

health club management

OCTOBER 2015

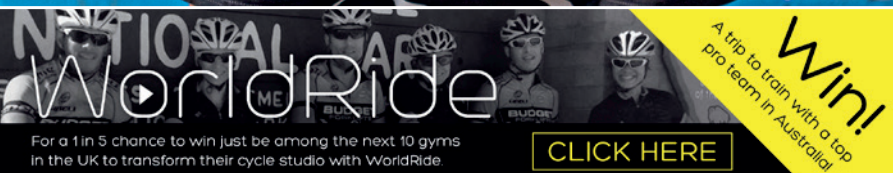
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Active Every Day



The health and fitness industry is failing to capitalise on one of the greatest opportunities it's ever had, according to Liz Terry, editor of *Health Club Management's* sister magazine *Leisure Management*.

Writing in the current edition of *Leisure Management*, Terry points to Public Health England's *Everybody Active, Every Day* framework, asking why more hasn't been made of this. Launched in October 2014 in a bid to combat obesity, it marked the first time government had advised the public to be active on a daily basis – don't worry how much, just do something. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity for the activity sector to seize with both hands – quite possibly the sector's biggest ever opportunity to enter the mainstream.

Yet while food manufacturers leapt on their version of this governmental gift – the recommendation to eat five daily portions of fruit and veg – and used every channel at their disposal to embed the Five a Day message in the nation's psyche, the activity sector has done precisely nothing with Active Every Day.

That's particularly shocking given its huge efforts to get government on board over recent years. What a wasted effort.

This failure to recognise and embrace such a huge opportunity is a symptom of a bigger problem, however, and that's the fitness sector's general introspection

and lack of focus on the end user: it has never really organised itself to build a direct relationship with the consumer. Yes, we open the doors of our gyms to the public, but few operators have quality conversations with their own members, let alone the wider population. And although the sector has dabbled in awareness campaigns – Change4Life, for example – in general

The goal is ensuring the public have two powerful health mantras to live by: Five a Day, and Active Every Day

it's inward-looking, focusing more on government, trade bodies and partners than on directly influencing consumers' beliefs and behaviours.

That's perhaps why this gem of a PHE report has been overlooked.

The good news is it isn't too late: the advice is still current. But we do have to act now, taking ownership of the message, shouting it from the rooftops and giving it so much airtime that it becomes an unquestionable truth among the public. If not, it can be taken away – unused, unowned and forgotten – as quickly as it was gifted to us.

So how do we go about this? First of all, the campaign needs a name – we like Active Every Day – and a brand identity. It also needs strong, sustainable routes to market, so consumers are compelled and constantly reminded to act.

This can be done on many levels, from a stronger focus on consumer PR through to better use of partnerships.

Coca-Cola now sits on the UK active Membership Council, for example, so how about getting the Active Every Day logo on all Coca-Cola packaging?

We also need a concerted, sector-level push to engage all consumer media, harnessing their power to help drive

home this one clear, powerful message.

And what about government itself? The NHS has much to gain from an increase in public activity levels, so could Active Every Day find its way onto hospital letters,

prescription slips and so on?

The goal is ensuring the public have two powerful health mantras to live by: Five a Day, and Active Every Day. Let's act now to make that a reality.

Kate Cracknell

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ON THE COVER
Sébastien Foucan, freerunning star of *Casino Royale*, talks about his activity philosophy and his new venture with Oxygen Freejumping

Photograph by Paul McLaughlin

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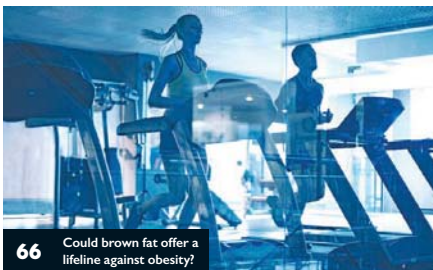
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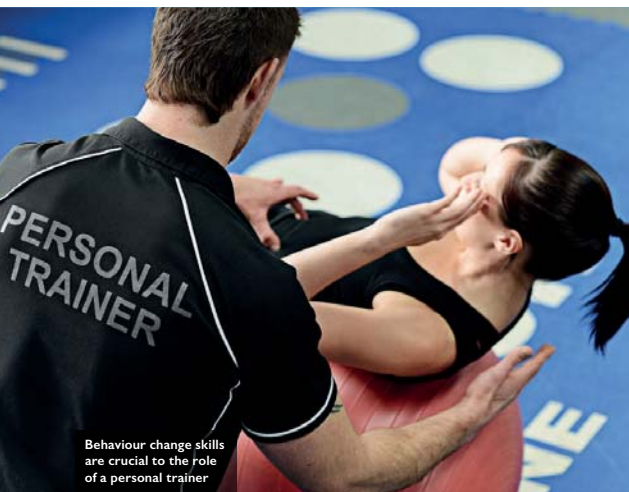


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Behaviour change skills are crucial to the role of a personal trainer

A Level 3 certificate on its own does not prepare someone for a PT role

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson's recent article (HCM Aug 15, p24) is a clear indication that the fitness industry is moving towards a higher level of professionalism.

The standard qualification for PTs in this country – a Level 3 certificate – is on its own not sufficient to prepare people for a role that's more dynamic and complex than ever before. A host of in-depth skills and knowledge are needed to enable trainers to support clients in their quest for health and fitness, let alone build the foundations for a successful career.

Behaviour change, for example, is a vital area for PTs, and one that requires more than a token mention of motivation strategies – it's crucial to the role. Outside of technical competencies, business skills are also fundamental, regardless of whether PTs are self-employed or in a paid position.

Aside from a re-evaluation of what trainers should be learning, the assessment process should also be rigorous and fit for purpose, to ensure qualifications are genuinely earned and demonstrate true capability in the workplace.

We're pleased to be involved with the work undertaken and CIMSPA are doing to address the standards personal trainers must meet.

It's time training providers acknowledged that, although it's important personal trainers take responsibility for their own careers, we have a duty to provide fit for purpose qualifications and courses that fully prepare people for work. We must collaborate with employers to achieve this.

Paul Swainson
Head of School, School of Personal Training

Six weeks is not long enough for a PT qualification

Research conducted at July's Meeting of the Minds event highlighted that a six-week intensive diploma was not an appropriate timeframe for an individual to become a successful Level 2 Gym Instructor and Level 3 PT. Eighty-six per cent of attendees agreed on this, with 96 per cent rating ongoing education beyond Level 3 'very important'.

It's our job as a training provider to ensure PTs are



Training providers must better prepare PTs

prepared for the rigours of their roles – not only for the sake of the individuals, but also the integrity of the profession and the credibility of the industry. That's why we're ceasing our six-week intensive Level 2 & 3 combined programme.

By working with CIMSPA – which has been tasked with standardising qualifications – we can help drive quality of qualifications and improve pathways for learners to thrive. It's only by taking positive action – a unified and simplified approach – that we as an industry can flourish.

Mike Jones
Commercial director, Lifetime



Courses need face-to-face support, not just online

Collaboration needed to standardise quals

Tanni Grey-Thompson made some great points about quality assurance, and the need to raise credibility and standards in workforce development, in the August edition of *HCM*.

Her first objective was to deliver a single, unified skills and workforce strategy. Now is the perfect time to achieve this, as on 30 September the Qualifications and Credit Framework closed, clearing the way for the new Regulated Qualifications Framework. This gives us a chance to take control of how our qualifications look.

