from other boxing franchises?

My early research suggested that consumers were intimidated by the idea of a traditional boxing club, where the ultimate outcome is to step into the ring. The other alternative available at that point was repetitive boxercise-style offerings, which only included a token strength programme.

I wanted UBX to appeal to people of all ages and abilities and knew I had to develop a concept that was non-contact and incorporated a full-body functional strength training programme.

Boxing is the world's largest niche, and it is yet to truly scale to its potential. For example, in the US the only major boxing boutique has taken more than a decade to build 167 clubs, while functional strength and HIIT providers in the same market hit 1,000 or more clubs in the same timeframe.

That's why we're excited about our concept. Together with Danny, we re-imagined how boxing could scale as an uber-flexible, disruptive challenger in the fitness marketplace.

How do consumers respond to UBX?

We've found our concept is sticky and has created raving advocates. A huge proportion of new members come to us via a referral from an existing UBX



**We've re-imagined
how boxing could scale
as an uber-flexible,
disruptive challenger in
the fitness marketplace**

member and our first 15 franchisees came from participating members and staff from the first club.

Will you customise for local markets?

Franchises generate value through consistency, so core elements such as the brand, technology, equipment and workout won't vary globally, but localisation will occur in areas such as marketing and real estate.

What was the creative process that led to the development of the concept?

It was very organic. I had climbed through the levels of the fitness industry and wanted to create something innovative that would compete against incumbents and future entrants. I started with the problems I'd faced and as I addressed them, the model emerged.

From there I launched an MVP (minimum viable product) in the most competitive area I could find, because if I was going to fail, I was going to fail fast.

I interrogated members for feedback and iterated the concept – sometimes daily – to improve the offering. As I recruited, staff were also involved in the creative process and helped me build systems around the concept to a point where the outcomes were repeatable and scalable.

What innovations are you planning next?

Our roadmap for the next 24 months includes increases in member value that will remove all barriers to training through club upgrades, the development of our App to offer training on demand.

We're also looking to gamify staff performance by providing our coaches with additional tools to help them streamline club management. Franchisees will get access to greater insights and automation, allowing them to spend their time where they're going to have the biggest impact.



What are your global rollout plans?

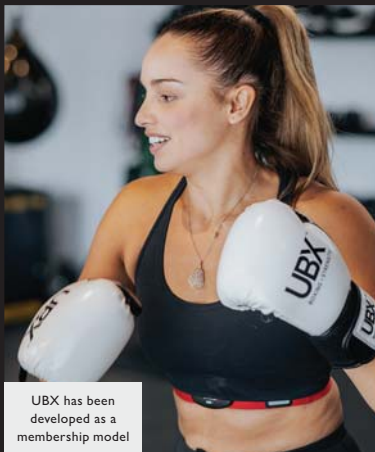
The global rollout started in 2019 with the expansion from Australia into New Zealand and Singapore. Later in the same year, we started to explore options to open our first UBX club in the UK and the US. These plans were paused due to the pandemic.

As we ramp back up, we've identified the UK, Ireland, the US and Canada as priority markets. By the end of this year, we'll start to explore more opportunities across Europe and APAC.

How many locations are you aiming for?

I think we have an opportunity to do for boxing what F45 has done for functional training. We're set to open more than 1,000 clubs across the UK, Ireland and APAC and believe 5,000+ clubs is realistic when you add North America and Europe into the equation.

There's increasing consumer demand for boxing, thanks to promoters such as Eddie Hearn from Matchroom and next-generation streaming platforms such as DAZN. This increasing demand, coupled with our concept means we could unlock boxing for the masses.



UBX has been developed as a membership model



There are plans for more than 1,000 new clubs in the UK, Ireland and APAC

What's the business arrangement with Empowered Brands and RM Funds?

In order to grow in a new region you need to have a great product, support infrastructure, and you need to make funding available to franchisees. That's the formula this deal brings. Empowered Brands holds a Master Franchise Agreement for the UK and Ireland and RM Funds provides access to the capital required.

What kind of franchisees do you look for?

Team players with a passion for boxing, committed to exceeding members' expectations, and with the capital and competencies to operate a successful business.

We expect them to be personal trainers looking to step up into bricks and mortar, existing fitness businesses looking to diversify their portfolios and 'corporate refugees' – individuals leaving the workforce and rethinking their career path.

How big are their territories?

We use a data-driven GIS mapping to determine the territory size based on what's required for a long-term successful franchise.

We provide one-to-one support through the onboarding, pre-sale and operation phases. Franchisees also benefit from the community of franchisees in their region.

What returns can they expect?

UBX is a low-to-moderate CAPEX model with a very low break-even point, so there is a great opportunity for franchisees to get strong returns. Scale-focused franchisees will look to minimise risk and maximise returns by establishing multiple clubs across a cluster of territories.

Is UBX a membership model or pay-as-you-go?

We are very much a membership model. The vast majority of revenue comes from recurring memberships, with the balance made up of retail and a small proportion of 'pay-as-you-go' business.

What upsells are available?

Clubs can retail boxing equipment and apparel, with this range set to expand significantly and



Our view of the role of technology in the fitness industry is that it should be used to simplify or amplify a human experience



ALL PHOTOS: UBX

West still owns his own club

work being done as we speak on different kinds of seasonal and limited edition offers.

Tell us about the tech that underpins the business

Our view of the role of technology in the fitness industry is that it should be used to simplify or amplify a human experience.

We'll continue to look for opportunities to reduce process friction, provide a seamless physical to digital experience for members and simplify operations.

Most of our tech is proprietary and built in-house. Where we've partnered, we've looked for market leaders such as AWS, Google, Myzone, ASUS and Stripe to ensure we have scalable, global capabilities.

What role does Danny Green play?

He advises on boxing content, equipment design and programming in the ever-changing workouts. It goes without saying that he has the last say on anything boxing-related.

What are your personal inputs?

My role as MD is to drive strategy, innovation and partnerships. I'm no longer involved in daily operation but work closely with the team on



UBX aims to be the world's largest boxing community

planning and implementation. To stay connected, I still own a club and train there each morning.

How has trading been during the global pandemic?

Challenging and contradictory – in some cases, it feels as though we've lost the COVID years but in others, we've been hyper-productive and have been able to implement change at a more rapid pace than would have been possible under normal conditions.

In 2019, network club numbers grew by 41 per cent but during 2020 and 2021 this dropped to 14 per cent per year, which was still above expectations, but a decent drop from the year prior.

We recruited well and released both our 'coaching screens' and digital offer, among a myriad of upgrades, optimisations and updates.

We're optimistic about the future. Our ability to not only survive but grow during the lockdowns prove the resilience of the model, and with heavy investment in our team and technology, we're primed for growth.

What have you learned in this time?

That I'm more creative and productive when I step back from operations and consider the business as a whole.

Four-times world boxing champion, Danny Green, oversees UBX programming



PHOTO: UBX

Of the team, I've learnt that they get better with pressure and I'm proud of the way they stood up and did what needed to be done to support the members and the franchise network. Sharing adversity creates a bond, and our team and business are stronger for the experience we've been through during COVID-19.

What's the end game?

Given that international expansion started in 2019 it is still very early days for us. The next five years will be focused on accelerated growth and the continued evolution of the product to cement our position in the global fitness landscape.

We remain open to strategic partnerships with groups that align with our core values, culture and ambition. By making boxing accessible to everyone we are hoping to create the world's largest boxing community.

Who do you most admire in business and why?

Elon Musk – because of the sheer size of his ambitions – and my grandmother, who's successfully run a diverse range of businesses. We still discuss business matters regularly, and her obsession with customer service and focus on excellence is as relevant as ever.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

When I was 19, a client shared this Jim Lovell quote with me: "Be thankful for problems. If they were less difficult, someone with less ability might have your job".

This re-frames challenges as opportunities to put distance between you and your competitors.

Anything else to share with HCM readers?

Do you box? If not, you should give it a try! It conditions the body and sharpens the mind and learning a new skill is addictive.

Our members tell us UBX has made them fall in love with the sport and with exercise. Those who liked boxing before joining like it even more now, and those who were indifferent have developed a new affinity for it. This is proof to us that we're on the right track. ●



**We found the benefits
of physical activity
outweigh the risks –
and the risk is very low**



PHOTO: DR NATASHA JONES

Dr Natasha Jones

**Co-author, the Benefits
Outweigh the Risk report**



PHOTO: SUZI GARDNER

Suzi Gardner

**National partnership lead
for health, Sport England**

***A new report called Benefits
Outweigh the Risk has established
that exercise is safe for the vast
majority of people – even those with
medical conditions. Kath Hudson
talks to the team driving the initiative***



***The Benefits Outweigh the Risk report
is a follow-up to a 2015 research study
called Exercise, the Miracle Cure. Why
is it needed and what's the aim?***

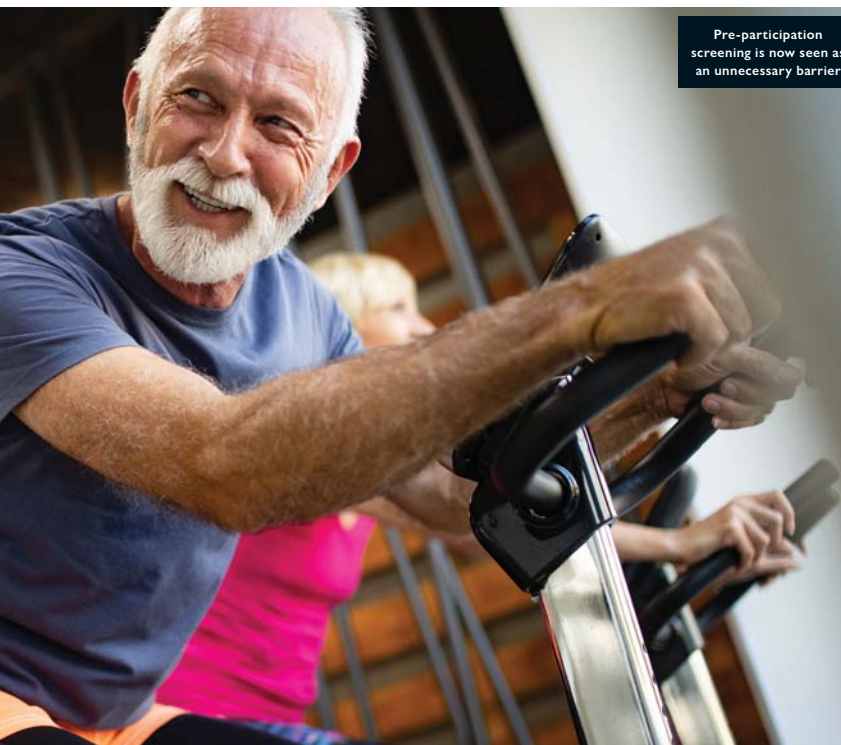
Suzi Gardner: Across a large time period Sport England has heard messages about the concept of risk with regards to people getting active.

Patients who need exercise have concerns that it might make their symptoms worse, or even cause a catastrophic event, such as a heart attack, while 46 per cent of healthcare professionals reported that not knowing how to advise patients how to safely take part in physical activity – and not knowing how to allay their concerns about taking part – is a barrier to signposting for them.

This has precipitated a huge discussion with a range of partners, looking at how we can work together to maximise the role physical activity can play, whether that's supporting people through ill health, or supporting the management of a condition.

This new research set out to weigh up the risks of physical activity for all adults with long term conditions and to find ways to overcome the barriers for exercise referral. The statements and advice have been written very specifically by healthcare professionals for healthcare professionals.

This isn't a standalone piece of work – there are lots of pieces to this jigsaw – but Sport England sees *Benefits Outweigh the Risk* as a critical piece of work (www.hcmmag.com/benefits/risk).



What were the findings, and how will they be used?

Natasha Jones: We found that the benefits of physical activity do outweigh the risks and that the risk is very low. More interesting is how the research will empower healthcare professionals to communicate the lack of risk to their patients.

It's not as easy as just telling someone to move more, medics need to be given tools to avoid the familiar "yes, but" conversations with patients. What is needed is a collaborative person-centred conversation, establishing what is right for that individual and how they could incorporate activity into their lives, taking into account specific concerns about symptoms.

Suzi Gardner: We'll also utilise the evidence and statements as a foundation to create policy change to remove other systemic barriers. For example, *Benefits Outweigh the Risk* calls for a review of the need for pre-participation screening, which is a barrier for many when it comes to getting active.

In the next phase of this initiative, we'll work with all interested partners, looking at how to remove systemic barriers and will be talking to all interested parties – including the health and fitness sector – to see what the scope of a review could be, how that could go forward and who should lead it.

We'll be working with the Richmond Group of Charities to develop patient-facing messages from the content of the report. Additionally, we'll work with CIMSPA to consider how the statements might be used within workforce development for the physical activity sector, leading to conversations around the standards, workforce expectations and what's needed to support people with long-term conditions.

Is change coming?

Natasha Jones: Yes, it does feel as though change is coming and it's a really exciting time. The work Sport England is funding and promoting is novel and recognised internationally.

There's still more to be done, however, to support medical professionals in helping patients overcome their barriers – for example, we need to get past the firmly entrenched idea that people should be signed off by a doctor before they can get physically active, as this is not the case.

We need to adopt a more rounded view of the patient, to understand what matters to them and what they're interested in, rather than defining them by their condition. It's all about empowerment and inspiration and how to best support them to achieve their goals.

There are a growing number of people with long term conditions and co-morbidities, so how we tackle inequalities and support those who are further away from physical activity to becoming physically active is an important issue.

Benefits Outweigh the Risk is not a standalone piece of work, it ties in with the Moving Healthcare Professionals Programme (www.hcmmag.com/MHP), which is educating healthcare professionals about the power of physical activity. The award-winning Moving Medicine project (www.movingmedicine.ac.uk) and Active Hospital Project (www.movingmedicine.ac.uk/active-hospitals) have also gained national



The fitness industry can empower people to find their own starting point when it comes to activity. If we keep that at the forefront of what we're doing, a lot of barriers will drop away

and international traction in healthcare and we work tirelessly to continue to build momentum.

Sport England's engagement with the National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine at Sheffield Hallam for the creation of Easier to Be Active is also looking at how to remove barriers to activity (www.hcmmag.com/easiertobeactive).

The aim is to develop a seamless journey into exercise to support health

Key takeaways OBSERVATIONS

- Pre-participation screening is an unnecessary barrier as long as people start gently and build gradually
- Most people with long-term conditions want to be more active. However, complex psycho-social barriers lead to high levels of inactivity in this growing population
- Healthcare professionals and the fitness industry can be most effective if they take time to understand barriers from the individual's point of view



PHOTO: DAVID HERBERTZ CALZADA/SHUTTERSTOCK

What can the health and fitness industry do to build a closer relationship with healthcare?

Suzi Gardner: It doesn't just come from one side, we need to work together to create better trust between the different sectors, and ultimately develop a seamless journey into exercise, as part of a multi-disciplinary team.

Natasha Jones: We need to keep person empowerment at the forefront. As healthcare professionals, we should keep building motivation and building confidence as our primary aim. Part of that could be to reassure people about specific medical concerns.

I am not an advocate of 'exercise prescription', which can be too directive and ignore the tenets of successful behavioural change. Medicalising exercise should only be necessary if the patient deems it to be so.

What I'm in favour of is the continuation of a supportive conversation, bearing in mind that people are much more likely to engage in activity if the idea comes from them.

The fitness industry can continue that journey by promoting autonomy while empowering people to find their own starting point and build from there. If we all keep that at the forefront of what we're trying to do, a lot of the barriers will drop away. ●

Fast facts

- 69 per cent of people living with long-term health conditions would like to be more active, according to research conducted by DJS Research as part of the We Are Undefeatable campaign.
- Reducing inactivity/increasing activity levels could help reduce the risk of up to 40 per cent of long-term health conditions, as well as helping improve quality of life and sleep, managing stress and helping reduce social isolation.
- 43 per cent of the population of England has at least one long-term health condition, according to patient data.
- People with long-term health conditions are almost twice as likely to be inactive (less than 30 minutes a week) than those without, according to Sport England's physical activity data.
- 56 per cent of people with one impairment are active, this decreases to 48 per cent for people with two, and drops to 37 per cent of those with three or more.
- Increasing levels of inactivity are evident in people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, more deprived geographical areas and among older populations.

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FitLab raises \$15m and plans 500 studios

Hybrid fitness platform FitLab has closed a Series A financing round, bringing total capital raised to more than US\$15m.

FitLab will use the funding to scale its portfolio of brands, which will see it accelerate the opening of boutique fitness studios, launch new mass-participation events and develop new technologies designed to bridge the gap between at-home and in-club fitness.

The company's brands include McGregor FAST, the combat-focused



FitLab's brands include McGregor FAST by UFC star Conor McGregor



PHOTO: TWITTER.COM/BRIAN.KIRKBRIDE

We plan to have 500 locations by 2025 and already have deals in place for 250 sites

Brian Kirkbride

fitness experience by UFC star Conor McGregor; XPT, a high-performance training system from Laird Hamilton and Gabby Reece; and Electric, a sports brand focused on performance eyewear, apparel and accessories.

FitLab's first wave of connected fitness studios will open during 2022, combining fitness tech

— such as tracking and performance measuring — with an immersive, in-person training experience.

Plans are for 500 locations by 2025 and according to co-founder, Brian Kirkbride, the company already has partnerships in place for 250 locations.

More: http://lei.sr/H4X5V_H

Hybrid brand LIT Method targets rapid growth



PHOTO: LIT METHOD

LIT Method's business model combines studios with an at-home offer

Wellness operator and fit tech company, LIT Method, (low-intensity training) is ramping up expansion after launching into the franchising market.

The company's hybrid business model now combines studios with an at-home, digital fitness offering based on the proprietary LIT Strength Machine.

The low-intensity, low impact workouts are built on the promise of "no running, no jumping and no weights".

Founded by husband-and-wife team, Justin and Taylor Norris, LIT Method opened its first flagship studio in West Hollywood, US in 2017.

In May 2020, the company launched the LIT Strength Machine, targeting the at-home market

What we're doing at LIT has never been done before

Michael Abramson

and billed as the "world's first all-in-one Pilates reformer, water rower and strength trainer".

Michael Abramson, a 20-year industry veteran — most recently chief operating officer and chief revenue officer at Xponential Fitness — is spearheading the brand's expansion into franchising.

Abramson said: "What we're doing at LIT has never been done before — no other brand has our hybrid studio and equipment model."

More: http://lei.sr/D4q8s_H

Trib3 takes fitness to the metaverse

Boutique chain Trib3 will become one of the first fitness operators to establish a presence in the metaverse by making its workouts available in The Sandbox.

Trib3 has struck a deal to enter the blockchain-based, decentralised metaverse – which joins companies and brands such as sports giant Adidas and Team GB.

The move will see Trib3's HIIT workouts and group classes delivered in the digital world – along with the first-ever Trib3 NFTs (non-fungible tokens).

Trib3 will work with OliveX – which has an account in The Sandbox – to launch a gym in the metaverse, with the ability to drive real-word revenues.

Trib3 CEO, Kevin Yates, said: "This is a landmark opportunity for



PHOTO: TRIB3

This is a landmark opportunity for our brand and our sector

Kevin Yates

our brand and our sector and we are proud to be one of the first to be grabbing it with both hands."

"People will be able to swap Trib3 Sweat Points they earn in the gym for Dose tokens which can then be spent in the metaverse," said Yates.

More: http://lei.sr/y2F4C_H



PHOTO: TRIB3

Trib3 will begin offering NFTs

ACSM Trends 2022 report: tech still rules

Wearable technology, outdoor exercise activities and strength training are among the trends expected to shape the worldwide fitness industry during 2022.

The annual ACSM's *Health & Fitness Journal* worldwide survey – which predicts sector trends by surveying 4,500 health fitness professionals globally – has outlined the top 20 activities and industry shifts for 2022.

The list shows the impact of the pandemic with tech, health-focused activities, individual exercise and the outdoors all featuring heavily in the top 10.

Wearable tech and home exercise gyms are the top two trends, followed by outdoor activities, strength training, exercise for weight loss and personal



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/DANIEL PRODUCTIONS

Wearable technology and outdoor exercise are the top trends for 2022

training. Group exercise training – which drives many boutique concepts – also makes the top 20 trends list.

"Wearable technology has again taken the number one spot in the global rankings, the same as in 2019 and 2020," the report states.

"Online training went from being the number 26 trend in 2020 to the number one trend for 2021,

likely due to a shift in the fitness market from clubs to homes because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"However, it has now dropped to the number nine spot for 2022, perhaps in anticipation of a return to normal, including more social interaction."

More: http://lei.sr/A5t2w_H

Wearable technology has again taken the number one spot in the global rankings

ACSM's Worldwide Survey

Planet Fitness buys Sunshine for US\$800m

Planet Fitness has signed an agreement to acquire Sunshine Fitness – an operator of 114 Planet Fitness fitness clubs in the US – in a deal worth US\$800m.

The cash and shares deal, which is expected to be finalised during the first quarter of 2022, will allow Planet Fitness to diversify across more geographies, according to CEO Chris Rondeau.

Sunshine Fitness was the first franchisee in the Planet Fitness system and has been backed by



PHOTO: PLANET FITNESS

Planet Fitness will acquire Sunshine Fitness' 114 sites across the US



PHOTO: PLANET FITNESS

Owning corporate clubs is an important part of our strategy

Chris Rondeau

TSG Consumer Partners since 2017. Its 114 locations will be merged into the current Planet Fitness company-owned portfolio, which is predominantly located in the northeast of the US.

Shane McGuinness, co-founder and CEO of Sunshine Fitness, who has been an owner and operator in the

Planet Fitness system for nearly 20 years, will oversee operations of the combined corporate store portfolio.

Rondeau said: "Owning corporate clubs is an important part of our strategy and gives us relevancy and credibility when making decisions."

More: http://lei.sr/h8b2Q_H

Wellness economy to be worth \$7trn by 2025



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ANANKE

The report predicts that the wellness sector will continue to grow in value

The global wellness economy will grow by 9.9 per cent annually and reach US\$7trn by 2025, according to new research by the Global Wellness Institute (GWI).

Named *The Global Wellness Economy: Looking Beyond COVID*, the report was unveiled on the first day of the 2021 Global Wellness Summit (GWS) in Boston.

The research provides new market data on the overall wellness economy and for each of its 11 sectors, as well as exploring how COVID-19 impacted the industry, which markets fared best and worst and what the future holds for the sector.

"We estimate that the global wellness economy grew from US\$4.3 trillion in 2017 to US\$4.9 trillion in 2019," said GWI senior research



PHOTO: GWI

The global wellness economy grew from us\$4.3trn in 2017 to us\$4.9trn in 2019

Ophelia Young

fellows and report co-authors, Ophelia Young and Katherine Johnston.

The report estimated the global physical activity sector to be worth US\$738bn in 2020, while workplace wellness was valued at US\$49bn and the weight loss sector at US\$946bn.

More: http://lei.sr/w5M2p_H

COVID-19 risk in health clubs remains low

The number of positive COVID-19 cases among people who've visited health clubs, leisure centres and swimming pools in the UK and Europe continues to be low.

Figures published by UK Active and Europe Active show an overall rate of 0.83 cases per 100,000 visits and 0.87 cases per 100,000 visits respectively.

This number does not indicate that transmission happened in facilities – it could have occurred anywhere – the study only tracks correlations.

Since restrictions were eased in April 2021, the UK Active Research Institute has collected data from 1,500 facilities on more than 125 million visits, while Europe Active – with King Juan Carlos University, AWRC-Sheffield Hallam University and the UK Active Research Institute



This report supports the prioritising of exercise and ensuring facilities remain open

Rob Copeland, AWRC

– has tracked 59.5m visits across eight countries (UK included).

The results show that while the case rate for the general populations have fluctuated, the prevalence of the virus has remained “extremely low” in the sector.

More: http://lei.sr/Z2p8A_H



The report suggests gyms are safe

Hussle's McDonald's deal sees 'huge rise' in visits

A marketing partnership between fitness marketplace Hussle and McDonald's resulted in a significant increase in the number of people looking at gyms via the platform, according to Hussle.

The campaign saw the company offer fitness-based prizes as part of the fast-food chain's annual Monopoly promotion, which took place towards the end of last year.

Hussle reports that there was a 71 per cent increase in visits to gyms listed on its platform during



The campaign saw Hussle offer fitness-based prizes as part of the campaign



The campaign created unprecedented exposure for the fitness industry

Jamie Owens

the promotion, while 87 per cent of customers were new to the marketplace – having never visited Hussle's gym partners before.

The customers arriving on the Hussle platform via the McDonald's promotion were younger than usual, with the average age of visitors during the campaign 28.7, compared with the 2021 overall average age of 33.5 years.

Hussle has not revealed the actual numbers of people who visited its platform or the numbers who went on the use a gym, due to a confidentiality agreement with McDonald's.

Jamie Owens from Hussle said: “The campaign created unprecedented exposure for the fitness industry.”

More: http://lei.sr/k6S2q_H

Funding sets Myzone on course for unicorn status

Myzone has secured US\$17.2m worth of investment from growth capital investor BGF – a move that values the brand at US\$102m. The deal is all equity-based.

The BGF cash injection is coupled with a separate £2.5m investment by Vin Murria, which will also see the renowned tech entrepreneur join Myzone as non-executive chair.

Founded in 2011 by entrepreneur Dave Wright, Myzone specialises in wearable fitness technology for the business to business activity



The deal follows the launch of the interchangeable heart rate monitor, MZ-Switch



Ultimately, we're aiming to become one of the first unicorns in our industry

Dave Wright

and wellness markets and has grown to serve more than 9,000 facilities in 84 countries, reaching two million consumers.

Last year (2021), Myzone launched MZ-Switch, the world's first interchangeable heart rate monitor, which allows users to wear the tracker on the chest, arm or wrist.

Wright said the investment and appointment of Vin Murria as chair is a logical step in the brand's journey towards growth and a "likely IPO".

"Ultimately we're aiming to become one of the first unicorns in our industry," Wright said.

More: http://lei.sr/a4P2q_H

Who's winning at digital in health and fitness?



A third of UK health club operators said they haven't got a digital strategy

A report on the state of 'digital maturity' of health club operators in the UK has shown that the sector is "digitally established".

Called *Digital Futures*, the report – commissioned by UK Active – charts operators' digital prowess and sets an overall benchmark for the sector.

Based on a consultation completed by 44 organisations, representing 1,300 facilities in the UK, showed that the average score for private operators was 63 per cent, putting them in the 'Digitally Established' category.

Public operators scored 55 per cent on average, with the index describing this level (40-59 per cent) as 'Digital Experimenter'.

Huw Edwards, CEO of UK Active, said: "For the first time we've been



The report makes the irrefutable case for accelerating digital strategies and skills at all levels

Huw Edwards

able to conduct a detailed digital consultation with operators across the UK and provide a benchmark of our sector's progress.

"The *Digital Futures* report makes the irrefutable case for accelerating digital strategies and skills at all levels."

More: http://lei.sr/7a3P7_H

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Fitness has critical role to play in healthcare

The UK government should encourage – and make it easier – for doctors and other health and care professionals to refer people to fitness facilities in order to reduce pressures on the health service.

A report launched on 12 January calls for health clubs, leisure centres, gyms and swimming pools to serve more people through the mechanism of social prescribing.

Called *Leading the Change: social prescribing within the fitness and leisure sector*, the report outlines



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ALBA BRON

Social prescribing connects people to activities based on what interests them



We must look at how healthcare-related exercise could be delivered in gyms and leisure centres

Huw Edwards

recommendations to members, partners and policymakers for growing the sector's role in the health system.

Published by the UK Active Research Institute, it makes four key recommendations to develop and grow social prescribing.

These include raising awareness over the role of physical activity

facilities and the social prescribing opportunities they offer in managing people's long-term health conditions.

Huw Edwards, UK Active CEO, said: "It's essential we look at how healthcare-related exercise could be delivered in gyms and leisure centres."

More: http://lei.sr/2b6X5_H

Wellness in 2030: McKinsey predicts trends



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/PAUL STODOL

Operators are advised to pursue data partnerships and nail down e-commerce

COVID-19 is accelerating interest in wellness as more consumers have been faced with the importance of taking care of their health and wellbeing.

Recent predictions from McKinsey suggest the future of wellness will be tech-heavy, personalised, interconnected and dominated by the six wellness categories: health, fitness, nutrition, appearance, sleep and mindfulness.

On fitness, McKinsey's Eric Falardeau predicts that bricks and mortar fitness businesses are here to stay.

He also anticipates that the future of fitness will feature an increasing amount of technology to help people track their fitness progress.

Meanwhile, on health, McKinsey sees "offerings that let consumers triage



PHOTO: MCKINSEY

Bricks and mortar fitness businesses are here to stay

Eric Falardeau

their own medical issues" becoming increasingly more mainstream.

Analysts also said that, in order to survive, fitness and wellness operators need to "nail down their e-commerce and marketing strategies and pursue data partnerships."

More: http://lei.sr/f3V4m_H

Join W3Fit in 2022

Where Business Meets Wellness



Premier hosted buyer event connecting owners and operators from Europe's top health, fitness, and leisure clubs and hotels with executives from global supplier companies innovating the fitness industry through pre-scheduled one-on-one meetings, education, and networking.



We are looking forward to meeting with suppliers face to face again so the news of We Work Well launching W3Fit for our industry is fantastic. We look forward to being part of the inaugural event.

Kevin Yates, CEO, TRIB3

It is great to hear about the launch of W3Fit, where industry leaders can meet, network and form everlasting friendships. We look forward to joining what surely will be a must attend event in our calendar.



Dave Wright, Creator & CEO, MYZONE

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Co-founder W3Fit EMEA
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We're looking to shift the mindset, turning our hotel fitness spaces from guest amenities into revenue generators

Pullman is building major fitness facilities for its dynamic demographic

PHOTO: ACCOR HOTELS GROUP

Accor's Pullman Power Fitness has been developed in partnership with Les Mills

PHOTO: ACCOR HOTELS GROUP/LES MILLS



PHOTO: ACCOR HOTELS GROUP

EMLYN BROWN

With a background in the health and fitness sector, Accor's global VP of wellbeing has big plans to harness the power of exercise and wellness. He talks to Kate Cracknell

What's Accor's approach to wellbeing?

We activate wellbeing for our guests via six pillars: nutrition, holistic design, movement, spa, mindfulness and digital, with digital being our newest pillar.

However, the way we combine those six pillars differs across our various brands. We compare it to music, where you use the same notes but combine them in different ways to create unique songs. For each of our brands, we turn the volume up or down on each pillar to differentiate and create unique wellbeing experiences for that brand – experiences that are in tune with the guest profile and demographic.

At Fairmont, for example, we focus on active wellbeing under the banner of Fairmont Fit. This includes a longstanding apparel- and gear-lending service that helps make fitness and wellbeing a defining element of the brand. We have big box health clubs at

many of our Fairmont hotels too, particularly in the US and Dubai, as well as an incredible reputation in terms of all our outdoor facilities: golf, canoeing, running trails, hiking, skiing and so on. Getting out into nature sits at the heart of the Fairmont brand experience.

Swissôtel's Vitality concept is our most holistic wellbeing programme, infusing every part of the guest journey, from fitness to menus and spa treatments, to mindfulness, meetings, guest rooms and hotel design. Swissôtel was one of the first brands to bring exercise into guest rooms in partnership with *Wallpaper* magazine (see page 42), but the concept goes deeper than that, embracing everything from circadian lighting to mattress quality and an enhanced wellness bathroom experience.

We've dialled up on fitness at Pullman hotels recently, creating a boutique gym design to help our guests stay ▶

We see recovery as the strongest trend shaping our thinking right now

- ▶ on top of their game. Meanwhile, MGallery hotels don't tend to have gyms, so there we've partnered with Yoga International to provide digital content and organise retreats. At Raffles hotels and resorts, it's more about emotional wellbeing – meditation and mindfulness.

We believe it's important to democratise the wellness experience within hospitality, so we're not only bringing it to our luxury brands, we're also finding effective ways to bring it across all of our brands.

Even with budget brands such as Ibis, where there definitely aren't any gyms, we've partnered with Red Bull to encourage urban sport and movement, as well as doing things such as turning stairwells and car parks into active spaces with opportunities for exercise.



PULLMAN POWER FITNESS AND CITROËN CREATE FITNESS POD CONCEPT

Accor – harnessing its Pullman Power Fitness concept – recently partnered with JCDcaux and Citroën to create an autonomous 'urban mobile platform' concept that allows people to explore cities while working out.

The futuristic travelling exercise pod comes with a holographic coach

The Pullman Power Fitness Pod is a miniature gym mounted on self-driving electric vehicle the Citroën Skate. Designed for a single exerciser at a time, dichroic patterns in the glass bubble protect the occupant's privacy while maintaining a view of the outside.

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; exercising within the pod also charges the Citroën Skate's batteries. There's a digital coach on a holographic screen, too, who encourages and guides the user through their workout as well as providing route information and entertainment.

The Pullman Power Fitness Pod is one of three pod concepts created for the Citroën Skate as part of The Urban Collectif partnership, which

also involves outdoor advertising group JCDcaux. The partnership aims to come up with innovative ways to 'optimise mobility' so people can reclaim urban spaces and improve their quality of life.

"We're going to be 60 per cent urban living in the next 15 years, which means we're going to have to come up with some new systems," says Accor's Emlyn Brown. "We were honoured to be approached for this project and excited to see what we could create."

"Could we deliver exercise to your door? Could we pick you up from the airport, making you more time-efficient by allowing you to work out for the journey into the city? We're some years away from this model happening at scale, but it was great to stimulate debate, and reinforce our commitment to fitness."



PHOTO: ACCOR CITROËN



Pullman Power Fitness is working with Les Mills to identify global fitness ambassadors

Tell us more about your movement pillar

Exercise is a vitally important part of our guest experience and arguably the number one priority for us to get right for our guests. It's also a way to engage a much broader group of people than through spa alone.

The high priority exercise is currently being given by consumers stems from a significant uplift in exercise adoption across society, as well as a change in the demographics of those taking part.

When we look across all of our brands – eco, midscale, premium, luxury, ultra-luxury – we see nearly 80 per cent of our guests are taking steps to improve their health and wellbeing on a daily basis. They're doing many things, such as 10,000 steps a day and mindfulness and meditation – in addition a large proportion is exercising regularly. We have to allow our guests to continue to do that when they're in our properties.

We also have to keep up with their rising expectations. Hotel gyms have traditionally not been particularly sophisticated, but for many years neither was the high street gym offering. However, there's been a huge departure in the complexity, design and exercise experience across the broader health and fitness sector over the last seven or eight years,

with consumer expectations now being shaped by the likes of Barry's, Equinox, F45 and Gymbox.