But this requires whole industry collaboration. One particular area of controversy is the standard time taken to qualify. Ofqual has said new qualifications need total qualification time specified – the number of hours a learner will undertake. But it's unlikely Ofqual will give clear parameters for how many of these, if any, must be face-to-face guided learning hours.

This leaves the sector open to great risk, with less scrupulous companies promoting the cheapest, fastest courses with no face-to-face interaction or tutor support, resulting in lesser skilled graduates without the soft skills the sector needs.

Tanni also spoke of a new Chartered Physical Activity Professional title to raise the sector's profile – a great idea, and one that provides CIMSQA with the chance to set parameters for training providers; learners will want to take a respected course to meet this level of qualification.

Jenny Patrickson
Commercial director, Active IQ



Our professionals must train to Level 8, to bring fitness and wellness together

Our sector must occupy the gap between illness and wellness

The intent of ukactive to clarify job roles and create a capability grading structure within the fitness professional is an excellent one. How can it be that a male aged 35, with no significant clinical history, could walk into 20 separate gyms and be given 20 separate recommendations of how to train? The reality is that he will find variations of training not just between facilities, but between equally qualified colleagues in the same gym.

What ukactive is seeking to achieve is increased confidence from the medical profession and general public that you can 'enter here with peace': well-groomed (that's important) fitness professionals shouting 'send us your frail, your hypertensives, your metabolic syndromes, your obese...and we will deal with them in a consistent, evidence-based and (dare we dream) outcome-focused way'.

This is an excellent ambition for the sector – but while there is of course room for progress in the standardisation of delivery, I believe that's actually too narrow an intent. We're still talking about

fitness and activity and they simply don't sit, or work, in isolation.

Because even with this structure in place, there are still questions to be asked. Can this new generation of trusted fitness professionals pick up with their clinical clients on the lifestyle elements left behind by medicine? To whom do they refer the 'tired all the time' client, or the 'can't get to sleep' client – back to the doctor who sent them to us in the first place? Or out into the open arms of the complementary medicine professionals, who sell time and empathy dressed in a cloak of questionable methodologies? Can a successful lifestyle and medical framework really leave room for £200m annual spend on herbal medicine and homeopathy?

I believe our sector must step up to occupy this gap between illness and wellness – and we have the capacity to do it, with a wealth of eager intelligent minds who can fill it at Levels 8 and above.

Oliver Patrick
Director, Viavi

► Demographics are not dead – they've just been refined

The editor's letter in the August 2015 edition of *HCM* is thought-provoking and spot on as far as it goes: it's true that new technology and innovation is opening up a world of possibilities and raising the expectation of the consumer. But I believe the title of the piece, 'demographics are dead', is a little misleading.

Demographics on their own do have limitations, but they have been superseded by geodemographics – the integration of data from more than one source to aid the profiling of consumers.

The current cross-channel classification system used by The Leisure Database Company segments the UK into 66 Types, and it becomes powerful when we add the supply of fitness sites and facilities to the supply/demand model which estimates latent demand. It's even more tantalisingly accurate when the data is customised

and layered with live consumer data. It's powerful because we're all human, and many of us are creatures of habit – not just one habit, but lots.

The examples given in the editor's letter are appealing to a growing number who are breaking down the habitual and allowing change into their lives; the fitness industry, like many businesses, is in transition while working out how it meets and anticipates consumer demand in this technology-led world.

But meanwhile, customer profiling and segmentation using geodemographics remains key to understanding your consumers, their habits and their propensity to participate in sport/fitness.

David Minton
Director, The Leisure
Database Company (TLDC)



Geodemographics are useful when overlaid with live consumer data

We need cost-effective swimming facilities

I felt compelled to respond to the 2015 *State of the UK Swimming Industry Report*, highlighting the decline in pool provision for a third consecutive year.

Pools are particularly expensive to run, with frequent demands for maintenance work. Many facilities are also coming to the end of their lifespan. This, combined with the growing financial pressure operators have running these pools effectively, is leading to more and more closures.

However, swimming is a vital life skill, and we must address this downward trend. Developing more cost-effective facilities across the country is key to this.

Pool construction in Europe uses steel tanks as opposed to concrete. These offer greater accessibility for maintenance and servicing, which contributes significantly to their longevity. For many years, I've used tanks as a way of teaching children to swim in deprived areas, and I know this innovative pool technology can be used commercially too: we've delivered successful projects for local authorities including Dumfries & Galloway, East Riding of Yorkshire and Bury to replace or increase their aquatic provision across communities, resulting in hundreds of thousands extra swims a year.



We must find ways to keep pools open, says Parry

In the case of Bury Council, a replacement pool was constructed after the previous facility was closed for 12 months due to structural damage. The local authority was facing repair costs in excess of £2.5m, but the installation of a replacement swimming facility for under £1m provided community access to a high standard facility for at least 15 years.

I recently returned from Russia and the FINA World Championships, where the two temporary 50m pools in the Kazan

Arena Stadium were further examples that showcased what can be achieved using the latest pool technology.

As a business led by Olympians, we're committed to providing a sporting legacy. Collectively, more can be done to address pool provision in this country so operators have effective and affordable alternatives to closures of wet-side facilities.

Steve Parry
MD, Total Swimming

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UK news update

PHE diabetes warning shows prevention is key

Up to five million adults in England are in danger of becoming diabetic. Public Health England has warned, highlighting the need to tackle the growing health crisis.

New data analysis from the health body has found that five million adults in England are now pre-diabetic, also known as non-diabetic hyperglycaemia, and at risk of contracting diabetes type 2 diabetes.

The condition currently costs the NHS more than £8.8bn each year and causes 22,000 deaths. Previous estimates have put the potential number of adults in England at risk of diabetes to be even higher, however PHE believes that its most recent calculations have enabled it to produce the most accurate estimate so far.

The findings provide a stark warning of the looming health crisis and underline the importance of preventative health schemes such as GP-referred exercise initiatives.

Details: http://lei.sr7a=n7v3m_H

Nuffield Health aims for healthier schools with pilot



The initiative aims to boost wellbeing

Nuffield Health and think tank 2020health have started work with Wood Green School on a new pilot which hopes to completely change the way that schools approach health and wellbeing.

The pilot scheme will explore the benefits of appointing a head of wellbeing at the comprehensive school, who will be tasked with developing a strategy to improve the physical and mental wellbeing of students and staff. It follows recently released research from Nuffield Health which highlighted how the school environment is second only to the home as the most important influence on a young person's development.

The new initiative will be funded by Nuffield Health and sees the two-year secondment of a head of wellbeing to help develop and implement a health and wellbeing strategy at the school.

Details: http://lei.sr7a=R253k_H

NFD 2015 takes Twitter by storm

National Fitness Day 2015 made a major impact online as well as in the nation's health clubs when it was held last month.

The ukactive-led event, dubbed "the most active day of the year", was among the top trending topics on Twitter that day, as thousands of users tweeted snaps and snippets of their exercise on 9 September.

More than 2,000 health clubs and leisure centres across the country – including major operators such as Fitness First, Parkworld Leisure and Places for People Leisure – put on a total of 10,000 classes to celebrate the growing initiative.

Meanwhile, a number of high-profile MPs pledged to 'move for their seat' as part of the campaign. Throughout the campaign MPs tracked their activity levels using either a Myzone MZ-3 heart-rate tracking belt, or a Fitlinx Pebble+ accelerometer device, to record the amount they were moving and to see how representatives from each political party measured up against rivals.

London mayor Boris Johnson was also on hand to lend his support to the day, turning up at a National Fitness Day Parklives event outside Parliament for a spot of tennis.

Details: http://lei.sr7a=H6X3E_H



Boris Johnson takes on ukactive's Will Smithard outside Parliament

Flexi-contracts 'best for retention'

Flexible gym contracts which don't ask members to commit to a fixed term are better for retention than traditional 12-month tie-ins, says a new report.

ukactive's mid-year *Business Performance Benchmarking Insight Report* – based on data from more than 600 UK fitness and leisure sites – has found that enabling health club members to leave whenever they want is actually the best way to keep them.

The report found gyms with a fixed-term minimum 12-month contract saw an average membership length of 11.2 months, whereas gyms not requiring a 12-month commitment and offering more flexible contract lengths



The report suggests flexibility is valued by members

saw an average stay of 17.2 months. The insight neatly demonstrates one of the major shifts of the past decade, the rise of budget gyms eschewing fixed-term contracts.

Details: http://lei.sr7a=Z7t5F_H

Sports Direct Fitness finds formula



Sports Direct Fitness' dual-use gym and retail concept will now be rolled out

Sports Direct Fitness is planning an aggressive rollout of new health clubs in 2016, with owner Mike Ashley confident the gym chain has found the right formula for growth.

The company plans to launch up to 16 new sites in 2016 under the dual-use gym and retail concept which has seen it offer memberships from as little as £5 per month. Sports Direct hopes to capitalise on the synergy between its retail and gym divisions by offering the two prospects side-by-side under one roof. Speaking exclusively to HCM, Sports Direct Fitness head of leisure Winston Higham said the company's owner is pleased with the refined concept, adding that plans

are in place for an 'aggressive' expansion of new-builds in the year ahead.

"We've developed a strong model with our new-build sites and the pulling power of a trusted brand above the door is helping us bring in new members quickly," said Higham.

There is also the potential for growth via further acquisitions. Having lost out to Pure Gym in the race to acquire LA fitness, Sports Direct Fitness has been rumoured to be sizing up a bid for Fitness First. However, Higham refused to be drawn on the speculation, saying that it "isn't the Sports Direct way" to comment on this.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=g9n8P_H

Gold's Gym inducts Arnie into its Hall of Fame



Arnie has been a lifelong member

Gold's Gym has inducted fitness legend Arnold Schwarzenegger into its Hall of Fame as the health club franchise celebrates 50 years in business.

Schwarzenegger has been one of the chain's most famous patrons. The Austrian said that his famed physique helped him land iconic roles in films such as *The Terminator* and *Total Recall*, and the star added that Gold's Gym had been a constant presence in his life-long commitment to his fitness regime.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=n4d5P_H

Jess Glynne pairs with I Rebel to create workout



The chart-topper is keen on fitness

Grammy award-winning songstress Jess Glynne has teamed up with boutique London fitness studio I Rebel to create a high intensity workout for people on the go.

Glynne, who is well known for her musical collaborations with the likes of Clean Bandit, has worked with I Rebel and glacié smartwater to formulate a 45-minute session called #smartrebel.

Aimed at people in a rush, the class combines two workouts, two studios and two trainers, all synced to one power playlist mixed and produced by Glynne.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=D8f5f_H

'Gymtimidation' holds users back

More than a quarter of Brits are fearful of going to the gym because they don't feel confident enough to use the equipment, according to a new piece of research.

Around 26 per cent say they've avoided gyms either because they're unsure how to operate the equipment or are scared that no-one will be on hand to help them. The survey of 2,000 people by Virgin Active also found that concerns about not having the right kit and feeling like the only new person in the class are also turn-offs to going to the gym.

The findings help to shed light on the barriers holding back potential gym members. Although the number of adults



Uncertainty around how to use the kit is a key issue

who are members of gyms has been slowly increasing in recent years, nearly 87 per cent of the UK's adult population are still not signed up as a member of a club.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=V2A5j_H

DEAD QUIET

AN EMPTY CYCLE STUDIO IS A VERY BAD PLACE

2:28:29 PM

“TRULY TERRIFYING”

Many multi-purpose clubs' cycle studios are sitting empty for more than 80% of their opening hours.

“I HAVEN'T SLEPT PROPERLY SINCE”

Boutique cycle studios are growing fast, with 42% of US club members also using boutiques – it was half this number in 2014!

“ABSOLUTELY SHOCKING”

Clubs with just 2-3 cycle classes a day could be missing out on up to a horrifying £120,000* a year in membership revenue.

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*Based upon a club with 3,000 members increasing from 18 to 40 live classes a week and bringing class utilization up to 70%.

Independent news

Tongan rugby stars get functional



The rugby players were a surprise addition to the lunchtime Tabata class

Fitness fans at a functional training facility in London were given the fright of their lives last month when five members of the Tongan rugby team turned up for a workout.

Fortunately for the other members they were paired with, the Tongans were at BaseFit in Shoreditch for a Tabata class rather than one of the boxing and pad workouts the site is also known for.

Will Helu, Joe Tuineau, Telusa Veainu, Kurt Morath and Siale Piutau popped in for a 20-minute lunchtime class as they set about final preparations for their first match against Georgia in the Rugby World Cup

on 19 September. Helu had been a BaseFit member in the past when he sought to maintain fitness levels during his transfer from Wasps to Edinburgh, and he decided to bring his teammates along for a workout.

"I was proud to have created a place of choice for the Tonga team to visit to train at in their downtime during the World Cup," said BaseFit owner Andy Milne.

"It gave a massive boost to the session and for all the members who attended. They found it very exciting and we had a social media meltdown afterwards."

Details: http://llei.sr?o=c8w4s_H

Frame Kings Cross to kickstart growth

Trendy London fitness

chain Frame is opening its third studio in October, with plans to scale up the business and to double overall revenue by the end of 2016.

Frame founders Pip Black and Joan Murphy are planning a further two studios in 2016 and expect turnover to hit £5m as part of the expansion, which also includes a move into retail.

Situated in the middle of the major regeneration project underway around Granary Square, Frame Kings Cross will be the latest addition to London's booming boutique fitness scene when it opens on 1 October. The 4,800sq ft (446sq m) site will have three studios to start, with a fourth



(L-R) Frame founders Joan Murphy and Pip Black

planned for next year. As is the case with an increasing number of boutique studios, there will also be a retail area stocked with a wide range of active wear from leading brands.

Details: http://llei.sr?o=N7y7d_H

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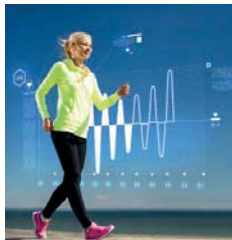
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Technology news

Bulk of free fitness apps 'fail to meet guidelines'



70% of apps had no flexibility function

It's often said that you get what you pay for, and it seems that fitness apps which cost nothing provide little more than that, according to a new scientific study.

Researchers from the University of Florida have concluded that the majority of free fitness apps are falling well short in meeting users' needs. Their study – published in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research* – found that only one of 30 popular free fitness apps for iPhones meets the majority of guidelines for physical activity from the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM).

The apps were compared to the ACSM guidelines for aerobic exercise, strength or resistance, and flexibility. Each app was scored across these categories, on how they adhered to ACSM parameters for safety, warm-ups, cool-downs, stretching, intensity, frequency and progression.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=W5y4Q_H

Wearable market 'to triple by 2025'



Development of wearable sensors will see tech embedded in our every-day attire

The burgeoning wearable tech market is expected to triple in value over the next 10 years, according to a forecast by IDTechEx.