Our aim is to reflect that within our hotels, so our guests' experience with us feels consistent with what they enjoy elsewhere.

Fitness doesn't have to be gym-based, of course: we want our guests to go outside, to be in nature, move around our resorts and locations, use apps for running routes, move their body through yoga or tai chi. We just want them to move.

However, where we create fitness spaces, there's now a need for a more complex product.

Can you elaborate?

Pullman is the best example of what we're now doing, with the launch of our Pullman Power Fitness concept.

The demographic of the Pullman brand is young, entrepreneurial, dynamic, diverse – a demographic that places great importance on the gym experience when they choose a hotel. Pullman hotels are generally city-based, too, and spa isn't a major part of the offering. We realised we had a good opportunity to create an elevated fitness experience that's motivating, fun, dynamic and with more of a wow factor. ▶

► Working in partnership with LA-based Fitness Design Group, we changed the way we looked at equipment selection, moving away from the old approach of 50:50 cardio :resistance in favour of a zoned approach. We have HIIT areas, functional training, video-on-demand cycling, free weights, recovery areas. There are therabands, battle ropes, sledges, kettlebells, air bikes, ski ergs... it's a dynamic space where the exercise options are far more rounded, interesting and varied than before.

We also worked with Bergman Interiors, who did the interior design for BXR in London, to create a wonderful interior design aesthetic that's timeless but edgy.

The result is boutique fitness, just without the personnel, because we don't offer instructor-led experiences. Pullman Power Fitness is a high-value, low-price model, more akin to Holmes Place's EVO Fitness than the full-service brands I mentioned earlier. However, in terms of atmosphere and function, the experience for our guests will feel consistent with what they experience in their daily lives.

What we do offer, though, is digital workout and class content that our guests can use in-room, in the hotel, outside the hotel and in the fitness areas. We've partnered with Les Mills to give all our guests a 30-day subscription to Les Mills On Demand, and have also worked with Les Mills to identify global fitness ambassadors for Pullman Power Fitness.

We're now rolling Pullman Power Fitness out

ABOUT ACCOR

One of the largest hotel companies in the world, Accor employs 260,000 people and operates 5,200 hotels in 110 countries under 40 different hotel brands.

The company, which has its origins in France, has a portfolio ranging from Banyan Tree and Sofitel through Mövenpick and Mercure to Ibis and F1 Hotels.

The company is also investing in the co-working market as part of its overarching philosophy of Augmented Hospitality, having reshaped its core business around a vision of tailor-making services for guests and the local community based on a 'Live, work and play' model.

Accor has business accelerator units in distribution, experience design and operations that support its owners and partners to boost their performance.

Read more here:

www.spabusiness.com/accorbriefing

Swissôtel in-room fitness, designed by Wallpaper magazine

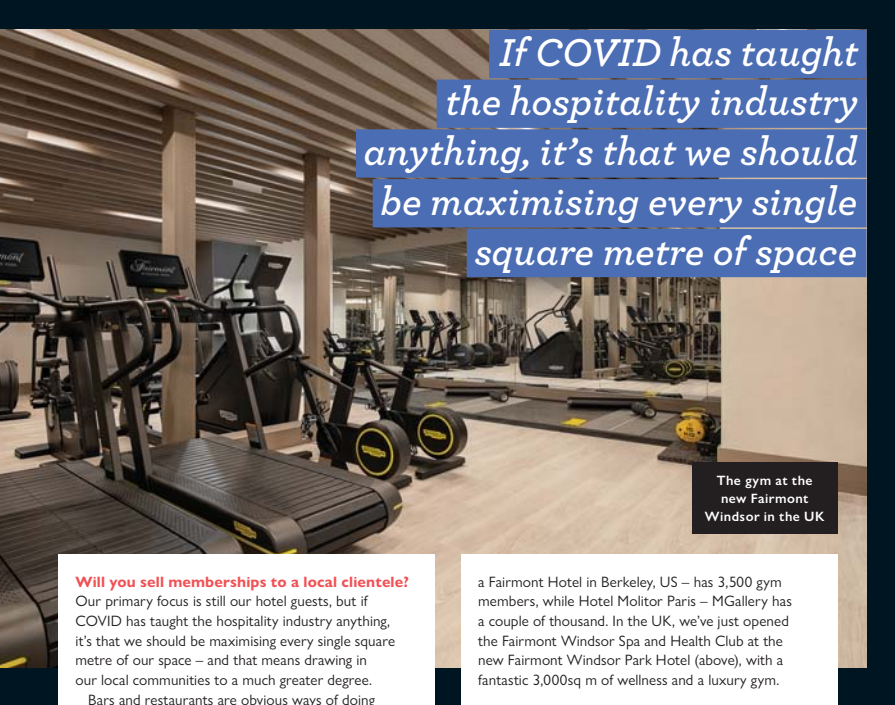
globally, including the full Pullman pipeline of about 40+ hotels that are in various stages of development. We'll put it in whenever we retrofit a Pullman hotel, too. Of course, the owners have to buy into it, but with a price tag 12–15 per cent lower than for our previous gym model – for something that's more engaging – the conversations have been pretty positive.

Explain Pullman Power Fitness ambassadors

We've worked with Les Mills to select six ambassadors from around the world to work with our Pullman clubs, elevating awareness and animating potential customers via social media.

They all come from a variety of fitness backgrounds, but crucially they're all young, up-and-coming, entrepreneurial fitness professionals. We weren't looking for influencers with a million followers already. We wanted young people we could work with, helping them on their journeys, training them, growing together.

Ultimately, we didn't want it to be transactional. We wanted it to be aspirational, motivational and entrepreneurial because that's what the Pullman brand is all about.



If COVID has taught the hospitality industry anything, it's that we should be maximising every single square metre of space

The gym at the new Fairmont Windsor in the UK

Will you sell memberships to a local clientele?

Our primary focus is still our hotel guests, but if COVID has taught the hospitality industry anything, it's that we should be maximising every single square metre of our space – and that means drawing in our local communities to a much greater degree.

Bars and restaurants are obvious ways of doing this, and we've been moving more and more into communal lobby space and communal working too. However, I'm a passionate believer that fitness is the most communal experience you can have, and I, therefore, see the gym experience as one we can really capitalise on from a local community point of view.

With the gym floor space averaging around 125sq m at Pullman, we'll be looking for perhaps 150–200 local members, with the flexibility to stop and start, upgrade or downgrade, choose from five- or 10-visit packs, monthly, six-monthly or annual membership. Crucially, though, we're looking to shift the mindset, turning our fitness spaces from guest amenities into revenue generators.

These 150–200 members will spend money in our bars, too, as well as dining in our restaurants and recommending our hotel. And they'll create more of a vibe in the fitness space, which will improve the experience for our guests; people don't want to work out in an empty gym. It's a very strong win-win for everyone.

Of course, we already do this at some of our other hotels, and at a bigger scale where we have big box gyms. For example, The Claremont Club and Spa –

a Fairmont Hotel in Berkeley, US – has 3,500 gym members, while Hotel Molitor Paris – MGallery has a couple of thousand. In the UK, we've just opened the Fairmont Windsor Spa and Health Club at the new Fairmont Windsor Park Hotel (above), with a fantastic 3,000sq m of wellness and a luxury gym.

Will Pullman compete with high street gyms?

We're not setting out to compete directly: our hotel guests remain our priority, as I say, and we'll be selling a limited number of gym memberships.

Our primary goal is to provide a fitness offering that doesn't represent a downgrade from the facilities our now highly fitness-educated guests use at home, ensuring we're the hotel of choice when they travel.

Although over the years I've been asked a lot about fitness brands getting into the hotel space, and whether I was worried about that. The answer is, I'm not at all worried, quite the opposite. Given the thousands of fitness facilities the hotel industry has in central city locations around the world, I think it's health clubs that should be worried when the hotel industry gets its act together and really gets into the fitness space.

Any news from your other brands?

Our SO/Sotogrande property – operated by Ennismore – opened recently and is what I'd call a semi-destination wellness retreat. SO/ is a young, vibrant, luxury lifestyle brand and in Sotogrande we've created a perfect environment for guests to have fun with friends – there's a great bar and



SO/Sotogrande strikes a balance between socialising and health, with a 2500sq m fitness and wellness retreat

*When we look across all our brands
– from eco to ultra-luxury – we see
nearly 80 per cent of guests are
taking steps to improve their health
and wellbeing on a daily basis*



Health club businesses should be worried if the hotel industry gets its act together and really gets into the fitness space

► entertainment complex – but they can also eat clean and move well. It provides a great balance, and I think that's what people want now.

We've created a 2,500sq m wellness facility where on one side you have the more passive spa experience – which also includes an incredible yoga studio – and on the other, a best-in-class 250sq m fitness area with a virtual studio for cycling.

Between them is a lap pool. There's cryotherapy, infrared sauna, flotation and two physio rooms with Hyperice Normatec recovery systems. The idea is that you can train like an athlete, eat like an athlete and recover like an athlete.

The property is surrounded by six golf clubs and there are plenty of outdoor activities and treks too. We're going to be launching wellness retreats in collaboration with Pillar, which will span nutrition, sport, movement, exercise and spa. The motto: 'Recover as hard as you train.'

And this is key, because we see recovery as the strongest trend shaping our thinking right now. It's fundamentally impacting the way we look at our spa design, for example, as well as being incorporated into our fitness spaces.

We see recovery as key to capturing a much broader demographic, tapping into the trend that first saw people want to dress like an athlete – the athleisurewear boom – then train like an athlete, with battleropes and PT, and now it's about recovering like an athlete with ice baths and percussion recovery. We're also working on helping people eat like an athlete.

We don't see this being a Gen Z thing either. Yes, the younger demographic is probably taking it more seriously, but there are a lot of high-spend, high net worth Gen X individuals looking at biohacking and exploring ways to feel better, live better and live longer. We're very interested in how we can deliver that within our club experience.

We're also interested in bridging the gap between the exercise experience and the spa experience. People have always seen them as very separate – spa as zen and silent, fitness as loud and sweaty – but actually they work together beautifully and in fact, I think a more dynamic approach to spa and a more holistic approach to exercise would also be interesting. We'd like to see guests and members move back and forth between the two much more: exercising, recovering, exercising, recovering.

SO/Sotogrande is focusing on exercise and recovery



The SO/ retreat in Spain offers plenty of outdoor activities, including golf and trekking



PHOTO ACCOR HOTELS GROUP

SO/Sotogrande is the latest development in the portfolio

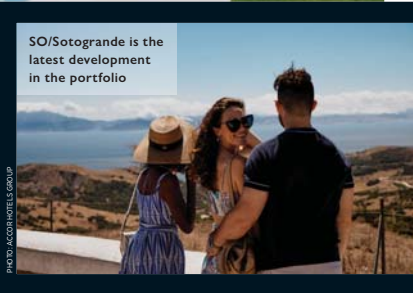


PHOTO ACCOR HOTELS GROUP

What other fitness plans do you have?

We have one brand new project I can tell you a little bit about: Raffles London at The OWO [Old War Office], which is currently under development. We'll be putting in an elite level membership club in collaboration with an external partner at this flagship location. That's all I'm allowed to tell you on that for now, though! We're not able to reveal who the partner will be just yet.

Meanwhile, Swissôtel's Vitality concept was introduced about five years ago, so we'll get a refresh in 2022 – just to update it, not to pull it down, and still including exercise as a key aspect.

And although Fairmont is already very fitness-focused, we'll be upping the ante on the exercise experience there. We'll be doing it in a different way from at Pullman, though, because it's a different demographic. We think there's an opportunity to create more big box clubs – maybe 1,500–2000sq m – with a stronger external membership component.

I'm a big believer in big box clubs, and it goes back to having had eight fantastic, formative years at Holmes Place. Big box has been maligned as a model over recent years, but as the exercising demographic ages, I think it will come back strongly.

The way we design our hotels is changing, too, from a leisure perspective. At the moment, you'll find the pool in one place, the kids' club in another, the gym and the spa in totally separate areas of the hotel. That's not particularly convenient from a wellness perspective, so we're looking to bring it all together into one area. Guests will then be able to move freely between the different wellness elements:

exercising in a great gym, doing some video-on-demand classes, having a spa treatment, going for a swim, enjoying the thermal area or relaxation space, refuelling at a good juice bar, sitting down with their laptop in reception... All of a sudden, we have a club, at which point we can bring in the community. That's how we're approaching things at Fairmont.

And then generally, we're starting to ask different questions around club feasibility when we're developing hotels. Say we're putting a hotel into a mixed-used real estate development, or a shopping complex with great car parking, great amenities, great accessibility and great demographics. We should be asking ourselves if a club would work there, and if so, what it would look like: should we be pushing our envelope a little bit on the square metres, taking it up to 500sq m, or even 800 sq m? What would the membership model look like if we did that?

And then, do we locate fitness on the ground floor so it's more accessible to non-hotel guests? Same question for our bars and restaurants. We need to start thinking about all of these facilities as a club our hotel guests have access to. These are the conversations we're really pushing on now. ●



We want to partner with operators to create experiences for their members, not only when they're in the gym, but also when they're away from the facility

Frank van de Ven

The vice president international of Life Fitness, shares his insight into the future and how the organisation is delivering on its strategy to co-create unique member experiences

What has the fitness industry learned from the pandemic?

One of the biggest outcomes has been a stronger focus on wellbeing. We started to see stakeholders realise that our industry is the solution and we experienced some countries acknowledging that faster than others.

What's important is the recognition that all stakeholders have a responsibility to convince governments that gyms are essential businesses. This is true now, more than ever.

We know people weren't happy with the change in their fitness routines during lockdowns – research proves this. As an industry, we saw it at the time, and we're seeing it now in the percentage of members returning to the gym.

But it's not about working out in a facility or at home – these two things are not mutually exclusive. It's about our industry connecting people wherever they want to work out, and ensuring their experience is one that encourages them to keep doing so.

How is this shaping strategy at Life Fitness?

A lot of what we're focusing on now as a business was already in place. In some instances, the pandemic has fast-forwarded plans, in others, it's helped us fine-tune them.

Most people lack intrinsic motivation to exercise, so the environment and the stimulus it provides is crucial to getting people active. This is a major factor in members returning to the gym; people want to be with others, somewhere that inspires and motivates them and offers a unique experience.

At Life Fitness, co-creating with our customers to achieve this is at the forefront of our strategy.

It's also not just health clubs where this responsibility lies. Health and wellbeing should be a part of someone's work or study culture, travel, and leisure time. But these experiences shouldn't exist in silos; they can be brought together through open platform technology.

This is something we had in place pre-pandemic, but recent times have only strengthened our belief in the power of this approach.

We want to partner with operators to create experiences for their members not only when they're in the gym, but also when they're away from the facility.



Frank van de Ven

What makes your approach special and different?

Before we commit to creating bespoke experiences, we need to first understand what that means to an operator and its members. Anyone can fill a room with equipment, but by working in partnership and collaboration with our customers, we're able to get under the skin of an organisation and appreciate their story and how that could be translated to serve their target audiences.

Where possible, this co-creation is with team members from all levels of the operation; we outline member personas and develop customer journeys to inform the unique experiences we create.

Our Experience Hubs are one of the tools we use – we now have six Hubs worldwide and growing – and each is uniquely designed to not only showcase what we do, but also how we connect our solutions to our customers' stories.

Our extensive range of equipment and technology, our 'family of brands', allows us to combine products, and the strengths of each brand, into one solution. The Official Hammer Strength Box and Run, Ride, Row concept – developed in partnership with some of our larger international operators – are just two great examples of this.

Our global reach means we see what's happening across the world and we're able to use this insight to inform our customers' plans and share success stories. We also recognise when customers would benefit from support from our partners – we're not naive enough to think we can do it all.

Across the world, we've developed amazing partnerships to help clubs create experiences that feed into every element of their facility.

What does the future look like for Life Fitness?

Bright! We've made some big decisions in line with our strategic plans – choosing not to attend some major trade shows in 2022 and instead focus on more bespoke, collaborative opportunities with our customers is one of these, but we truly believe in our approach.

There are some great examples of clubs doing things differently and in a way that's true to their values, but the majority of facilities don't do this well enough.

There's a real opportunity for Life Fitness to plug this gap and lead the way in helping facilities identify what 'unique' means to them and their members. Together, we can then create solutions and experiences that help reinforce the pivotal role that our sector plays in the health and wellbeing of our society. ●

Healthy COMPETITION



WW customers can
now add 'points'
through physical activity

What can the fitness industry and the weight management sector learn from one another? Sarah Lloyd consults some of the key players

Researchers from the Universities of Arizona and Virginia argue that a focus on fitness rather than weight loss gives better overall health outcomes for people who want to lose weight, but many in the fitness industry acknowledge that the sector needs to do better when it comes to engaging with people who are struggling with obesity.

Some operators in the weight management sector have adjusted their approach to include references to exercise, with WW (Weight Watchers) having added exercise to its 'points' system for the first time – WW members now have the ability to add points to their daily food 'budget' by doing physical activity.

Both the fitness and weight management sectors are contributing to the health of people around the world, so after years of competing and proposing alternative approaches, is it time for a reboot when it comes to how these sectors collaborate and share expertise? We round-up views and insights and ask what approaches are proving most effective.

The fitness sector could learn from us when it comes to the value of personalisation and the ability to 'meet people where they are'

Dr Gary Foster
Chief scientific officer
WW (Weight Watchers)

WWW takes learnings from cognitive behavioural, acceptance-based and positive psychology sciences to offer a system that helps members develop awareness, shift how they think about their overall lifestyle and how they think about themselves.