The company, which has a database of 1,200 companies in the wearable tech sphere, predicts the value of the wearable tech market will rise from £15.5bn this year to £47.4bn in 2025. The report acknowledges that fitness-focused wrist-worn devices such as the Apple Watch, Microsoft Band and Fitbit have so far dominated the fledgling wearables market. However, it predicts that the future will see device manufacturers look beyond the wrist and "abandon the 100 year old 'components in a box' approach".

According to the report, smart materials such as graphene will change the way we interact with electronics, while wearable sensors and e-textiles will see technology embedded in our every-day attire.

Initially regarded as a threat to traditional gyms, health club operators are beginning to embrace the potential for wearable tech to demonstrate how users are gaining results. Aside from helping gyms and PTs track a client's progress, there are also opportunities for the industry to provide its specialist fitness knowledge for the development of wearable tech, with several collaborations underway.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=Q6V5v_H

BORN DIGITAL

eGym was founded in 2010. Unencumbered by the past we've always had a digital mind-set. And the result is, as you would expect.

Suppliers target training tie-ups



Life Fitness Academy has teamed up with YMCA Awards to create new courses

Leading fitness suppliers are turning to partnerships with training providers to offer their clients a wider range of fitness solutions.

Competition among suppliers has been heating up, and the new strategy could be viewed as evidence that equipment providers are seeking to gain a competitive edge by adding education to their overall package.

Both Matrix Fitness and Life Fitness have announced tie-ups with training companies to bolster their offerings, while Precor has launched a web-based hub – Precor Coaching Centre – to help educate customers and fitness professionals.

For Matrix, the partnership with Lifetime Training is intended to provide Matrix customers with quality training

and education so their fitness teams can provide member-focused service and help to improve retention. Lifetime will provide a suite of REPs-accredited courses designed to enable clubs and centres using Matrix equipment to ensure teams of trainers are fully educated in all major programmes.

Meanwhile, Life Fitness Academy (LFA), the training arm of Life Fitness, has teamed up with YMCA Awards to create a new series of Level 2 and 3 courses for its clients.

For Precor, its new Coaching Centre is designed to provide web-based information to help fitness professionals and exercisers optimise workouts, and ensure operators get the most value out of their equipment.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=z9v6g_H

Precor announces new partnership with Spinning



Precor president Rob Barker

Precor has secured an exclusive worldwide agreement with Mad Dogg Athletics, creator of the Spinning indoor cycling programme, that will see Precor assume all commercial production for a new line of Spinner indoor cycling equipment.

The tie-up adds another string to Precor's bow, following on from the company's recent acquisition of functional training systems provider Queenax.

"We're committed to pursuing opportunities that allow Precor to deliver top of the line fitness experiences to exercisers and operators," said Rob Barker, president of Precor. "Capitalising on the manufacturing and engineering quality that Precor is known for and the reputation that Spinning has established within the indoor cycling category should enable us to better service a wider range of customers and excel in this category."

Details: http://lei.sr?a=7s5m8_H



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People news

Arthur McColl swaps LA fitness for Anytime Fitness



McColl will be based at Sydney HQ

Fitness industry veteran Arthur McColl is leaving his role as chief operating officer of LA fitness to become chief executive of Anytime Fitness Australia.

With LA fitness health clubs currently being absorbed into the portfolio of new owner Pure Gym, McColl has decided to pursue a new challenge and take up the reins at Australia's biggest gym chain. In just seven years, Anytime Fitness Australia has amassed a total of 420 gyms and McColl has been tasked with maintaining and increasing the franchise's dominance.

Boasting more than 30 years' experience in the health and fitness industry, McColl will be undertaking his second stint Down Under, having previously spent three years developing the Livingwell brand in Australia from 2003 to 2006, before joining LA fitness. Details: http://lei.sr?a=Q4W7p_H

Xercise4Less appoints Jon Nasta



Nasta hopes to bring innovation and help develop a 'number of industry firsts'

Retention and digital marketing specialist Jon Nasta has joined Xercise4Less as director of ecommerce and marketing, tasked with helping drive the gym chain's ambitious UK expansion programme.

Nasta, 43, arrives after an eight-year stint with membership retention specialists Retention Solutions. He will oversee ecommerce and marketing across the chain's 29 sites, which it hopes to increase to 100 by the end of 2016.

"Having worked very closely with Xercise4Less over the last few years, I'm delighted to now be a part of the team," said Nasta. "The sheer number of gyms that we plan to launch over the coming months shows just how big the brand has become in just over six years, as well as

how the demand for affordable fitness continues to increase across the country."

Nasta said he hopes to bring innovation to the role and assist in developing a 'number of industry firsts' as he bids to support the expansion, grow the team and increase revenue streams.

Commenting on Nasta's appointment, Xercise4Less chief operating officer Stuart Perrin added: "Jon Nasta is a fantastic addition to the Xercise4Less team and we're delighted to welcome him on-board."

"He brings with him a wealth of industry experience and will certainly play a key role in helping to shape the business as we move forward. We're very excited to see what he can bring to the table."

Details: http://lei.sr?a=t6k8Z_H

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Founder of Wild Training

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International news

GoodLife and 24 Hour Fitness partner up

Canadian chain GoodLife Fitness has teamed up with US health club operator 24 Hour Fitness, in a reciprocal arrangement to offer members access to each other's clubs while they are travelling in North America – almost 7000 clubs in the United States and Canada.

"Whether you're travelling for work or pleasure, there are incredible benefits to be achieved by maintaining your fitness routine in a comfortable and welcoming environment," says GoodLife Fitness founder and CEO David Patchell-Evans.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=j9W9T_H

Fitness First Middle East turns 60

Fitness First has launched its 33rd club in the United Arab Emirates, on Palm Jumeirah's Golden Mile. This follows hot on the heels of the launch of its men-only club in Dubai in August – at the Ayia Hotel in Al Ain – and brings its estate in the Middle East to more than 60.

The premium clubs both feature state of the art gyms with Life Fitness cardio and strength equipment, as well as functional areas, saunas, relaxation areas and members' lounges with wifi and complementary drinks.

Fitness First Middle East's chief operating officer George Flook says the chain will be opening more clubs in strategic locations.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=D5t7r_H

Pole position for énergie Group

The **énergie group** is gearing up to roll out its low-cost brand, Fit4less by énergie, into eastern Europe, with the announcement of a site in Riga, Latvia, and two in Gdansk, Poland.

The 6,000sq ft Fit4less in Riga will be the chain's first in eastern Europe and is expected to open in this month; a second site is already in the pipeline.

Meanwhile the two Polish clubs – the first énergie clubs in the country – will open in the next quarter. Jan Spaticchia, chair of the énergie Group, says: "We see huge potential in Poland and ultimately expect to open 20–30 énergie clubs there."

"Latvia is a smaller market – we think there's capacity for 10–15 clubs – but we're currently looking at extending the master franchise agreement to cover Lithuania and Estonia too."

Details: http://lei.sr?a=j9W2B_H

GO fit: Getting Spain & Portugal fit

GO fit – part of the Ingesport group, which runs full-service health and fitness clubs in Spain and Portugal – has unveiled expansion plans for both countries.

The first Portuguese club opened this February in Olivais, Lisbon, and has 13,000 members. Work is now underway on a second club – in Campo Grande, Lisbon – which will open next year. Negotiations are underway on a further eight sites in Portugal.

Meanwhile, there are 12 operational clubs in Spain, including one corporate club in the premises of Telefonica, and contracts have

been signed for seven more. The next Spanish site opens in Madrid in December 2015.