Mindset, food, physical activity and sleep are all critically important for health. Ten to 15 years ago, WW would have only seen physical activity as a means of helping someone to lose weight. Now we educate members on the benefits of it for preventing diseases such as diabetes and cancer, prolonging life expectancy, plus the additional benefits to a person's self-esteem, mental health and quality of life. The days of just focusing on food, weight and size are over.

We recently launched a totally customisable programme called Persona Points, where every member has a unique Personal Points budget with food and activity targets and their own Zero Point foods list, based on the foods they love and can't live without, to help them stay full and feel satisfied.

Not all calories are created equal, and that's why Personal Points goes beyond calories to focus on the overall nutritional profile of a food to help guide members toward a healthier pattern of eating. For the first time, members also have the ability to add points to their daily budget through physical activity, drinking water and eating non-starchy vegetables. It



PHOTO: DR GARY FOSTER - WEIGHT WATCHERS

reinforces the importance of a healthy lifestyle balance – what's in your head is as important as what's on your plate, and we constantly celebrate 'non-scale' victories, such as improved energy and mobility, and increased confidence.

Our members complete health questionnaires on diet and physical activity – for example, do you think of exercise in terms of steps or minutes?

What are your favourite snacks? Do you drink alcohol? What do you think exercise is? Plus we assess how active they are now, and give members customisable goals. We don't focus on reaching government guidelines or a minimum number of steps overnight. Instead, we take people from where they currently are and aim to increase that gradually. If a member is achieving 3,000 steps, asking them to do 10,000 is unachievable. The smaller and more specific the goal is, the more likely they are to reach it. We ask our members to move in ways that move them. Physical activity shouldn't feel like a duty, it should feel like a gift you are giving yourself.

WW has a strong relationship with organisations in the fitness sector. We're not competing with them, as ultimately we share the same goals. We've partnered with Obé Fitness to offer on-demand video content within the WW app, with workouts for all interests and intensity levels, including sculpt, yoga and dance cardio.

The fitness sector could learn from WW about the value of personalisation and the ability to 'meet people where they are'. It's important to appreciate that all activity has value, and that some activity is better than none.



*Our society is weight-obsessed.
It should be health-obsessed*

► **Greg Whyte**

Professor of applied sport and exercise
Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU)

Over the last 10 years, we've seen some parts of the diet industry using divisive statements, such as 'you can't outrun a bad diet', rather than promoting all aspects of a healthy lifestyle. To some people, these types of statements will suggest physical activity is of no value to them when they're trying to manage their weight.

It's essential that both the diet and fitness sectors get their messaging right, that it's tangible, and that both activity and diet work in combination, not in isolation.

We must be careful not to pitch different behaviours that support health against each other. It's true that unless you fix your diet, weight management is going to be problematic, but unless you include physical activity in that intervention you're less likely to be successful and maintain weight loss. The real, responsible messaging should be about long-term lifestyle modification.

The weight-loss sector is full of so-called 'experts' who often use inflammatory language, claiming miracle weight loss through low fat or high-fat diets,

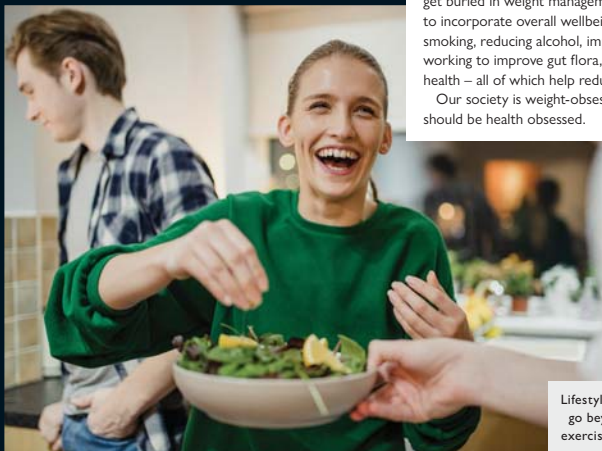


PHOTO: LJMU

low carb or high fibre diets, or shakes and pills. You name it, there's a plan, and this onslaught of noise can be overwhelming – especially on social media.

The World Health Organization's definition of health is not just freedom from disease but includes mental, emotional and social good health. Exercise promotes social and emotional health, whether that's going out walking or down to the gym. All forms of exercise are good for you, and this simple message shouldn't get buried in weight management. Messaging needs to incorporate overall wellbeing, including stopping smoking, reducing alcohol, improving sleep and working to improve gut flora, mental and emotional health – all of which help reduce all-cause mortality.

Our society is weight-obsessed. It should be health obsessed.



Lifestyle changes must
go beyond food and
exercise modifications

PHOTO: DOE IMAGES, SHUTTERSTOCK



*Slimming World members
know the government's
physical activity targets,
but they feel so far away
from that goal there's no
point even starting*

Dr Jacquie Lavin

Head of research and scientific affairs
Slimming World

We partner with the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities in the UK on the Better Health campaign and fully understand the transformative positive impact losing weight and increasing physical activity can have on someone's life.

We've been working with the NHS since 1999 and pioneered 'slimming on referral'.

However, when it comes to exercise, some people with a weight problem don't have the confidence to get started. Our members often say they feel uncomfortable at the gym; they don't know where to start or how to use the equipment and they worry about whether they'll fit in. They're concerned they won't be able to do exercises correctly or keep up, that they'll get too hot and sweaty, feel exposed or self-conscious, and that it's going to hurt. We recognise and understand these fears.

While our programme consistently talks about the overall health benefits of losing weight, more often than not, if you ask someone why they want to lose weight it's because they want to feel more confident, wear a smaller clothes size and not feel held back by their weight.

We support them in achieving this and as a consequence of successful weight loss, they also see improvements in their physical health.

We know being active can also help improve health and wellbeing, which is why we launched our Body Magic programme back in 2003 with the help of Ken Fox, a professor of exercise and health at the University of Bristol, who's also advised the UK government on physical activity, behaviour change and



PHOTO: JACQUELEEN - SLIMMING WORLD

obesity. Body Magic 'hand holds' our members across the physical activity threshold, breaking down barriers and helping members gradually increase how much they move, without telling them what they 'have' to do. Instead, it's about helping members find something they enjoy that fits in with their lifestyle.

During our Body Magic focus groups, we were amazed to discover how many Slimming World members knew the government's physical activity targets. But the clear message was they felt so far away from that goal, in their minds, there was no point even starting.

Body Magic is a behavioural support programme, not an exercise programme and aims to redefine what our members typically think exercise is. We help members overcome their fears and any barriers they feel when it comes to getting started.

We look at what they might already be doing – for example, short walks – and offer praise for this, using it as a starting point to build on bringing physical activity into their everyday lives until it becomes a habit.

It's one of the reasons we've launched our online Body Magic exercise programme. We're not looking to run weekly 'fitness classes' in village halls, but we can inform, inspire and educate our members who trust our voice, our methods and our behavioural approach in designing specialist, bespoke content for their needs.

We've always shared activity tips and encouraged members to share their experiences to help inspire and motivate others in the group. Members self-report their activity and get awards for each step they take. Our insights showed there was demand for more online resources at every stage of being active. We also wanted to offer resources that were fully accessible and available to people who may have a health condition. ▶





Small behaviour changes are encouraged, not demanded

► **David Langridge**
MD
1FitLife

We've created 52 videos for Slimming World's online Body Magic programme that aim to give users physical literacy and a nurtured baseline of confidence.

They're all a gentle introduction to low-intensity exercise; a taster of what activity looks like that supports the development of an activity habit. The point of Body Magic is that it's not daunting; it builds on small behaviour changes that are encouraged, not demanded, and it doesn't assume people have any interest in or understanding of exercise.

The content is pitched completely differently from the high-end workouts we've filmed on behalf of fitness brands, which are geared up to support and challenge members at home and in-club. For Slimming World, the videos are filmed in attainable segments of five, 10 and 15 minutes, so users can dip in and out without feeling they've been set up to fail. At the end of each five-minute segment, we give people the option of stopping or resting and then continuing with another five-minute round if they feel good to go on.

The language and tone of voice used by our instructors are extremely important. They're warm, friendly and reassuring, and range in age from mid-20s into their 70s, so there's something and someone for everyone.

Online fitness is perfect for people who are new to exercise and weight loss. If you're overweight and unfit, the thought of having to put on workout gear and set foot in a gym is unrealistic for some. Training at home allows people to feel safe and once they've gained confidence, they're more likely to join a mainstream health club or leisure centre.

PHOTO: DAVID LANGRIDGE - 1FITLIFE



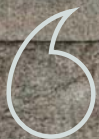
Operators must create content that attracts 'hard-to-reach' groups

With over 50 years experience, Slimming World supports hundreds of thousands of people – both in groups and online – who are more likely to be physically illiterate and may suffer from long-term chronic health conditions.

Gym operators and leisure centres struggle to connect with this market. The content they create tends to assume new customers have an understanding of physical activity and are confident to walk through the doors; this strategy can intimidate and stop this 'hard-to-reach' group on their fitness journey before they've even started.

The fitness industry should be asking itself what can it learn from Slimming World. Who else is engaging and inspiring this audience successfully?

Programmes should focus on long-term habit change, not quick results



We need to stop demonising both food and physical activity



PHOTO: IBOO - SHUTTERSTOCK

Dr Paula Watson

Reader in exercise and health psychology
LJMU

The benefits of physical activity go far beyond weight loss. Research shows physical activity is good for everyone, and that you're better off being overweight and active, than slim and inactive. A culture that's obsessed with 'the skinny' and the body beautiful isn't going to stop the growth of obesity.

I'd like to see more people adopting a holistic lifestyle approach, living sustainable, healthy lives in the long term that impact not only the individual but their family around them.

The concept of a diet that lasts for 12 weeks or six months sets people up to fail. A target weight or a goal might keep people focussed in the short-term, but ultimately once you've reached that 'perfect weight', more often than not the diet stops and the weight goes back on.

It also doesn't change family habits, and with obesity often running through generations we need to ditch the scales and think about portion control, a nutritious and unprocessed diet, plus incorporating and normalising physical activity into everyday life.

It's not a quick fix. We need to stop demonising both food and physical activity. Narratives such as 'no pain no gain' are unhelpful, and present physical activity as a punishment. Ultimately it must be something



people look forward to and enjoy – be that walking with a friend, a bike ride with the family or playing walking football.

A good first step would be to change the language we use. So instead of 'beach body ready' or 'new year, new you' messages which focus on what a person looks like, promoting the healthy lifestyle message; being happier, more able to participate in life and chasing after children or grandchildren.

Facilities could also look to provide enjoyable activities that families can do together, as well as low intensity and beginner classes that cater for people who aren't confident in a 'gym' setting. Parkrun is a great example – there are minimal barriers to participation, the activities are free, people can run wherever they happen to be – and there's a 2km children's run.

If someone has a dysfunctional relationship with food, whether they're an emotional eater, a bored eater or a compulsive eater, there's a bigger battle to overcome than just weight loss; they need to improve their relationship with food and be supported to reinterpret what healthy eating looks like and what physical activity can be.

Some of these changes might require a cultural shift, and health and fitness operators might consider seeking support from exercise psychologists. It's a new and growing field, and I'm increasingly working with individuals, practitioners and facilities to promote physical activity in a healthy way. ●

Wellness INSIGHTS

As the industry dives into another year of challenges and opportunities, operators talk about key areas for growth and innovation, as well as shifting consumer views of health and fitness



Personalised attention to detail really matters to people in these challenging times

Barbara den Bak, CDO, Urban Gym Group. Founder of High Studios

Our industry bodies need to work collectively to provide guidance for the general public – especially those with health conditions

Ben Beevers, group development director, Everyone Active



We need to create compelling offers to tempt consumers out of their home gyms

Christian Dietrich, co-founder and MD, Joon

Mind, body and holistic training will emerge as a strong trend as we see people wanting to look after their mental health

John Penny, MD, Third Space



The gym floor can be the biggest and best group exercise studio

Karen Wilkinson, operations director, The Bannatyne Group





People with health conditions need better exercise guidance

Since the start of the pandemic, consumer attitudes to fitness and wellbeing have changed in line with personal values. Both the fitness industry and consumers have been focusing on the role of physical and mental wellbeing within the bigger picture of health, and we're seeing the language of fitness shifting to reflect these changing needs and values.

What does this mean for operators?

"We can expect a more holistic approach which highlights movement, recovery and nutrition and a focus on health, rather than the more traditional reasons for engagement, such as performance or body image," says Karen Wilkinson, operations director at The Bannatyne Group.

Consumer awareness of mental health and wellbeing will also offer a range of opportunities around connection and community.

"Mind, body and holistic training will emerge as a strong trend as we see people wanting to look after their mental health," says John Penny, MD of Third Space. "Community-led group exercise is likely to rise in popularity, and operators can leverage this in

clubs, outdoors and at event-led days. Humans love to achieve goals together and tell others about it."

As greater numbers of people become aware of looking after their health, the challenge of guidance and signposting remains.

"We need better links between health and physical activity," says Ben Beevers, group development director at Everyone Active. "As a sector, we're set up to help, but our industry bodies need to work collectively to provide guidance for the general public – especially those with health conditions."

Engaging with wider audiences

The past two years has brought fitness and physical activity to the forefront of people's minds, and the sector now faces the challenge of reaching and engaging new audiences, including those who've been living an inactive lifestyle.

Everyone Active manages over 200 sites in partnership with more than 60 different local authorities. With the insights that come from this work, Ben Beevers says it's vital the industry takes the right steps to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all. "This includes ensuring all colleagues undertaking



Consumers have just spent two years finding their own way. As they make their way back to you, make sure they enjoy the experience

relevant training to understand the specific needs of different groups of customers," he says.

Expanding reach through partnerships

The physical activity sector can reach more people through collaboration and this could be the year for the creation of more meaningful strategic partnerships and bold acquisitions.

The Bannatyne Group views these as key ways to expand its offerings to a wider demographic with recent examples including the launch of its recently opened club at Cardigan Field, Leeds where it's providing a point of difference for members through its spa, to a partnership with Teesside Airport for the opening of the first Bannatyne Travel Spa.

Everyone Active is using partnerships to explore immersive activity, with the launch

of its first Tag Active arena, with more sites planned as the partnership develops.

Joon plans to build on its proof of concept by offering franchising opportunities to the market in 2022. These will open up other geographies, particularly in less developed markets that are in the early stages of positioning fitness.

High Studios, part of the Urban Gym Group, plans to host a community 5K running event, leveraging the popularity of its 'learn to run' digital product, which was launched during lockdown.

Exciting and memorable experiences

Consumers have just spent two years finding their own way and attaching themselves to brands that match their values. As they make their way back to you, be sure they enjoy the experience. Whatever



Mind, body and holistic training will emerge as a strong trend



Younger audiences enjoy more 'experience-led' products and services

your business specialises in, 2022 is the year to work hard on making every touchpoint memorable.

For younger audiences, this means facilitating more 'experience-led' products and services and leveraging the power of digital. For those who have been engaged with outdoor exercise, this may mean developing hybrid offers that showcase the community support of the sector. For everyone, it means revisiting every detail of the customer experience, regardless of demographic or offer.

"We need to create compelling offers to tempt consumers out of their home gyms and online training sessions," says Christian Dietrich of Joon. "Humans are social by nature, but prospective members will be looking for the best possible match to their needs. I believe this will be more important to them than the usual evaluation of whether to maintain or cancel a membership. This is a phenomenal opportunity for new concepts to stand up and communicate why they're the best solution."

"With the advancement in technology and continued growth of social media, people want an experience they can share or engage with outside the facility," says Beevers. "Our fitness offering now includes Fortis, a new group fitness HIIT class – a premium experience,

with the very latest technology that makes the most of data and social media sharing."

"Group training is a fantastic way to create memorable experiences that can use the latest equipment and trends to generate a valuable sense of connection with others," he said.

"The gym floor needs to be an exciting place to visit," says Wilkinson. "It's becoming one of the primary social outlets for younger generations. In many cases, the gym floor can be the biggest and best group exercise studio. We expect to see more classes taking pride of place on the gym floor, with the design reflecting this through the creation of more dynamic spaces."

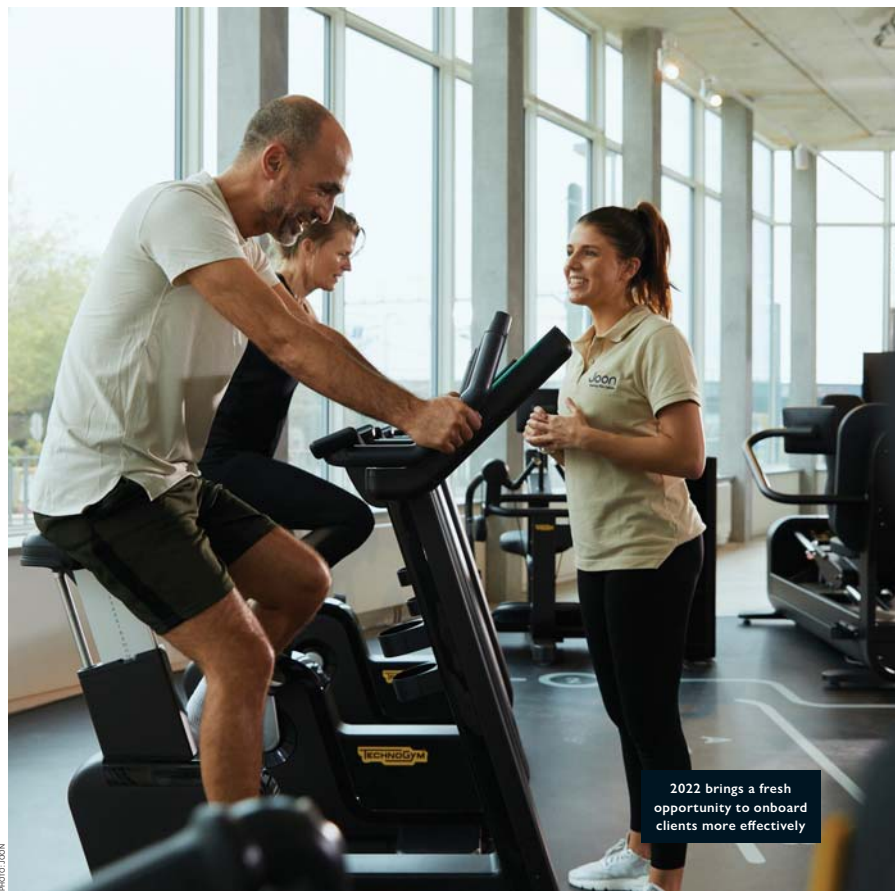
Strengthening the customer journey

With more people than ever actively reflecting on their health, the sector will see greater numbers of first-timers and lapsed exercisers coming through the doors. We must be ready to not just support them on that journey, but also to optimise each element of the customer experience. Technology, apps and workforce talent provide exciting opportunities to get this right.


"Too many people find it difficult to maintain that initial increase in their activity levels, despite having a very strong initial motivation," says Wilkinson.



Developing a digital or hybrid offer bridges the gap between consumer's homes, outdoor spaces and traditional fitness sites



2022 brings a fresh opportunity to onboard clients more effectively



The growth of digital enables clubs to meet members where they are

"2022 gives us a fresh opportunity to onboard clients more effectively, preventing that cycle of joining, cancelling, and re-joining, which is no good for anyone.

How can we be better at supporting people at this important stage of the journey? Empowering people with relevant knowledge, a greater focus on education delivered by skilled professionals, as well as better partnerships and signposting, should be key focuses.

"We're back up to pre-pandemic membership levels, despite a lot of lockdowns here in the Netherlands," says Barbara den Bak of High Studios. "I put this down to our hard work in staying in contact with members, developing new products in response to their needs and remaining extremely flexible as things changed.

"We even had instructors doing door-to-door delivery of prizes for in-house fitness competitions. That kind of personalised attention to detail really matters to people in these challenging times."

Balancing digital, hybrid, and physical

The explosion of digital technology presents opportunities and barriers to operators, with the increase in independent online coaches and unregulated fitness trainers giving the sector new competition. This isn't only a problem when it comes to attracting consumers, but also for when it comes to recruiting skilled professionals into the workforce.

Developing a digital or hybrid offer bridges the gap between consumers' homes, outdoor spaces, and traditional fitness sites. If customers are faced with more gym closures and lockdowns, having a digital option as part of (or all of) their membership is an engaging way to promote brand loyalty.

"After lockdown, customers understand where and how they can consume fitness through multi-channels," says John Penny. "We should develop an omnichannel approach to connect with customers in different ways – app-led, outdoor, via community and events and through traditional in-club attendance. Genuine engagement across all these touchpoints through innovation, collaboration and educating your teams will ensure no opportunities are missed."

The growth of digital means operators can offer more innovative and flexible solutions that meet consumers where they are – in a technological and geographical sense.

"We can now support customers within our centres and from the comfort of their own home through digital platforms or apps," says Ben Beevers. "This opportunity to support customers' physical and mental wellbeing is hugely beneficial."

In 2020, Everyone Active launched its Everyone on Demand app that has provided customers with a digital fitness solution and access to a number of leading fitness apps for their everyday fitness and wellbeing goals. This offer evolved in 2021 to include NHS-approved exercise prescription app and data portal, EXi. The app has helped Everyone Active support more people and forms part of its Exercise Referral Service.

All operators will need to get their brand into people's hands and homes in 2022. The hybridisation of live/digital content and the creation of brand experiences – balanced with physical in-person contact – will be crucial factors for success in 2022. ●

Hydrow

Rowing re-imagined

Bring the outdoors into your health club, gym or fitness space with Hydrow, the leading connected rower



Hydrow was created to transform the rowing experience, helping people realise its true benefits. It's an investment that will excite and engage your members

James Moffat, Hydrow UK



Robust, durable and engineered to provide a seamless experience for both businesses and their members, Hydrow is an amazing full-body workout that pushes the body and releases the mind.

Access +3,000 live and on-demand workouts with world-class athletes, streamed live from beautiful waterways around the world. Members can row across Lake Lucerne in Switzerland, float down the Charles River in Boston or even take in some of the local sights as they skim past London Bridge on the River Thames.

As well as being one of the most efficient and effective workouts, Hydrow will blend seamlessly into your gym surroundings with its sleek and sophisticated design. Virtually silent and ergonomically crafted for comfort, this state-of-the-art piece of fitness equipment will transform the way your members work out.

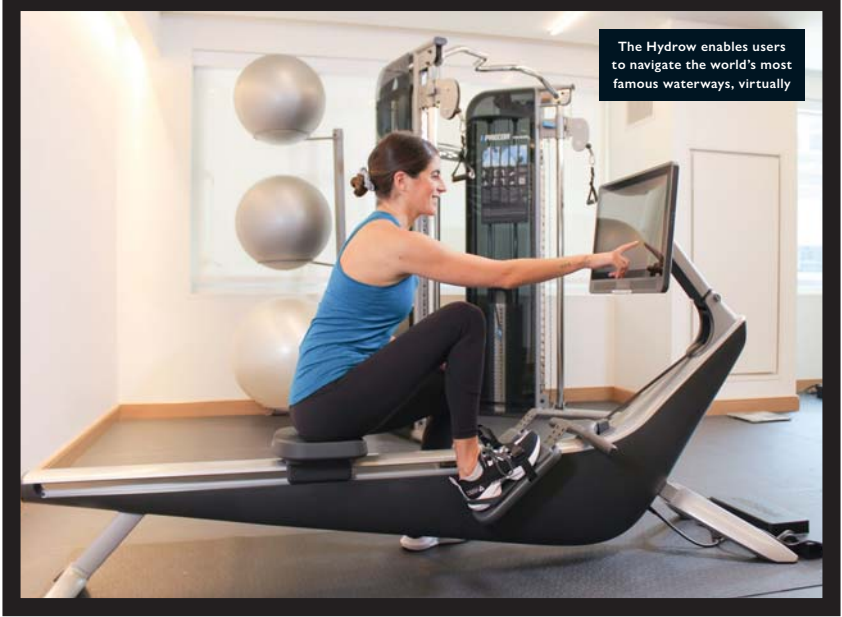
Commercial warranty

Plus, the Hydrow rowing machine comes with a commercial warranty, making it perfect for health clubs, leisure centres, rehabilitation centres, colleges and universities and those investing in corporate wellness or residential communities.

From its conception, Hydrow was developed as a fusion between gym and outdoor exercise; blending the immersive experience of being out on the water with the convenience of an indoor setting and reflecting the growing trend towards digital fitness, which has emerged over the last few years due to COVID-19.

Hydrow's multi-sensory approach is brought to life through an incredible 22 inch HD screen and patented Live Outdoor Reality, which immerses your members in a captivating on-the-water world.

In contrast to 'studio focused' modern fitness brands, Hydrow keeps your members connected to



The Hydrow enables users to navigate the world's most famous waterways, virtually

the natural environment. Whether that's through the library of live and on-demand workouts, or the patented, computer-controlled drag mechanism which flawlessly replicates the pull of the water – it's an indoor experience unlike any other.

But there's more. This revolutionary rowing machine promises to work 86 per cent of major muscle groups, compared to less than 44 per cent used in running or cycling. Full body, yet low impact, Hydrow is perfect for all ages and abilities, including those returning from injuries or just looking for a light-paced cardio option.

Library of workouts

Hydrow also offers an entire library of on-the-mat strength training, conditioning, yoga and Pilates classes to complement rowing. These workouts range from 5-45 minutes, targeting the legs, back, arms, glutes and core.

Friendly athletes – including world champions and Olympians – will talk your members through the motions and metrics of every row. They can choose between Breathe, Sweat and Drive workouts, which all feature a leaderboard for those with a competitive side.

Join British rowing champion, Mike Dostal on a tough, but light-hearted row, or try a high-energy

workout with US Paralympic champion Dani Hansen. Whatever your members are looking for, there's plenty to keep them motivated.

With unlimited user profiles, Hydrow delivers a personal experience to every user. Members can link up with their Strava accounts, monitor their heart rate as they row and even connect Bluetooth headphones for more privacy.

Through the Hydrow app, members can also access personal tracking, progress monitoring and analysis of their fitness data. Plus, it's easy to get started with simple account creation for new users, so they'll soon be 'out on the water'.

After almost two years of lockdowns and restricted travel, Hydrow will give your members the chance to be put through their paces with workouts that feel more like adventures as they glide down Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire, rather than doing the same circuit of the local park. And what's more, for every 25 (non-consecutive) days your members work out, Hydrow will donate to water.org on their behalf.

Bring the outdoors into your gym space today. Visit www.hydrow.co.uk/commercial to arrange a one-to-one introductory call and demo, and discover how Hydrow can fit into your business.



Members should lose track of time and experience the feeling of collective joy you get from sharing an experience with others



The challenge is to uplift exercise from a 'chore' to a memorable event

Thoroughly ENGAGING

Focusing on retention to keep members engaged has never been more important, as Abi Harris reports on from the latest Retention Convention

Around 600 people from 30 countries signed up to the recent Retention Convention to get advice on creating exercise adherence and building loyalty and retention through workout-related customer experiences.

Organiser, Paul Bedford, said: "You only have to look at the investment brands such as Apple and Peloton have put into creating their experiences to realise that if operators don't ramp up in-club exercise experiences, the difference will be so significant it will be disappointing.

"These fit tech companies design everything around entertainment and it's important to be constantly examining what health club operators can do to provide memorable in-club workout experiences that compete."

Creating memories

The Retention Convention kicked off with a session on designing memorable exercise experiences.

Bedford said: "The routine of going to the gym can get boring. We need to focus our energies on improving the exercise experience and creating memorable workouts for members who are just going through the motions.

"Things don't have to change every time they visit, but at least every four to six weeks something new needs to happen to maintain motivation and interest and to ultimately improve retention."

The session focused on exercisers who want to work out a couple of times a week. "Exercise doesn't always fulfil them emotionally," he explained. "It's a bit like grocery shopping or commuting, it's a task



Paul Bedford

that has to be done. We need to inspire these people to become enthusiasts, so they come more regularly.

"Since lockdowns were lifted, we've seen some people quitting six months after joining. Between 90-270 days is the point when some become demotivated; this is the weak spot where we need to take action.

"Group exercise has really moved on, driven by the rise of boutiques and their great content, but the gym floor doesn't have those dynamics – it's often just a vast array of kit. We need to make workouts here memorable and pleasurable, so people don't have to rely on willpower to keep coming," said Bedford.

"They need guidance and a sense of progression, otherwise it can be like playing a video game – if you're stuck on one level, you'll give up."

Designing an exercise experience

Bedford – who has been studying the creation of memories – explained that days are made up of moments, remembered as good or bad, which are linked to emotions. "If you can attach an emotion to something," he said, "it will create a memory, and memories build relationships".

"Exercise doesn't always need to be fun, but it does need to be enjoyable – even discomfort can be enjoyable for an enthusiast; feeling the ache becomes something you look forward to, as the chemical bombardment makes us feel good. But new exercisers must get used to the 'hump of discomfort'. There shouldn't be pain, just discomfort related to the level of effort needed for results."



The Upstartr Project Ecosystem

Samantha Cullum from boutique growth consultancy, Upstartr, led a session on the Upstartr Project Ecosystem – a six-step system for improving business growth. Cullum said: “Your aim is to stand out, be different, be confident and create impact. You need to use a consistent framework that can work across any industry or any new project.”



Samantha Cullum

The Upstartr Framework

PART 1 Discovery

Firstly gather information, data and evidence, both internally and externally, including customer and market research – everything is built on top of this phase, so don't skimp.

“Identify your primary driver, whether it's time, cost or customer requirements,” said Cullum. “If done well, this phase will shape your service, telling you what customers want and need, who's in the marketplace already and what they look like and whether the innovation fits with your overall vision and mission.”

PART 2 Insight

Analyse what you've learned, test it and validate what you think is true. Review customer data and look for patterns and unique or shared customer behaviours. What problems do they have and what solutions might help them? Think in layers: ‘must-haves’, such as online booking, ‘nice-to-haves’, for example, a class dropping into members’ calendars on booking, and ‘wow moments’, such as a post-class message with a link to rebook.

Check what competitors are offering – your ‘nice-to-haves’ may become ‘must-haves’ if everyone around you already offers them.

PART 3 Playback

Report to your team, discuss and adapt, so there's a shared understanding of the project plan, roadmap, vision and expectations. It's critical everyone knows what you are innovating and how it will impact the business.

PART 4 Innovate

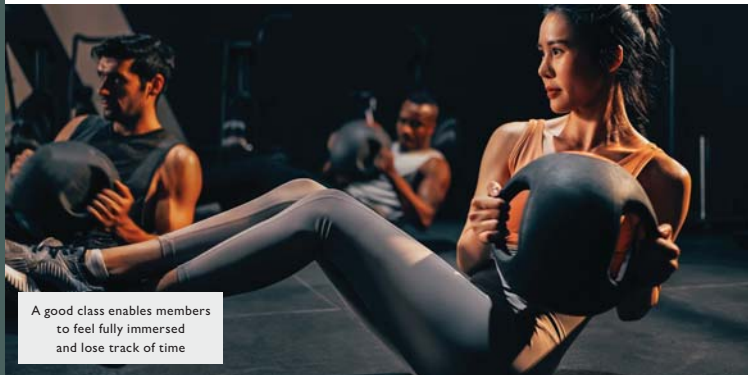
This is where the magic happens as the product or service is created. Be prepared to fail, review and start again several times, although too many times and this indicates you've got a problem in discovery, in your interpretation of the insight or with the developer's interpretation of your plan.

PART 5 Finalise

This is the stage where you'll often be asked to ‘add this’ or ‘remove that’, but if your previous processes have been robust this should be straightforward to manage in or out.

PART 6 Live

Launch time! The hard work for you may be finished but it's just starting for the team implementing your project.



A good class enables members to feel fully immersed and lose track of time



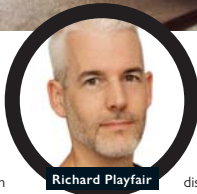
PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/COGNIZANCE

- ▶ Bedford said people must be able to complete their workout – it should never be so hard they have to abandon it – and suggested setting individual challenges that build over time. “Perhaps work towards one day near the end of each week when they really challenge themselves; this will encourage them to attend, as well as offering the ‘reward’ of having the weekend to recover.

“Or look at the order in which they complete exercises or move the major muscle groups around to focus on a peak-end moment, rather than splitting muscle classes into different days.”

Bedford's advice was to make sure members know what's coming, so they're mentally prepared and more likely to have a positive experience. “Exercisers need to feel the effects but not fail. Get them to attempt a personal best or complete a set for the first time – create one moment that stands out – each week or each month.”

His final message was to think about what feedback you give and when. Praise the positives, the technique and the effort, be mindful that silence is also a powerful tool and think about where you stand as you give



Richard Playfair

feedback so you can encourage their experience without interrupting it.

Sounding sweet

Richard Playfair from Sweatlife Films discussed creating on-demand workouts

that meet changing customer expectations. In his session ‘The Studio to Screen Strategy’, he told delegates to focus on quality content: “It doesn't matter how good the set looks or how good the sound is if the end-user feels frustrated or disconnected.”

His top tips included utilising audio, video and graphics to create a frustration-free workout that's easy to follow. You'll need at least two cameras for full body and tighter shots. Use head mics and be aware of hair or jewellery that creates background noise which is difficult to remove in post-production. Users may stack classes, so remain consistent with your audio.

Encourage instructors to wear colourful clothes, as movements can be difficult to distinguish in black, but avoid tight patterns and fluorescents, which can look strange in finished production. Timer bars can be really useful, but their placement should be determined in pre-production to ensure camera angles work. ▶



Members need guidance and a sense of progression, otherwise, it can be like playing a video game – if you're stuck on one level long enough, you'll give up

► Subtitles are inexpensive to add in post-production. Always make sure presenters run through in real-time to spot mistakes and practice sounding authentic on camera.

"The aim is to leave the exerciser feeling so successful they can't wait to come again. But any fitness fan will tell you, doing it online is not the same as in person," said Playfair. "The same goes for the instructor. Connecting with an audience through the camera is a whole new skillset."

Consistency is key

"Your four main aims should be: to become known for what you do best; to create signature workouts that stand out from the competition; to create opportunities for more meaningful interactions; and to deliver a consistent omnichannel experience," said Playfair.

"Determine how much content to create and how often you need to release it to keep members happy. Too much and they can feel overwhelmed. Be aware live-streamed videos may feel inferior next to on-demand workouts in your library, especially if the instructor stops to engage with the live audience."

Talent talks

Playfair's top tips for talent include:

- Script to remove 'umm' and 'ahhh' filler words, so instructors can be relaxed and their personality can shine through
- Avoid long intros, which can be frustrating
- Replace the term 'guys' with 'you', so people feel you're talking directly to them
- Remember that body language that feels natural in a studio may not work on camera. Audition and up-skill your team so they don't disappoint fans online



Adam Zeitsiff

- Be aware viewers can't always see the screen, so give exact descriptions
- Don't be tempted to fill empty spaces with chat – gaps help coaching tips sink in.