Operations director Joao Galileu says the company aims to make fitness accessible to all user groups. "We offer big facilities, high quality equipment, the best programmes and the ultimate in technology to support the member experience," he explains.

Centres typically span 7,500sq m with two swimming pools, five group exercise studios, a HIT area and a gym. Technogym supplies the gyms, including the Artis line and mywellness. Details: http://lei.sr?a=j2q2a_H



Go fit wants to make fitness accessible to all user groups with its full-service clubs

Starck designs inflatable health club

The **French designer** known for furniture, product and industrial design, Philippe Starck, has created the first "inflatable" building in France. The five-storey Montpellier health club

has been clad in EFTE, to create a distinctive, bubble-like facade, which Starck says is reminiscent of a cloud.

Launched in September, Le Nuage club



Le Nuage health club is a cut above in terms of style

includes a fitness studio and gym, swimming pool, café, children's area, hairdressers and beauty salon. Starck furniture has been used throughout the stylish and striking interior, with the exterior evoking a light, airy quality, which can change colour with external lighting.

Developer Roxim says the building was inspired by the gymnasiums developed in baths during the Greek and Roman times, which were designed to be places for both training and relaxation.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=K6U6s_H



Elements builds Frankfurt presence



Wellness is an important part of the offering from German chain Elements

Elements, the premium German health and fitness chain is set to open two clubs in Frankfurt over the coming months, bringing its number of clubs in the city to three – and seven in the overall estate.

Elements Eschborn is slated to open in late autumn. At 5,200sq m, it will be the biggest club in the chain so far. Indoor facilities will include a 2,300sq m wellness area with bio sauna, steam bath and relaxation areas, as well as a ladies-only wellness zone. Outside there will be a Finnish sauna, relaxation pool, training pool and a sunbathing area.

Meanwhile, a 1,200sq m gym will offer 150 stations, functional and boxing areas. A wide range of classes will also be available, including indoor cycling, capoeira and yoga. Additional member services at the new club will include a coffee and espresso bar and childcare services.

The third Frankfurt club, Elements Henninger Turm, will open its doors next year. Facilities are yet to be announced, but it will have a rooftop pool with a view over the Frankfurt skyline.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=C6y8Y_H

World Class launches flagship club

Russian fitness chain

World Class recently launched its largest club to date, in Strogino, Russia.

Spanning 10,000sq m and designed to cater for 3,800 members, World Class Strogino has a 900sq m gym equipped by Technogym. There are also two large group fitness studios, a specialist pilates studio with Gratz equipment, and a studio with a boxing ring and martial arts zone.

Other facilities include a fitness testing area, a four-lane 25m swimming pool, a 800sq m sports hall and the national squash center. For post-workout relaxation, there's an extensive



World Class Strogino has an extensive wellness area

wellness area, as well as a fitness bar selling a range of healthy drinks and a restaurant run by the Ginza project.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=J8P5p_H

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Ken Hughes

Personalisation of products and services is key to future-proofing your business.
The founder and CEO of Glacier Consulting explains why to IHRSA's Patricia Amend

You're speaking this month at the 15th Annual IHRSA European Congress in Marseille, France. A little preview?

We'll be exploring the future. The next generation of consumers is going to demand different things from the brands and services they use. Get it wrong and you become irrelevant; get it right and you future-proof your business.

You describe yourself as a consumer and shopper behaviouralist. What does that mean?

I study the behaviour of shoppers and consumers – why and how people buy. This is a social science discipline that combines psychology, social anthropology and neuromarketing – a form of marketing research that focuses on consumers' sensorimotor, cognitive and affective responses to marketing stimuli. It also involves behavioural economics. Ultimately it's about understanding the science of shopping and consumption.

What led you to embrace this particular discipline?

People have always fascinated me – not only what they do, but also how you can nudge them to behave differently. If you understand enough about consumers and their needs, there's virtually nothing you can't sell them.

One of the topics you focus on is personalisation, and you recently critiqued Euro Disney based on your own experience. Tell us more.

Personalisation really is the key to succeeding today. Euro Disney offers an app for its visitors, but fails to ask them who they are. Some visit the park for family rides; others for the thrill rides; and others for the shows and entertainment. If the company had simply captured the ages of my kids, it could, for instance, have suggested rides with short queues close to where we were. Similarly, it could have pushed offers to me to eat at a nearby restaurant.



Sometimes the 'personal' in personal training wears thin – but if a member feels they've become just another body in the club, their usage and loyalty will also wane



It did none of this, so as a user I was left with what was essentially a digital map of the park. It could have been a personalised app that deliver added value, but in fact it would have been of as much use to me at my home in Ireland as it was in the park. This is a personalisation failure that no service business can risk today.

What lessons can health clubs draw from this example?

Really wrapping your mind around the individual rather than the masses is so important. Sometimes the 'personal' in personal training, or the 'individual' in individual instruction, wears thin – but if a member ever feels they've become just another body in the club, their usage and loyalty will also wane.

At every moment, every aspect of their club experience should be personal – from entering the locker room, to working out on the fitness floor, to snacking in the café. The product has to be tailored to the individual, and clubs need to find a commercially viable way to do that.

You've talked about the high expectations of millennials. What are their successors, Generation Z, going to want?

They're going to want even more! These are the A.G.s. (after Google) consumers. They've grown up in a world of instant information, entertainment and feedback. This is the

'swipe card here' generation. They're demanding and unforgiving. Getting your product Gen-Z-ready is critical. Companies that fail to do so are going to get caught with their pants down! ■

ABOUT IHRSA

Founded in 1981, IHRSA – the *International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association* – is the only global trade association, representing more than 10,000 health and fitness facilities and suppliers worldwide.

To learn how IHRSA can help your business thrive, visit www.ihrsa.org

Locate an IHRSA club at www.healthclubs.com

ABOUT GLACIER CONSULTING

Glacier Consulting started life as a market research agency, but the focus soon shifted to consumers. Today, it helps bridge the gap between what consumers really want and how its clients can most efficiently and effectively design and deliver those products and services.



Hughes says Generation Z consumers are going to be even more demanding than millennials

Business works out



ukactive's latest report investigates best practice in the area of community wellbeing

cross-sector partnerships.

Executive director

Steven Ward explains

Over the last few years, ukactive's dedicated policy team has shifted the debate to focus on the role physical activity can have on public health. It has raised awareness of the need to tackle inactivity among the public health community and, earlier this year, highlighted the ticking time bomb represented by 'Generation Inactive'.

To keep up this momentum, we're launching our third publication of the year in late October 2015 – entitled *Business Works Out*. The aim of this report is to encourage a growth in effective cross-sector partnerships in the community wellbeing space. We're aiming to do this by seeking to understand what works in current established partnerships, and by engaging with a variety of stakeholders to build a series of recommendations: what the private sector, government and third sector bodies can do to widen the appeal and improve the delivery of this crucial aspect of healthy partnerships.

CLEAR RECOMMENDATIONS

In a period of squeezed public sector budgets, an NHS struggling under the weight of unsustainable spending, and rising demand on services due to ever-higher levels of lifestyle disease, cross-sector partnerships between private organisations – such as major consumer brands – and local authorities or charities have never been more important in boosting the health and wellbeing of communities.

Business Works Out sets out the context and background to the debate, including its controversies and complexities – as well as presenting brand new insights on the views of



Asda Active helps kids around the country – and their families – take part in sport

brands, councillors, charities and local authority deliverers.

Like previous ukactive reports, *Business Works Out* makes clear recommendations to address the issue it explores. There's a series of calls to government bodies, private companies and local authorities to ensure existing partnerships reach their full potential, in addition to demonstrating why more are needed.

The report explores five case studies of cross-sector partnerships that seek to benefit communities through community projects. These involve organisations that ukactive has worked with – such as Coca Cola GB, Asda and Danone – as well as private companies from further afield, such as Morgan Stanley and Moldelez.

LAUNCH EVENT

The report will be launched at an event in late October for private sector stakeholders, senior local authority and charity figures, MPs, business commentators and ukactive Strategic Partners. It offers an opportunity for any business interested in working with local authorities to advance its understanding of how to develop sustainable community projects that engage employees, improve their reputation and lead to the improved wellbeing of local citizens. ●

UNIQUE DATA

To gain unique primary data for this report, ukactive commissioned quantitative research that surveyed 401 local councillors in England and Wales to gather their views about the role of private companies in working with local authorities.

ukactive also sourced unique insight by conducting qualitative primary research among private companies, local authorities and charities who have worked in partnership on projects that have sought to benefit communities. The research explored the nature of the working relationship between partners, the power dynamic and how the partnership ran efficiently.

The qualitative views of a cross-section of senior local authority delegates from around the UK were also obtained, tapping in to their views about what cross-sector partnerships mean for the communities involved.

OCTOBER

19-22 | 15th Annual IHRSA European Congress

Venue Marseille, France

Summary

Offering presentations by executives from inside and outside the health club industry, providing thought-provoking commentary on trends shaping business in general, and the fitness industry in particular. Networking events and focus group discussions provide the opportunity to build relationships with colleagues from across Europe.

Web www.ihrsa.org

23-25 | The OM Yoga Show London

Venue Alexandra Palace, London, UK

Summary

A total yoga experience under one roof, including free yoga and pilates classes, a range of workshops, children's yoga and hundreds of exhibition stands covering all aspects of yoga, pilates, ayurveda and naturally healthy products.

Web www.omyogashow.co.uk

27-30 | FSB

Venue Koelnmesse, Cologne, Germany

Summary

International trade fair for architects, engineers, developers and operators of sports, playground, swimming and recreational facilities. Includes the bi-annual IAKS Congress for professionals in the sports and leisure sector. FSB is held alongside the Aquanale trade fair for pool and heat experience companies.

Web www.fsb-cologne.com



OM Yoga Show: A total yoga experience under one roof, including kids' classes

28-29 | International Standards Meeting

Venue Lisbon, Portugal

Summary

Organised by EuropeActive, this event brings together experts to discuss ways in which to drive standards in fitness.

Ideas presented will help to guide and accompany the work of EuropeActive's Professional Standards Committee.

Web www.europeactive.eu

goal to give an understanding of sports performance technology. Attendees will exchange ideas and share how they've used technology and data to revolutionise the sports and fitness industry and improve decision-making.

Web www.theinnovationenterprise.com

18-21 | SIBEC Europe

Venue Costa Blanca, Spain

Summary

Brings the UK and Europe's major operators in health, fitness and leisure together with leading suppliers in a one-to-one meeting forum. There's also plenty of time for networking. The event kicks off with a Question Time panel session discussing the hot topics in the fitness and physical activity sector.

Web www.sibec.eu

NOVEMBER

4-5 | Sports Performance & Tech Summit

Venue Manchester, UK

Summary

Aiming to attract more than 125 senior level sports professionals, this summit's

CAN YOU TELL A DUMBBELL FROM A SMART ONE?

According to industry reports, dumbbells are now one of the most popular pieces of fitness equipment in commercial fitness facilities.

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Health messaging

The Royal Society of Public Health has outlined proposals to cast the net wider in terms of health messaging, getting non health-related professionals involved. Where do health clubs fit in?

People in public-facing jobs such as firemen, postal workers, hairdressers and bar staff could be given a formal role in imparting health messages if recent proposals by the Royal Society of Public Health (RSPH) – put together with input from Public Health England, the Centre for Workforce Intelligence, Allied Health Professionals and the Department of Health – come into force.

Initially the idea seems rather bizarre. Do people really want to be lectured – during their leisure time no less – by bar staff and hairdressers telling them to give up smoking and drink less? Could such tactics be detrimental for business, dissuading people from visiting their local?

And how qualified to offer advice does the public perceive these people to be anyway, when they might need to make lifestyle changes themselves?

All that said, such schemes aren't without precedent. Already in Jersey, postal workers are given a secondary role to check up on frail elderly people who live alone; they also collect their prescriptions as part of their job description. Meanwhile betting chain Ladbrokes welcomes the RSPH proposals, having already tested out a similar concept of its own. Recognising the fact that many of its punters are hard to reach in terms of health messaging, it supported Men's Health Week in June of this year with the aim

of raising awareness of lifestyle changes that could lead to a healthier life.

Grainne Hurst, Ladbrokes' director of corporate affairs, says the poster, leaflet and social media campaign "challenged men to think about drinking sensibly, watching their weight, quitting smoking, being active and turning up for their NHS health checks".

However, the RSPH proposals want to push this idea much further. Rather than having promotional material on display, staff will be required to engage with customers. With the right training, could this be the key to widespread lifestyle change? And where does the health club industry fit into the plans? We ask the experts....

Do your staff know how to start 'healthy conversations'? Email us healthclub@leisuremedia.com

SHIRLEY CRAMER

CEO • RSPH



"We've been working with a number of organisations about how we can achieve a radical uplift in the prevention of non-communicable diseases, which are often caused by lifestyle factors.

There are 15 million people in the UK who work in occupational groups, who have frequent face-to-face contact with the public. These people could be trained to have healthy conversations and signpost local groups and services, such as smoking cessation programmes.

We're not talking about a forced conversation, but if the door is open, we want people to be equipped and confident to offer appropriate advice. For example, a hairdresser might be able to recommend a walking group to a client who is feeling isolated after suffering a bereavement.

We'd like to engage the health club sector, but with a broader brief. For example, health clubs could start offering NHS Health Checks, as well as services such as measuring BMI and blood pressure and running falls prevention programmes. Tower Hamlets GPs already do social prescribing – such as prescribing a charitable lunch club for someone suffering from depression – and there's an opportunity for the health club industry to play this sort of role too."

MIKE TAYLOR

Director • British Barbers' Association



"Hairdressers and barbers develop close relationships with their clients, so this could work well, but with some important caveats. They wouldn't want to preach – that could be bad for business – and only be the most professional, credible hairdressers and salons should be given the training to offer this advice. There are many unqualified people in the industry.

You can tell a lot about someone from the condition of their hair and scalp: how much they drink and smoke, if they're stressed, or if moles are changing. Telling people you've noticed a change in their hair is a good starting point for a conversation, but there are limits to what they would talk about, since many hairdressers also drink and smoke.

Barbers are open to tie-ups with the health and fitness industry. This year, the British Barbers' Association is working with Movember to find more ways of generating cash: we're encouraging barbers to ask local gyms if they can borrow an exercise bike for the duration of the Movember campaign. In my shop, we're going to cycle from Bournemouth to Thailand. Staff will hop on between clients and I'm going to get people who are waiting to go on it too. We'll invite local gyms to hand out leaflets and see if they could spare PTs to chat to people."



An initial chat at the bar could spur people to seek more information

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

BRIGID SIMMONDS

CEO • British Beer & Pub Association

“Complex health messages are best communicated by a health professional, but I think bar staff could provide information around food and drink issues, and signpost people to where they can get further information or support.