Digging digital

Adam Zeitsiff, president and CEO of online fitness class platform, Intelivideo, opened his session by saying: "Digital meant survival for operators early in the pandemic, but it will be an important crutch going forwards, too."

"Lockdown acted as an awareness campaign for digital, but people continued using Intelivideo when the clubs opened in July 2021, and we even saw a New Year bump coming into 2022."

"Members are returning and in-gym will always be the best experience, but consumers are still engaging with our platform – we haven't seen a dip – so, we need to recalibrate what in-person vs digital looks like to ensure members stay."

Ashley Poodle, Intelivideo's CMO, backed this up with stats showing:

- 80 per cent of members plan to continue using digital in addition to live workouts (Source: *Les Mills 2021 Global Fitness Report*).
- 59 per cent favour a 60-40 split between in-club and at home, so it must form part of an overall retention strategy (Source: *Les Mills 2021 Global Fitness Report*).
- 22 per cent increase in monthly exercise frequency by those using digital programming as well as in-club, so people are actually working out more (Source: *Les Mills 2021 Global Fitness Report*).
- On average, the Intelivideo platform sees bricks and mortar members checking in digitally to complete a workout 3.8 times per month. (Source: Intelivideo). ►



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/FLAMINCO IMAGES

Exercisers need to feel the effects, but not feel as though they've failed

Operators should market the benefits of belonging to their tribe

► “If members are engaged both physically and digitally you’re winning, as your brand has more affinity than before,” said Zeitsiff, who believes digital doesn’t just have to mean workouts – it can be used for onboarding, to reduce new member anxiety, for education, coached sessions and technique development. An Intelivideo client case study showed hybrid content can be bundled into premium memberships and used to generate leads, convert walk-in trials and increase membership fees.

Hybrid tactics

Zeitsiff highlighted three types of hybrid strategy:

- **Simple exercise replacement** – how can I keep members engaged with my brand when they can’t get to the gym?
- **Concierge content** – adding nutritional content, wellness advice or recovery videos that may keep members engaged by driving additional check-ins when they don’t want to come to the gym
- **Gym-timidation content** – such as ‘how to’ videos or workouts to do in the gym, to build confidence and make the experience less intimidating for people new to the club.

“We often see people with their phone propped against the wall playing YouTube exercise videos in the gym – if they’re doing that, it should be your content they’re engaging with,” said Zeitsiff. “If they want to do a quick workout before they leave the gym, you need to be offering that ... or someone else will.”

Unicorn instructors

Closing the seventh annual Retention Convention, Barry and Shay Kostabi, co-founders of Fitness Career Mastery, explained why simply offering workouts isn’t enough anymore.

“The future lies in the meticulous design of the experience people have – well beyond the workout. Members need to fall in love with what it feels like to be a part of your operation,” said Barry Kostabi. “We all know ‘unicorn’ instructors that make a class so much more than a workout, and there’s a science behind it.” He advised operators to ensure they market the benefits of belonging to their tribe, the unique traits of their instructors and the transformations clients have achieved, not just the club’s amenities, equipment and workouts.

Shay Kostabi then explained the basics needed to design a memorable client experience. The workout space should reflect your brand identity and deliver on your promise. Music is a huge part of the experience and audio equipment is needed to protect your instructors’ vocals, so invest in an excellent sound system. Lighting doesn’t have to be fancy, but ambience helps, and provides brand consistency through signature programming where all instructors are equally good.

“Instructors can hop online and earn up to US\$600 in their living room, but most still prefer teaching in a studio. They want to show up and do what they’re good at, so help them to do this,” said Shay Kostabi,



*Between 90-270 days
is the point when some
members become
demotivated; this is
the weak spot where
we need to take action*

before revealing four essential skills instructors need to deliver an addictive workout experience:

- **Persona** Help instructors – cultivate the power of persona – who they are on stage. Being super clear on their style will help you market them more effectively too
- **Flow state and collective joy** – members should lose track of time and be fully immersed, despite the perceived challenge, with the feeling of collective joy you get from sharing an experience with others
- **Mastering the art of coaching and cueing** –instructors should record and review themselves regularly to ensure they're still teaching and speaking to a multitude of people with different learning styles
- **Musicology** – tap into the psychology of music to create concert-level playlists that transform workouts into immersive experiences.

Shay advised operators to take their instructors' classes and see if the music draws them in. "Can you get lost in the moment? Does time fly by? Does the music support the movement and motivate you to push yourself more? Do you experience feelings of joy or an emotional release? Was there a song that empowered you?" he asked, reminding delegates of the power that comes with doing it well. ●

● If you missed the 2021 Retention Convention you can access the videos at: www.retentionguru.com



Barry and Shay Kostabi

PHOTO: JESSIE DEYOUNG



iFIT-powered Freemotion cardio machines offer some of the world's most interactive, connected fitness experiences

Technology in motion



Strength training is accessible to all with the Genesis Dual Cable Cross - Inclusive Use

Freemotion uses connected fitness and omnichannel experiences to benefit exercisers and clubs the world over

For over 20 years, Freemotion has been an innovator and trailblazer, developing game-changing fitness equipment and technology to transform health and fitness facilities the world over.

Freemotion was the first company to introduce cable-based strength training to the industry, going on to revolutionise cardio fitness with the Incline Trainer and the world's first road-simulating bike. Today, Freemotion cardio machines are powered by iFIT—the world's number one health and fitness platform – allowing users to work out in the most exciting destinations on earth.

Freemotion was rebranded as 'Freemotion from iFIT' in 2021, reflecting a shared vision with its parent company, iFIT Health & Fitness Inc, to offer omnichannel solutions through iFIT to an ever-growing community of more than six million members in over 120 countries.



Dan Toigo

Dan Toigo, MD of Freemotion and senior VP of iFIT Health and Fitness, talks about the brand's success and what lies ahead in 2022.

Future plans

"iFIT-powered Freemotion cardio machines offer some of the world's only truly interactive, connected fitness experiences and are a reflection of our heritage and commitment to always innovating, pushing boundaries and delivering excellence within the global fitness market.

"Our inclusive strength training solutions ensure all exercisers can reach their goals with a high-quality, total-body workout," he says.

"The combination of Freemotion and iFIT allows operators to transform their facilities into an entire world of health and fitness, where members can work out across the globe with renowned coaches and athletes."

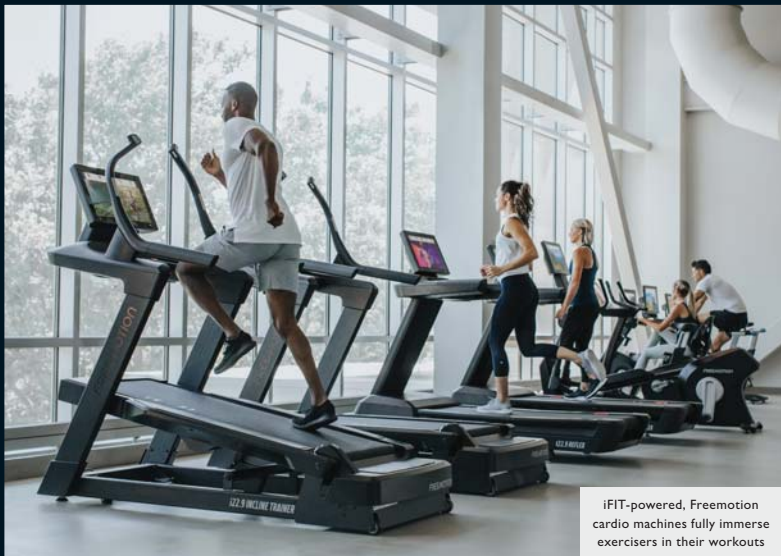
Toigo adds, "Freemotion and iFIT deliver omnichannel solutions that empower members to train wherever they are – at the fitness centre, at home or on the go, with the perfect blend of physical fitness, mental health, nutrition and recovery.

"Each piece of equipment has been meticulously designed and developed to deliver an interactive, engaging and personalised experience where users are fully immersed in the workout. The equipment responds automatically in time with what's happening on-screen, as iFIT trainers adjust the speed, incline, decline and/or resistance.

"With a near-endless selection of live and on-demand workouts to choose from, Freemotion

iFIT reimagines interactive fitness with 17,000 live and on-demand workouts





iFIT-powered, Freemotion cardio machines fully immerse exercisers in their workouts

and iFIT are the ideal partners for operators to drive retention and lifetime value."

Open access for all

Freemotion also recently announced the launch of the new Genesis Dual Cable Cross – Inclusive Use, a machine that makes strength training accessible to all, with open design for wheelchair accessibility and weight stacks with touch and colour contrasts to accommodate visually impaired users. The new machine also meets ASTM international standards.

"Offering an inclusive environment to those looking to train at a club or gym is important," Toigo says. "Our industry strives to make people healthier and fitter and that includes people with disabilities."

From iFIT-powered cardio experiences to the Genesis Dual Cable Cross – Inclusive Use, Freemotion is constantly evolving and committed to meeting the ever-changing fitness landscape with innovative solutions.

"Successful operators must provide an interactive, connected fitness offering to meet their members' diverse needs and expectations," says Tony Ali, Freemotion UK country manager. "With iFIT, game-changing technology and innovation already existing in the UK, providing omnichannel experiences that drive engagement and retention."

Gyms without walls

"Since the start of the pandemic, businesses, brands and operators have had to react and respond faster than ever before," says Toigo. "Freemotion's Jeff Esswein coined the phrase 'gyms without walls' to describe when facilities closed their doors and pivoted to digital services, engaging and motivating members who couldn't work out at the gym."

During this time, we've pushed to make this phrase a reality for our customers. Integrating Freemotion and iFIT allows facilities to have more digital touchpoints with members because the club of today – and beyond – is truly one without walls."

The driving force behind this vision is a passion for innovative technology that, ultimately, makes a positive impact on people's lives.

"Technology is more than a word at Freemotion and we are more than a fitness manufacturer," Toigo concludes. "We're in this game we call a 'business' to empower everyone, of all abilities, with immersive, inclusive and rewarding experiences centred around health and fitness. Everything else is just a by-product of that primary goal."

More: www.freemotionfitness.com

Email: sales@freemotionfitness.com

Tel: +44 7719 554216



Kalt is consolidating
the Migros portfolio
of health clubs

*Our ambition is to have a club
within a 10-minute drive time
wherever you are in Switzerland*

René Kalt

Migros Zurich's fitness veteran is leading a pioneering first for the country's cooperative federation: breaking down cooperative borders and uniting all health clubs into one enterprise – newly named Movemi AG. He speaks to Kate Cracknell

Let's dive straight in and explain Migros for readers who aren't familiar with the company

Migros is Switzerland's largest retailer and largest private employer – the company is made up of 10 separate cooperatives across the country, each operating within its own very strict geographical borders. Within those boundaries, each of the co-operatives runs its own businesses, these range from everything on the retail side right through to building and running health clubs.

How is the company structured?

There are some centralised entities. There's Migros Bund, for example, a hub that sits beneath the 10 cooperatives as an 11th cooperative, performing centralised tasks for all the other 10: things such as marketing, logistics and purchasing food for our supermarkets. Migros Bund is owned by all 10 cooperatives, although Migros Zurich – as the founding cooperative of the whole federation – holds the largest share.

Also owned by all 10 co-operatives is Migros Klubschule (Club School), which sets out to provide education and training for all.

As an organisation – even if we haven't made a profit – roughly 1 per cent of our annual retail sales are used for cultural, social and economic purposes. Klubschule is one beneficiary, and we have Klubschulen across the country. These are currently run by the different cooperatives, but a decision was recently made to bundle them into one subsidiary.

We're also currently consolidating the health club operations into one business and when complete, this – together with the bundling of the club schools – is one of the first times that a business area from the Migros cooperatives has been placed in the hands of a new company.

Tell us more about this consolidation.

Migros Zurich has acquired all the fitness businesses of the Aare, Lucerne and Vaud cooperatives, bringing them into a subsidiary of Migros Zurich – what we call a 'daughter brand' – of which I'm CEO.

There are now only five health clubs within the Federation of Migros Cooperatives in Switzerland that aren't owned by Migros Zurich. These are in Basel and we're working to bring them into the new subsidiary.

In Basel, very sadly the CEO passed away suddenly. The new CEO started in December, so we're now aiming to complete the consolidation by early 2022.

How have you been allowed to do this?

If we rewind a few years, only a handful of the cooperatives had really focused on fitness: Zurich, Lucerne, Aare and Ost (Eastern Switzerland). Alongside that, as I say, a few clubs in Basel and one in the French part of Switzerland.

Migros Zurich had therefore already managed to get permission to expand into the territories of other cooperatives where there were no health clubs, such as Geneva and Neuchâtel-Fribourg, and we took our more affordable Activ Fitness brand



*Personally, I believe it will be 2023 when
we're back at the same levels as 2019*

- to these regions. We also franchised it in Ticino, the Italian part of Switzerland, and acquired and rebranded the approximately 15 clubs in Ost.

In January 2020, I became CEO of the Migros Zurich-owned Activ Fitness AG subsidiary, merging the 15 Ost clubs into the business. Alongside this, Migros Zurich operates premium Fitnesspark clubs and golf parks, for which I'm also responsible. In the meantime, the company has been renamed Movemi AG.

From all of this, it was evident that Zurich was Migros's expert in the area of fitness.

It was also evident – from research we had done in our Zurich clubs – that customers were travelling to work out. We found that 25 per cent of all visits were coming from people who weren't members at that specific club, which is incredibly high.

This further strengthened our belief that all Migros health clubs should be united into one enterprise, giving members the flexibility to work out anywhere.

What does the merger mean in practice?

To be specific, it's Movemi AG (Activ Fitness AG) that has acquired the health club businesses of Migros Aare, Migros Lucerne and Migros Vaud, in a deal that will complete on 1 January 2022. At the same time, Migros Zurich's Fitnesspark clubs will be transferred to Movemi AG, bringing everything together into one enterprise.

There are actually more club brands – there's also Fitness Club, One Training Center and Only Fitness – but we will be rebranding these so we just have the two brands going forward: mid-market Activ Fitness and premium Fitnesspark.

There are currently 16
Fitnessparks out of a
total estate of 132 clubs





Fitnessparks is the
Swiss company's
premium fitness brand

One Fitness Club location – a higher-end facility in Bern – will become a Fitnesspark. The rest will become Activ Fitness clubs. In the short term, that will mean a new brand above the door and a new look, feel and colour scheme – our trademark red – to ensure all clubs are clearly part of the Activ Fitness network and feel familiar to our members. In the longer term, we may also need to make a few tweaks to the product offering at some clubs.

There's now great geographical coverage for Activ Fitness across Switzerland, and this will only grow as we work towards our ambition of having a club within a 10-minute drive time wherever you are in the country. We currently have 132 clubs in total, including the 16 Fitnessparks, and two new Activ Fitness branded clubs which opened at the end of 2021.

What are your price points?

Fitnessparks is a premium offering and Activ Fitness is mid-market. Ten years ago, Activ Fitness was low-cost, but it's actually very hard to make budget gyms work in Switzerland. If you look at Pure Gym (which operates in Switzerland as BaseFit), for example, it recently put its annual membership up from 490 to 690 Swiss Francs.

Activ Fitness – with its live group exercise, saunas and crèche facilities – charges 790 Swiss

Francs a year [around £50 a month] as one all-inclusive price. At Fitnessparks, by comparison, membership ranges from 1,250–1,390 Swiss Francs.

You opened a new Fitnesspark in the middle of the early lockdowns

Yes, Fitnesspark Stadelhofen opened in August 2020, which wasn't ideal. But then, this is a 2,500sq m premium club, meaning a long process from planning to launch date; all decisions were made long before COVID-19. Had we been a smaller organisation, perhaps we'd have paused, but fortunately we were able to follow through on our long-term strategic decisions even in the middle of the pandemic.

We have a strong belief in our health agenda, of which fitness is part – alongside healthy eating, supported by our supermarkets, and a healthy mindset that recognises the value of everything from sleep to sex, friends and laughter to moderating alcohol intake – and we're confident the business will come back in the end.

It is taking time, though. After the first lockdown, our member numbers were almost the same as pre-COVID, but a long second lockdown really saw habits begin to change and this has hurt our sector in Switzerland and Germany. We aren't seeing members leaving and going to another club. They're leaving and ▶

- either doing nothing or trying to work out from home. So, our competition isn't other clubs at the moment.

Our biggest challenges come from the decisions being made by government. Here's an example of what I mean by that. Since 13 September, members have only been allowed to come and train in our clubs if they have a 3G certificate, which means either they're double vaccinated, or they've tested negative or they've had COVID within the last six months and have antibodies. Then since December, they've needed 2G – to be double vaccinated or to have had COVID in the prior six months.

This isn't about clubs being unsafe, though. We have the impression that it's about the government trying to force more people to have the vaccine and it isn't exclusive to gyms. It's also being applied to cinemas, restaurants, museums... it's making things very hard.

Let's talk about your German operation

Although I have oversight of the business, I'm not responsible for the German operation on a day-to-day basis any more.

It was something I originally founded in the shape of Elements health clubs, and then grew by acquiring two consultancies that specialise in the field of fitness: Greinwalder and Inline. The latter also came with a network of franchised clubs operating under the Injoy brand.