Bar staff are often people with whom conversation is natural about a wide range of issues, but I would certainly be cautious about adopting a more hard-sell approach – one that could be seen as lecturing customers – or seeking to provide detailed advice. It's more about starting a conversation and making sure information is available to customers to let them make their own choices, or to seek further information. I think it's important to keep these things low-key, ensuring bar staff don't have a duty of care but that they're equipped to provide information to customers if they need or ask for it.

The BBPA has spearheaded a unit awareness campaign, with posters and other materials, to help start a conversation around units in drinks. Many of our members have increased the choice available in the lower-alcohol category. There can also be a role for pubs as facilitators of wider initiatives such as Club Soda, where people meet in pubs to enjoy low, or no, alcohol drinks in the great atmosphere.”



CLAIRE MACDONALD

Behaviour change specialist • NHS

“It's important to realise we can't rely on clinicians alone to impart health messages: we need to encourage more people to be part of the solution, rather than part of the problem.

We can't use commercial environments to improve public health if it has negative impact on the custom, but done well, this could boost customer relationships. Both bar staff and hairdressers know their customers and are typically good conversationalists: it would be good to give them an improved knowledge base so they could offer an opinion and give out some beneficial messages. However, I think it would have to be a light conversation – one that could be the catalyst to encourage individuals to look elsewhere for specialist help.

The health club industry certainly has a role to play here, because it's in the perfect position. Hairdressers can't weigh people, but health clubs can. They can also have honest conversations about health, and do blood pressure and BMI checks. Health clubs could also be imparting more dietary advice: tell members about MyFitnessPal and encourage them to stop the compensatory behaviour of having a latte and a muffin because they feel they've earned it. Make sure healthy food and drink options are on offer and talk about them.”





Sébastien Foucan, the founder of freerunning, talks to **Kate Cracknell** about James Bond, growing his academy network, and the vital need for everyone to move



Foucan wants people to move their bodies and have fun freerunning

James Bond fans will recognise renowned freerunner Sébastien Foucan as the baddie Mollaka from the opening scenes of the 2006 film *Casino Royale*.

Madonna fans might have spotted him defying gravity in the video for her 2005 single *Jump*; he then toured the world with her on her Confessions tour.

Yet in spite of these impressive CV entries, Foucan remains remarkably down to earth – much more interested in exploring the potential of his art form and passing his passion on to others than he is in superstardom or marking his territory.

"I'm a pioneer, but I don't try to own anything," Foucan explains. "Jumping, running, climbing, swinging... it was all here long before I was born. People will take freerunning and do it their own way, and I'm OK with that."

"But for me, what I do is a lifestyle – something I do every single day – and it's a constant work in progress. I think that's what happens when you create something new."

He continues: "I moved away from parkour, which I originally founded with my friends in Paris, when I started to feel limitations being imposed on my practice. People had started to say 'It has to be like this, you shouldn't do this, you can't use this, you can't do that', and I found it very restrictive. I'm very into martial arts and philosophy, so I've always been driven by creativity and by being open."

"Me personally, I have absolutely no boundaries. Activities are activities. We give names to sports – tennis, for example – but if you put a racket in a kid's hand and they don't know the right technique, they'll just move in whatever way feels natural to them and they'll have fun. That's what I focus on. Activity any time, anywhere – just move your body and have fun."

"My style therefore began to evolve into what I eventually named freerunning, which is about expressing yourself in your environment without limitation."



Sébastien Foucan showed off his skills in the opening sequence of *Casino Royale*

The aim of freerunning has nothing to do with being able to jump high. The aim of freerunning is wellbeing

"If I had to explain the difference between parkour and freerunning, parkour is efficiency – it's getting past obstacles to get from A to B – whereas freerunning is more about flips and tricks and creativity."

"But actually the difference is more than that. It's a shift from physicality to musicality."

THE FOUCAN PHILOSOPHY

In fact, the longer you listen to Foucan speak, the clearer it is that freerunning for him is as much a philosophy of movement as it is a physical act of bouncing off walls and jumping between obstacles.

"For me it's a connection, not just with nature but with the universe. It's being totally in tune with your body and your surroundings," he says. "The aim of freerunning has nothing to do with being able to jump high. The aim of freerunning is wellbeing, which for me is everything you do that doesn't damage yourself. It's important not to go against your own internal rhythms."

He continues: "In freerunning, we don't have a season like a traditional sport might have: there are no competitions, no league tables, no trophies. Instead we follow nature. We adapt to our circadian rhythms, understanding our bodies and creating our own lifestyles based around those natural rhythms."

"In my calendar we have spring awakening, expressive summer, smooth autumn and winter sanctuary. Winter is meant to be more relaxing. Autumn can be things like ice skating – swinging, gliding, less impact on your joints so you can recover. In the spring you start to get more dynamic. That's my concept."

"People come in and want to do the jumps straight away, but as a coach I try to share my bigger concept with them. They need to go through the whole year's journey to progress with freerunning, as well as progressing in their own mindset towards a stage where they can just let their body and mind go."

INTERVIEW - SÉBASTIEN FOUCAN

- "The connection between your mind and body is really important. I call it 'horse-mindship'. The horse is your body, and the mind is obviously the mental side of things – and often in freerunning there's a disconnect between the two. You see it a lot when someone's getting ready to do a jump. It's that fight inside: 'I want to do this jump, but I can't do it'.

"Even me, when I was doing James Bond – I was scared. I only had one tiny wire supporting me and my mind couldn't accept that was enough. But you focus and you learn to believe you can do it. That's where I think freerunning has been influenced by martial arts – in that sense of inner focus and concentration and self-belief.

"In my approach to teaching, if it doesn't happen today, that's OK – you just keep coming back to it and sooner or later your mind and body will just let go. I believe I have the tools to help someone overcome their fears, whatever those fears might be."

He continues: "I see a clear difference between traditional sports and lifestyle activities, and that's shaped everything I do. I want my practice to become very educational, with less of what I call lying. You might get an injury playing a sport, but people lie to themselves and to their bodies – they push themselves when they shouldn't, just to win a trophy.

"In my practice – in my lifestyle – there's no such a thing. If I were in pain, I'd stop. You need to work in harmony with your body. I deeply believe we can live to 140 years old, but not if you get trapped in the cycle of competitive sport: the cycle of injury, recovery, injury, recovery, winning, losing, winning, losing. That destroys your body, as well as your internal armoury.

"That's my philosophy, and that's what I want to bring into my academy. In fact, I'd like an area like a martial arts dojo with my philosophy clearly up there on the wall. It isn't quite like that yet, but it's what I'm working towards."

SPREADING THE WORD

And he'll have plenty of opportunity to evolve his academy concept, having joined up with Oxygen Freejumping founders David Stalker and Fred Turok to ►



Foucan: Every park should have a playground



Freerunning is everywhere: outside, inside, absolutely everywhere. The world is the playground



Kids and adults alike want escapism, says Foucan



Foucan aims to help people overcome their fears



Foucan's academies will be in every Oxygen park



PHOTOS: KELLY REEVES; PAUL MC LAUGHLIN



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INTERVIEW - SÉBASTIEN FOUCAN

- launch a Foucan Freerunning Academy in every Oxygen trampoline park. The first Oxygen Freejumping site opened in West Acton, London, this summer, with plans to open another six over the next 12 months. A further 15 are already in the planning pipeline. "I'm really excited about it, because they just get it. David [Stalker] shares my vision and my passion for activity," enthuses Foucan, who has now made Oxygen West Acton his indoor base.