It's actually very hard to make budget gyms work in Switzerland. If you look at BaseFit (PureGym), for example, it recently had to put its annual membership up from 490 to 690 Swiss Francs

In 2019, I merged these three businesses into an organisation called ACISO. And then I stepped back, handing over to a local management team, although ACISO is still owned by Migros Zurich. The seven Elements clubs have come through COVID pretty well.

What's your role now?

Stepping back from the German operation has given me the time I need to focus exclusively on merging the Swiss cooperatives' fitness businesses.

A merger isn't done simply by signing the contract, there are employees to manage and it's important ►



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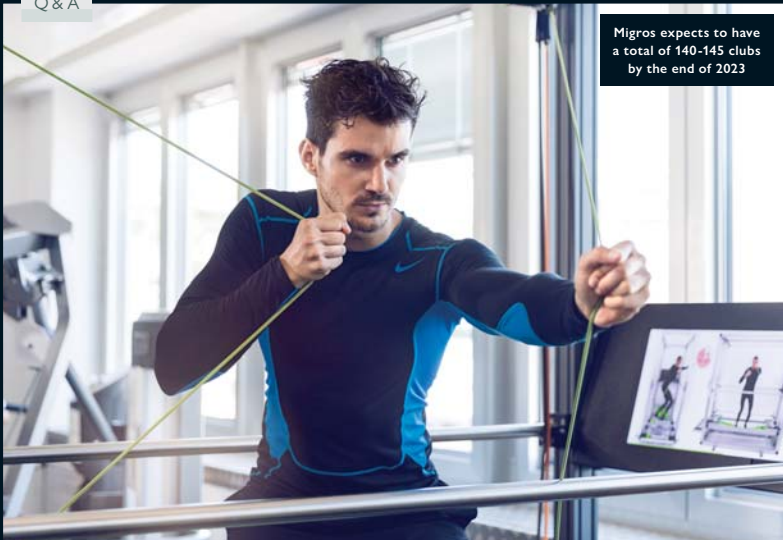
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Migros expects to have a total of 140-145 clubs by the end of 2023



► to address their ideas and their fears and ensure there isn't a knowledge drain. Then there's the senior management team to align, and the need to create systems and an infrastructure to support two clear brands. This is a big cultural job, and will be my primary focus throughout 2022.

We'll grow, just because we always do. By the end of 2023, I imagine we'll have perhaps 140-145 clubs. But mainly, the focus will be on cultural integration and, of course, recovering economically from the impact of the pandemic.

Recovery will happen – ours is a strong company – but it's hard to say exactly when. There are some in the industry who believe it will take four or five years. Personally, I believe it will be 2023 when we're back at the same levels as 2019.

And then, once I've done all that... well, I have to retire in four years! There are strict rules around that. I see properly merging all fitness clubs in Switzerland as my last big goal, capping off an eventful career at Migros, in which I hope I've done my bit for the brand.

If the next CEO comes in with new energy and a desire to take our fitness brands into other markets, for example, I'd say it's feasible. We've already considered northern Italy. But that will be their job and their decision. ●

René Kalt, Migros 'lifer'

"When I started at Migros in 1995, I thought I'd be here for five years," says René Kalt. "But then new opportunities kept coming along, new chances to grow, and it's now 2021. I'm still here, and I will be until I retire in four years' time."

"First of all there was the opportunity to expand the Fitnesspark brand. Then came the realisation that we wouldn't always be able to build these huge premium clubs and that we needed a second product. We had an idea of what we wanted to do, but in fact a chain of nine clubs – Activ Fitness – was already doing it well, so we acquired them and used the power of Migros to roll the brand out."

"I was also head of Migros Club School for five years, getting it onto a more secure financial footing. And then came the chance to cross cooperative borders and beyond, expanding Activ Fitness across multiple regions and launching Elements health clubs in Germany before also acquiring Inline and then Greinwalder."

"We've bought other Swiss operations along the way, too, such as Silhouette. And now we're merging the fitness operations of all Swiss cooperatives into one enterprise. There's just always been an exciting new challenge, and that's what I thrive on."

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Creating active environments

With the importance of public health thrown into the spotlight by the pandemic, HCM talks to Joanna Frank, the head of the Center for Active Design, which operates the Fitwel healthy building certification system, about how investors and operators are waking up to the 'business of health'

After a decade of working to convince commercial property investors and owners of the benefits of creating buildings and community spaces that actively promote health and wellbeing, president and CEO of the Center for Active Design, Joanna Frank, says it took a 21st-century global pandemic to turn the tide of opinion.

Frank says: "Our mission has always been to bring about market transformation around health, so every building is optimised for use, drawing on design and operational strategies based in public health research."

With its headquarters in New York City, the Center for Active Design (CfAD) was launched in 2012, towards the end of Michael Bloomberg's tenure as mayor. Since then, it's launched a certification process called Fitwel, that benchmarks the health and wellness impact of any building. Fitwel was originally developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"When CfAD was first launched, we had to take a top-down approach to persuade companies and organisations to get on board," says Frank. "We were frequently met with resistance, as they were dubious about the benefits – and the financial implications." But since the pandemic hit, she says



businesses and organisations have been knocking on the door of CfAD, hungry for information on how they can keep their buildings and businesses running, and protect their staff and customers.

Frank says: "It's interesting how COVID-19 has drawn a line in the sand.

After what the world has experienced in the last couple of years, we now have investors coming directly to us for advice and direction.

"Whereas in the past investment in a 'healthy building' was seen as a cost, there's no longer doubt in anyone's mind that it's not only a wise investment but also a non-negotiable one."

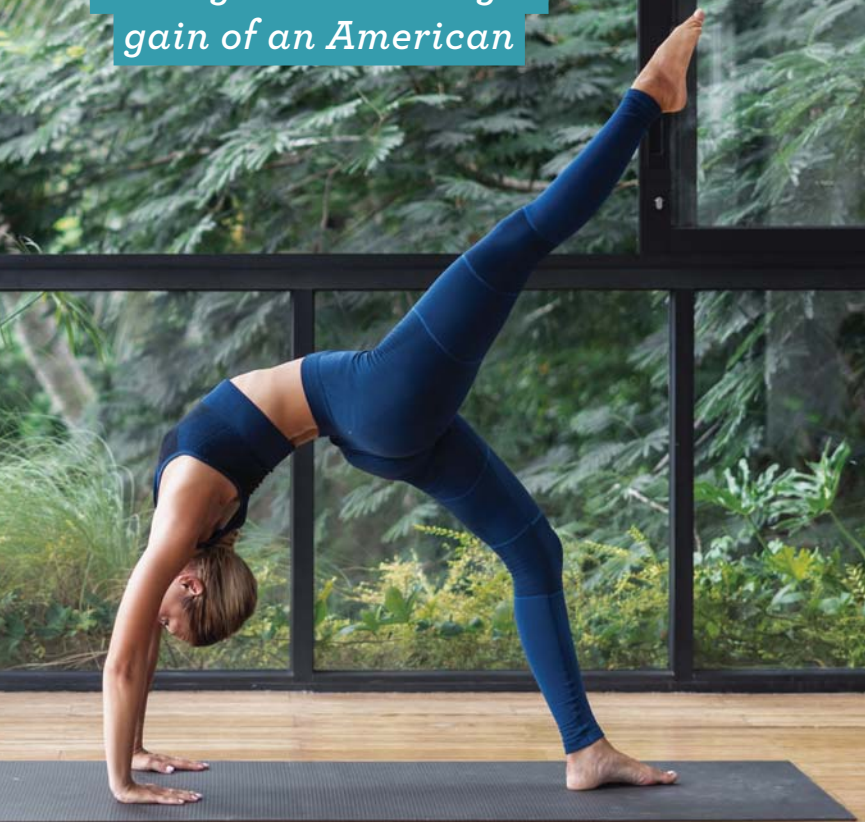
While much of CfAD's focus is on improving public health through design and build strategies, the sudden and unexpected arrival of COVID-19 demanded implementable strategies to cope with a highly infectious disease, on a scale that hadn't been seen since the great flu pandemic of 1918.

Frank is keen to stress that it has all been experienced – and largely conquered – before. "Many lessons were learned from the great flu pandemic of the last century," she says.

Everything that informs Fitwel strategies is based on public health research and Frank and her team are able to draw on an archive of 100 years of health studies and data. "It's our job to take them

66

Taking just six flights of stairs a day offsets the average annual weight gain of an American



Research proves views
of nature positively
impact mental health

- ▶ and translate them into actionable policies that can be adopted for buildings,” she explains.

But while these practices and processes don’t, according to Frank, require significant ‘reinvention’, today’s time-pressed businesses need a ready-made blueprint to follow. The sheer commercial unpreparedness for the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns threw many customer-facing businesses – such as gyms, spas, retail spaces, restaurants and hotels – into a tailspin.

Responding to the virus

“There was so much information floating around that people literally didn’t know what to do, so we produced a new Viral Response Module certification (VRM). We actually had to release it

chapter by chapter in response to the pandemic, because the demand was so urgent,” says Frank.

“Right from the start, we also knew we needed to address not just the physical but the mental health impact of COVID-19,” says Frank. “We understood from SARS that people’s mental health was going to suffer, so we also consulted behavioural experts, focusing on what to do about social isolation and rising anxiety levels in the face of such an existential threat.”

By going through the VRM, businesses can show they’ve used evidence-based strategies and reached certain standards for creating a safe public environment. That ‘proof’ can take the form of a simple decal sticker that certified businesses and buildings can put on display, with contact details the public can look up for further information.

The built environment becomes a playground, creating opportunities for exercise





Wellness promotion is a circle – if you improve the food environment it can promote better mood. Better mood can result in people moving more and reduce the incidence of disease. You don't have to follow a particular order to see success – you can start at any place in the circle

Next steps

With Fitwel certified buildings now prepared for any future pandemic, it's time to turn attention back to the organisation's core mission – mitigating the growth of chronic diseases, such as heart disease (currently the number one killer in the US), Type 2 diabetes and obesity – through the design of the built environment. This also includes sharing ways to reduce stress, anxiety and depression, which are fast becoming new challenges for public health.

"While there are certainly technologies at the build stage that can help in terms of – say – air or light quality," says Frank, "some of the easiest changes can happen at an inexpensive, operational level."

"Stairs are a prime example. They're a resource and opportunity that exists in almost every building – and they're super-efficient in terms of delivering exercise. Taking just six flights of stairs a day, for example, offsets the average annual weight gain of an American."

"All public and commercial buildings of more than one storey have stairs, but they're often hidden away behind doors and rarely get used. Even just being able to see stairs as you enter a lobby increases the likelihood of you taking the stairs by 50 per cent. Then if you actually have signs saying, 'take the stairs' you further increase the likelihood by another 8 to 9 per cent."

Fitwel facts at-a-glance

1,100 Projects certified
or pending certification

2,900 Registered projects

1,570,000 People impacted

6,700 Global users

50 Countries represented

Clearly, the implications of this for businesses could be significant – by using low-cost, subtle signage and deploying messages that speak directly to customers, behaviour can be improved. Once you contemplate Frank's advice, the possibilities for businesses seem endless. For a gym, that could mean a sign saying, 'Take five minutes to stretch here', 'Hydrate here'.

Power of nature

Not surprisingly, giving access to the benefits of nature plays a big part in Fitwel's strategies. "Access to nature in any context is so important – since views of nature greatly impact mental health and create a willingness to venture outdoors and move our bodies," says Frank.

For businesses such as spa resorts, which are often set in beautiful natural surroundings, this may be an easy tick-box to check off – but what about urban buildings – such as big-box gyms, for example – that may have a more limited outlook?

Frank says: "In the absence of access to outdoor nature, bringing plants into a building and using the calming powers of biophilic design can have a positive impact. And even displaying images of nature within a building can have a measurable effect on health. Humans are quite simple creatures really!" ▶



All those involved in the construction and running of buildings must be able to answer not only how their operation is promoting health, but how it's preventing health risks

- She continues: "However, there is a caveat – in the case of access to nature, the environment must be well maintained. If all a person can see is dead trees, then the result will be a negative impact, especially on mental health and a person's sense of safety in that environment."

Research, she says, has also shown people quickly take visual cues about whether they feel invited and welcomed into a space or not.

Frank points to a study by the University of California, Berkeley, which found that simply adding a sign that said 'Welcome' in multiple languages greatly increases the feelings of participants being comfortable in those spaces – and these results were the same regardless of whether participants spoke that language or not.

In another study, participants were divided into two groups. One was shown a picture of the outside of a library, while the other group was shown an altered version of the picture, with planters, a bench and lighting. In the altered photo group, the number of those who saw the library as welcoming was at least 10 per cent higher.

Certification process

Frank says: "Our message to businesses feeling unsure about the path forward post-COVID is that wellness promotion is a circle or a cycle. For example, if you improve the food environment of a community and do nothing else, those benefits will show. Good food can promote better mood, and better mood can result in people moving more, and moving more will reduce the incidence of disease.

"You don't have to follow a particular order to see success – you can start at any place in the circle," she says.

Up to 2019, CFAD was mainly dealing with US-based businesses, but in that year it added international

standards to its certification process, and in May 2021, it established Adai (Active Design Advisors, Inc), which promotes and administers the Fitwel certification as it expands into new markets.

"Going forward, all those involved in the construction and running of buildings must be able to answer not only how their operation is promoting health, but how it's preventing health risks," says Frank. "Decision-makers are finally seeing investment in health as an absolute must and public health as a big risk factor if they don't get it right."

Data from other areas of the market supports this view. Figures published in September 2021 by the Global Wellness Institute (GWI) in its report, *Wellness Real Estate: Looking Beyond COVID-19*, revealed the wellness real estate market grew from US\$148bn (€126bn, £109bn) to US\$275bn (€235bn, £203bn) between 2017 and 2020.

GWI defines wellness real estate as "residential and commercial/institutional properties that incorporate intentional wellness elements into their design, materials and building, as well as their amenities, services and/or programming".



If Frank and her team have their way, all buildings will eventually be 'healthy buildings' – from small business and single operator sites, right up to multinational global property portfolios – regardless of what market they operate in.

"Ten years ago there was no demand for what we're doing," says Frank. "The real estate market mainly saw wellness as a 'nice-to-have', a marketing gimmick that might be good for brand differentiation – once they'd done everything else. But now consumers and employees are demanding it."

"Businesses globally have experienced first-hand that the health of the people in their building is important – and has a financial impact. Now this connection has been made, things are really starting to happen." ●

More: www.fitwel.org

Joanna Frank bio

Frank graduated from the Glasgow School of Art, Scotland in 1998 with a BA in Architecture. Her career in the US started in real estate development as a partner at Bright City Development, where she was responsible for mixed-use residential projects that prioritised sustainable design.

Prior to launching CfAD in 2013, Frank worked for the City of New York, where her positions included director of Active Design and director of the NYC Fresh programme, a city-wide initiative designed to increase access to fresh food in underserved communities.

She's a member of the Urban Land Institute's Affordable & Workforce Housing Council and the National Council of State Housing Agencies' Advisory Group on Financing Healthier Affordable Housing, as well as an active partner in ULI's Building Healthy Places initiative. Frank was named in the 2021 *Commercial Observer Power 100* which recognises the 100 most influential real estate professionals in the US.



We've created the ultimate health and lifestyle club that has everything you love in one incredible resort-inspired location

BRETT LEAHY

MD, Next Gen Australia

How did Next Gen start?

Next Generation Clubs was a successful portfolio of premium clubs in the UK and this model was brought out to Australia with the first site opening in late 1999 at Memorial Drive, Adelaide.

Over the intervening 20 years, we've developed a string of private members clubs across Australia and New Zealand.

How do you fund your growth?

Next Gen Health and Lifestyle Clubs is owned by private equity group Kings Park Capital out of the UK. KPC has been the owner of Next Gen for the past 10 years.

What was the original vision?

To develop premium racquet clubs adjacent to or as part of iconic tennis clubs and facilities across Australia.

How has this evolved?

Over time this original vision has broadened in scope. We identified that our clubs were delivering a wide

Leahy is growing Next Gen as a lifestyle brand



Restored landmark building, Tullamore House in Doncaster, has been fused into the new development

variety of leisure, fitness and sporting pursuits – far wider than the original intention of a tennis focus.

In an attempt to more accurately reflect the direction of the business in 2015 we changed our name and related branding to Next Gen Health and Lifestyle Clubs.

What shape is the business in today?

Next Gen currently has six locations. Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Auckland. In addition to extensive fitness facilities and studios, each has an indoor and an outdoor pool, spa and sauna, children's playrooms, crèche, members' lounge, restaurant and bar – and tennis courts with a variety of surfaces.

Three of our clubs have function/conference centres and four have squash courts. Our clubs also have pro shops and host retail tenants such as hairdressers and physiotherapists and other allied health practitioners.

What plans do you have to develop it going forward?

We're looking to grow the portfolio and will continue with our search for specific club sites of suitable size and location. The owners have no specific goals for site growth. More important is the careful selection of sites that will enable the development of a flagship club such as Next Gen in locations that will ensure their success.

Who are your customers?

The average age of a Next Gen member is 44. The membership base is split equally male to female. They tend to be seeking out a more holistic and social club membership when they become members or they come to us to join our gym and evolve to become a member of our club.

As a result, the average tenure of a Next Gen member is considerably longer than in a standard fitness facility.

Tell us about the team

The senior executive comprises me as MD, Gavin Rowe as FD, Richard Furlong, executive GM, Australia, and Annette MacAndrew as marketing manager.

Other senior staff include Rob Meham, sales manager, Melissa Moussalem, people and culture, Carlos King executive GM – New Zealand and Daniel Everard, product manager.

In addition, each club has its own GM, along with a team of relevant industry specialists.

The strengths that this team brings as a whole is the diversity and depth of experience, along with a passion for both the industry generally and for Next Gen specifically.

What makes Next Gen special and different?

All of our clubs are designed and constructed specifically for their purpose. Natural light, ventilation and a sense of space are important features and have been of particular importance to our members since the start of the pandemic.

Our clubs are set up to offer a superior value proposition – we have a HIIT studio, cycle studio, yoga studio and group fitness studio, as well as a gym, an aquatic centre, a tennis centre and finally a members' bar, lounge and restaurant. All for one membership and all under one roof.



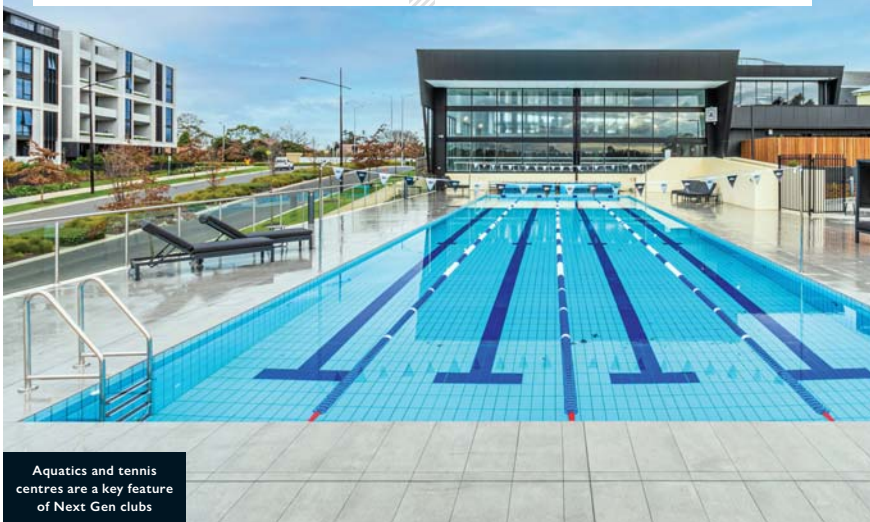
Next Gen Health and Lifestyle Clubs is owned by private equity group Kings Park Capital out of the UK. KPC has been the owner for 10 years

Tell us about the customer journey

We place strong emphasis on a quality onboarding and retention experience for members. New members are offered a 60-day 'Next Steps Passport' programme that introduces them to everything the club has to offer in terms of facility, programmes and service.

On the gym floor we have an initial body composition scan consultation, along with an initial personalised programming session. Both of which can be refreshed at six-weekly intervals.

We have a tenure loyalty programme that provides members with a sliding scale of discounts for in-club purchases and services and Next Gen offers a range of children- and family-focussed



Aquatics and tennis centres are a key feature of Next Gen clubs



The 11,000sq m Doncaster Club has an extensive gym floor

PHOTO: NERY DEN DOULIS BALCONH



The club in Victoria has been designed as a flagship wellness lifestyle offering

PHOTO: NERY DEN DOULIS BALCONH

6

**We've learned
that we're a resilient
and adaptable bunch**

Next Gen is actively
looking for more
sites, says Leahy

PHOTO: NEXT GEN/BRETT LEAHY

activities such as holiday active programmes, swim school and tennis lessons, homework club, family fitness classes, movie nights and supervised play.

Retention at Next Gen is as much about family and social engagement and activity as it is about fitness and results. We have an extensive calendar of activities for members and their family groups in all areas of the club.

Who designs your clubs?

Design is completed by our in-house team. We look to our successful design formulae from previous clubs and then combine that with the latest innovations out of Europe and the UK in particular. We look to include a variety of facilities that provide choice to members, as well as designing-in the aforementioned sense of space via natural light, ventilation and aspects.

How important is your F&B operation?

It's a fundamental way that we differentiate ourselves from fitness operators or community leisure centres. We have a fully licensed bar and full-service restaurant for members. Our function centres host weddings, milestone birthdays for members, Christmas functions, trade shows, corporate training and conferences.

Might you expand internationally?

We're already in New Zealand and will look to add to the portfolio over there if the right site presents itself.

How have you coped during the pandemic?

COVID-19 has thrown plenty of new challenges at our business and our industry. We've learned that we're a resilient and adaptable bunch.

With the support of our owners, members and staff we got through the 2020 lockdowns and rebounded very strongly throughout the start of 2021.

We've continued both member and staff engagement online and have developed a library of workout resources for members to access at home. Being the type of club we are, we've also included colouring competitions, family trivia nights and chef recipes for members to utilise.

What are your views on the state of the industry in Australia and NZ?

I think the importance of wellness – both physical and mental – will continue to increase. Clubs such as ours will play an important role in offering the broadest range of services in this space.

The fitness offering will continue to fragment with specialist operators emerging but there will still be a place for a premium lifestyle alternative such as ours.

Tell us about your newest club

Next Gen Doncaster is a flagship club for us and is delivering the premium facilities and service we're renowned for. We've created the ultimate health and lifestyle club that has everything you love in one incredible resort-inspired location.

What does it offer?

Set on over 11,000sq m, the club boasts the latest innovations in fitness, including dedicated functional training zones, cutting-edge Technogym equipment, Outrace high intensity training facilities and a full schedule of studio classes.

The Doncaster club has four competition-grade tennis courts



PHOTO: NEXT GEN - LD DOUG BALCOMB



COVID-secure
interiors prioritise
good ventilation

We've introduced an ultra premium membership

There's also a reformer Pilates studio, yoga, Les Mills speciality classes and a cinematic cycle studio.

In addition, the ultimate relaxation experience is waiting in the Premium Spa, which features a sauna, steamroom, vitality spa pool, an ice bath and a monsoon shower with an adjacent outdoor relaxation garden. Indoor and outdoor sun lounges and cabanas complete the experience.

We offer four competition-grade tennis courts for member bookings, professional tennis coaching, social and competition tennis. Members can also enjoy extensive aquatic facilities, with indoor and seasonal outdoor heated pools offering lap swimming, aqua fitness classes and learn-to-swim programmes.

Next Gen Doncaster also features a members' lounge with a licensed bar, café and restaurant, and an extensive array of family-friendly facilities and programmes, including a crèche and kid's playrooms.

Is there anything unexpected about the club?

The newly-restored Tullamore House and gardens also form part of the Next Gen Doncaster experience. The 100-year-old homestead has been fully restored and is transformed into a very special extension of the member lounge and dining space. It is a truly unique offering for us and for the community.

Unlike many fitness facilities, Next Gen Doncaster has been designed specifically for its purpose. The reward for this has been an open, spacious environment with abundant natural light and panoramic views across the suburbs of Melbourne. There's a palpable sense



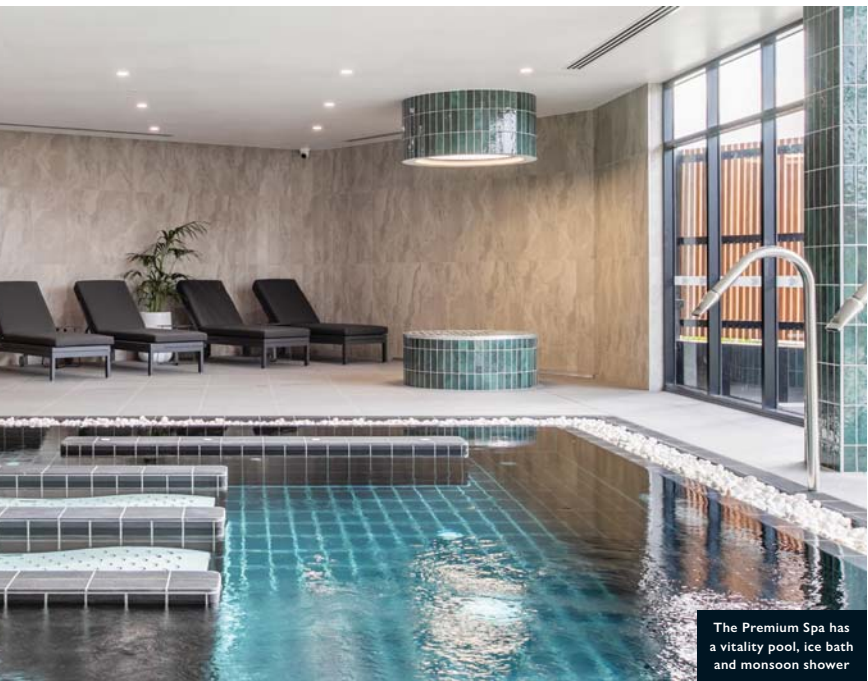
of space which adds to the luxurious feel of the club surroundings. In addition, the design complements what we now all understand to be crucial for a COVID-safe environment to be provided for our members and staff.

What 'new' experiences are on offer?

Next Gen Doncaster is very closely aligned with the premium country clubs of Asia, Europe or the USA. It's a leisure, health and lifestyle destination unique in Melbourne. In addition, we've introduced an ultra-premium Tullamore Club membership. This new category is an elevated level of facility and service and offers a private members' lounge and verandah, themed dining event and in-house dining credits, bespoke training and coach programmes, unique corporate networking opportunities and exclusive merchandise.

Next Gen Doncaster is a true destination at a time when fitness offerings are becoming more fragmented. Our club offers everything that's great about the best fitness studios in the market but then adds fantastic sporting, leisure, relaxation and dining options for the whole family. ●

More: www.nextgenclubs.com.au



The Premium Spa has a vitality pool, ice bath and monsoon shower



The cinematic cycle studio with bikes by Technogym

Product innovation



Steph Eaves rounds up the latest launches in health and fitness

The Genesis Dual Cable Cross – Inclusive Use is made for accessibility, says **Dan Toigo**

Freemotion Fitness has introduced its Genesis Dual Cable Cross – Inclusive Use, designed to meet Inclusive Use standards, which help fitness clubs offer healthy living opportunities to

people with disabilities. The new G624-IU Genesis Dual Cable Cross features an open design, allowing for wheelchair accessibility to accommodate exercisers with mobility disabilities.

The model also has an innovative, patent-pending pin design, which allows users to make adjustments more efficiently and safely.

Previously, once the user released the vertical arm adjustment pin, it would snap back into the frame. Now, with a 90-degree-turn

- The equipment has a patent-pending pin design



Our industry strives to make people healthier and fitter and that includes people with disabilities

Dan Toigo

lockout system, the pin can be locked in place using one hand and then the user can adjust the arm vertically using the same hand, without the need to use two hands simultaneously.

Other inclusive features include recessed numbers on weight stacks for people with visual impairments, a redesign of the weight stacks to provide contrast based on touch and colour, a fixed stability bar that's the required diameter and length to meet ASTM International standards, and material used on the fixed stability bar that facilitates better grip and reduces slippage.

Senior VP and MD, Dan Toigo, says the new model will be a "crucial addition to any club looking to provide an inclusive environment". [fitness-kit.net/keyword/freemotion-fitness](https://www.fitness-kit.net/keyword/freemotion-fitness)



Virtuagym's integrated QR code helps clubs comply with COVID-19 access rules

Virtuagym has launched COVID Pass Integration. The feature allows fitness businesses to efficiently and securely check a

customer's COVID-19 status each time they enter their facility, while simultaneously helping them manage access levels. Through a single scan of a client's international COVID-19 QR code, a club can check an individual's vaccination and test status, as well as match the information with their member database.

The product has been launched now so that clubs can continue to run as normally as possible in the case of any new COVID-19 access rules.



The feature will allow clubs to safely and securely comply with industry regulations

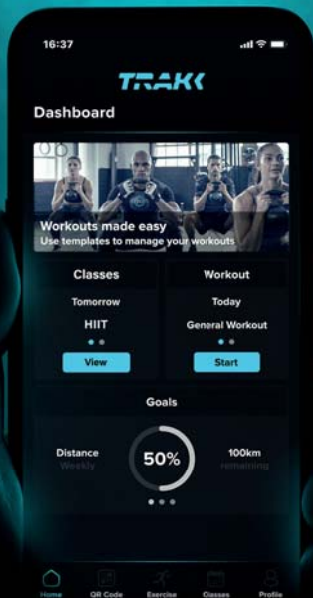
Hugo Braam



- Clubs can easily verify each member's vaccination status

The adaptation to any such rules is aided by the QR code feature being integrated into Virtuagym's existing check-in technology, as part of its All-in-One Fitness Management Software Solution. The integration is available for EU clubs, and will soon launch in non-EU countries.

"The increase in access measures is naturally a setback for our industry, but we hope our QR feature will allow clubs to comply with industry regulations and focus on what they do best," says Hugo Braam, CEO and co-founder of Virtuagym. [fitness-kit.net/keyword/virtuagym](https://www.fitness-kit.net/keyword/virtuagym)



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Vycel is a seamless solution for disinfecting clubs, says Ben Dixon

Anytime Fitness has partnered with Vycel to create a safe and disinfected environment, free of bacteria and viruses to protect staff and members and provide peace of mind when training.



We needed a disinfection solution that also reduced our use of blue roll and cleaning time

Ben Dixon

Trialled at its Chelmsford, UK club and now being rolled out to other franchisees, Vycel products are designed to easily and efficiently disinfect spaces.

The Vycel Electrostatic Sprayer protects against viruses by delivering a positively charged water-based antimicrobial spray, creating a mist that is drawn to surfaces, evenly coating and wrapping them throughout the clubs, including equipment and kit, changing rooms and lockers.

As a result, the club has experienced a drastic reduction in costs of blue roll, antibacterial spray and



● The Vycel sprayer creates a mist that's drawn to surfaces

staff time spent cleaning, having a positive effect on the bottom line.

Ben Dixon, chief development officer at Anytime Fitness, says: "When I was initially introduced to Vycel I knew it would become an important part of our everyday strategy to prevent the spread of COVID-19."

"Yes, we still need to clean the equipment to remove

dirty, dust and sweat, but that isn't enough to eradicate the threat of spreading the virus.

"We needed a solution for our disinfection regime that's not only effective in protecting members and staff but also reduces our blue roll use and time spent cleaning. Vycel is proving to be a seamless solution."

[fitness-kit.net KEYWORD](#)

Vycel

The Matrix Virtual Training Cycle creates an immersive experience, says Rob Knox

Matrix Fitness has launched its Virtual Training Cycle, an immersive training experience that delivers exclusive programmes, streaming of music, movies and shows, and access to instructor-led content

on the gym floor to boost user experience.

The high-performance cycle features a 22" touchscreen with app-based interface similar to other touchscreen consoles in the Matrix cardio

portfolio. The inbuilt Matrix-exclusive programmes include the 20-minute Sprint 8 HIIT, Virtual Active forward-motion HD destination footage and Target Training, which tracks watts, heart rate, RPMs, distance or calories.

The product is designed to keep users motivated by gauging progress through engaging graphics and intuitive colours. Users also have access to iFIT live and on-demand experiential studio and outdoor workouts.

The Virtual Training Cycle is precision-engineered with a freewheel design featuring magnetic resistance, intuitive four-way adjustment, a contoured seat and multi-position



The Virtual Training Cycle fits into members' busy schedules

Rob Knox

handlebars that simulate the feel of real road riding.

"The Virtual Training Cycle is the best upright bike on the market and gives members the same riding experience as a class but at a time that best fits their busy schedules," said Rob Knox, Matrix product director.

[fitness-kit.net KEYWORD](#)
Matrix Fitness



● Users can take part in an on-demand class

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Human fat tissue seems to support SARS-CoV-2 infection, causing a stronger inflammatory response

COVID-19 ‘attacks fat cells’

New research suggests that COVID-19 infects fat cells, explaining why overweight and obese people have been at a higher risk of severe illness and death from the virus

The research study, led by the Stanford University School of Medicine, examined whether fat tissue obtained from patients of bariatric surgery could become infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, and tracked how various types of cells responded to the infection.

It found that fat cells and also immune cells (macrophages) can be infected, leading to a “robust inflammatory response”. The findings show the virus is able to evade the immune defenses within the body’s fat cells, before causing inflammation elsewhere in the body and could help explain why patients with excess body weight are particularly vulnerable to the virus – and also why some younger adults with no underlying health issues become so ill.

The research will reinforce the importance of work being done in the health and fitness and spa and wellness industries, to help people control and reduce their percentage body fat.

THE DETAIL

In reporting the details of the findings, the researchers said: “Collectively, our findings indicate that adipose (fat) tissue supports SARS-CoV-2 infection and pathogenic inflammation and may explain the link between obesity and severe COVID-19.

The research could explain why patients with excess body weight are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19

“Obesity is clearly associated with adverse COVID-19 outcomes, but the underlying mechanism was unknown. We demonstrate that human fat tissue is ‘permissive’ to SARS-CoV-2 infection – the virus that causes COVID-19 – and that infection elicits an inflammatory response, including the secretion of known inflammatory mediators of severe COVID-19.

“We identify two cellular targets of SARS-CoV-2 infection in adipose tissue: mature adipocytes and adipose tissue macrophages. Adipose tissue macrophage infection is largely restricted to a highly inflammatory subpopulation of macrophages, present at baseline, that is further activated in response to SARS-CoV-2 infection.

“Preadipocytes, while not infected, adopt a pro-inflammatory phenotype. SARS-CoV-2 RNA is detectable in adipocytes in COVID-19 autopsy cases and is associated with an inflammatory infiltrate. ●

The research has not yet been peer-reviewed but has been published online here: www.hcmmag.com/fatcells



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