But does it not matter that the activity takes place indoors at these venues – isn't the whole point of freerunning that it takes place outside?

"No, no. Freerunning is everywhere: outside, inside, absolutely everywhere. The world is the playground. "I could work with anyone, anywhere, as long as they have the vision. It's important to design the room with freerunning in mind, though, so participants of all levels can find a creative route through it.

"At Oxygen, I'm inside for safety purposes and for convenience – especially with children, because I have to be responsible for them. But in my daydreams, I'd have somewhere with a little tunnel where the kids could crawl back and forth between an indoor and an outdoor area. I think they'd love that."

The main challenge will be how to spread himself across numerous locations. "I'll have to teach the coaches myself, and in fact some of the adults who I've been teaching for a while now have put themselves forward. ►



freerunning can be done both indoors and outdoors

I want my legacy to be creating the place I would have loved to have had when I was a kid

Foucan is looking to train a team of coaches first-hand



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The freerunner wants his legacy to be about 'fun and play and freedom'

- "But I have to deliver the quality. I have to define the standards of the Sébastien way, and I've thought a lot about it. I now have a clear idea of what I want, how it's supposed to be, what I don't want to see. So it's coming.

"We may make a few mistakes along the way, but I'm not afraid of the challenge. I want my legacy to be creating the place I would have loved to have had when I was a kid. The sort of place that will make the word spread like wildfire."

CALLING ALL VISIONARIES

Given the way Foucan embraces freerunning as a lifestyle, does he ever just walk normally down the street?

"I do walk normally, but inside my head it's constant. You look around and you see things differently. It affects you in your lifestyle forever, because you notice when people are putting up boundaries. You notice parents saying to their kids: 'Don't do this, don't climb, don't jump... don't, don't, don't.'"

"Society does that too. I run a class at Latimer Road in London, and every sign there says 'No freerunning'.

No freerunning, no skateboarding – and the worst sign I've ever seen: 'No jumping of any kind.'

"That's awful, because there's a huge call for what we do, not only from kids but from adults too – and that's because people want freedom. They want escapism. They want an activity that's fun and social and that isn't going to feel like a chore after work.

"So if you come to one of my freerunning classes, we won't be training. I don't do sit-ups. I don't do pull-ups or push-ups. I hate running – sorry to those people who like it, but it's boring.

"We're doing something new, and it's about fun and play and freedom. I believe every park in the country should be full of playgrounds. You have all this space and you should be using it to inspire people to be active.

"I know there are health and safety considerations, but in the end, in life, 100 per cent safe doesn't exist. We do our best in our academies, but activity is vitality. People have to be active.

"So where are the visionaries? I can go to any gym, any place. All I need are people who are visionaries." ●

25 Years of helping Health Clubs get new members

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RIGHT ON COURSE

Gladstone's Learn2 software has revolutionised course management, with benefits for both customers and the bottom line

From learn-to-swim schemes to football or tennis coaching, course programming is the bread-and-butter of any successful sport and leisure business.

As most operators will tell you, the challenges of administering and co-ordinating these schemes can stretch even the most efficient management teams to their limit. It's not only the logistical burden of keeping track of multiple joiners, leavers and movers; it's also trying to keep parents and participants up to date with their progress, which impacts greatly on retention.

But thanks to Gladstone's Learn2 course management tool, many operators are now meeting these challenges much more effectively.

Rather than requiring receptionists to send out re-enrolment letters, Learn2 automatically emails and/or texts parents

to let them know when their child is ready to move up to the next class or needs to pay for the next set of lessons. It then further reduces the pressure on your staff by allowing customers to re-enrol their child themselves using the internet-based Home Portal.

Instead of paper-based registers and competency check sheets, teachers work with a portable, waterproof, touch-screen device. This allows them to take registers and make real-time assessments of children during the lesson itself, drastically reducing the admin burden. And because the device connects and syncs wirelessly with Home Portal, over a secure wireless network, it's easy for parents to stay up to date with their child's progress online.

Also built into Learn2 is a tailored reporting feature, allowing you to access reports on your joiners, leavers, class movements and class occupancy, set

against monthly targets and refined by date, centre, course or teacher.

"We developed Learn2 to simplify the administration process for swim-schools, which can often become very complicated and time-consuming," says Tom Withers, Gladstone's sales and marketing director.

"However, it's been so successful that a number of leisure operators are now using Learn2 to manage dryside courses, as well as to increase revenues."



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“We’ve increased our number of swimmers by 15 per cent”

In October 2014, we launched Gladstone’s Learn2 course management tool at our two leisure centres as part of a wider overhaul of our learn-to-swim scheme.

One of the main advantages of Learn2 is that together with the ASA National Plan, which we introduced simultaneously, it enables children to be moved up a class as soon as they are ready. Under the old system a child would have to wait until a dedicated assessment week before being identified as ready to move. Swim co-ordinators would then allocate them a space in an appropriate class, before giving the parent a call or handing them a move slip. If parents were hard to get hold of, or did not want the allocated day or time, this

often led to delays – and with swim co-ordinators not always being available, the process could become very frantic.

With Learn2 all of this is avoided. Now parents get an automated email when their child is ready to move, and can go onto Home Portal to choose a class themselves. As well as being easier for parents, it significantly reduces the number of calls we get on this topic, and it’s much easier to keep track of availability in classes. Our swim co-ordinators now spend around 23 per cent less time dealing with class movements, allowing them to concentrate on signing up new swimmers. As a result, we’ve been able to add new classes and have increased our number of swimmers by 15 per cent in the past nine months.

Another problem with the old system was that parents often commented that

they did not know how their children were doing in class.

With Learn2 the swimming instructors record attainment using portable poolside devices, which are linked into Home Portal, meaning parents can now track their children’s progress at their leisure.

We also use the system to keep a more regular record of why children leave, so we can deal with any underlying issues promptly.

Overall, Learn2 has significantly reduced the administration burden of managing our swim scheme, as well as being popular with parents.

John Richardson, head of community services, North West Leicestershire District Council

“Learn2 has resulted in significant time and cost savings”

Active Northumberland uses a wide range of Gladstone products across its 18 sites, which range from dual-use leisure facilities to a disabled riding centre.

We’ve been very impressed with Learn2. We brought it in last September as part of a complete overhaul of our swim development programme, including the introduction of 46 weeks of lessons, continuous assessment and direct debit payments, and it has already helped make the process much more efficient. The fact that Learn2 is linked to Plus2 has made it much easier to migrate people to direct debit, and the system is designed to support continuous assessment.

It’s also resulted in significant time and cost savings. Thanks to features such as the active waiting list and automated movement alerts it’s now simpler to move participants around. This means we no longer need to hold re-enrolment days, which included putting an extra receptionist on shift and the swim coordinator working extra hours. The system also enables reception to deal with enquiries and add people to the programme.

Our swim instructors are now confidently using the poolside devices; 74 per cent of participants are registered on Home Portal and 56 per cent are actively using it; and, overall, there is much less admin and paperwork for everyone. We will be looking to roll out the product to our dryside courses in the future.

Colin Winfield, area manager South East Northumberland, Active Northumberland

“ We will be looking to roll out the product to our dryside courses in the future ”



A number of operators are now using Learn2 to manage their dryside courses



Extreme fitness challenges such as Tough Mudder are increasingly inspiring the public to push themselves further than they ever imagined possible. We look at how fitness operators are tapping in to this trend

TO THE EXTREME



Over two million people have taken part in Tough Mudder around the world

The market for extreme fitness challenges is booming, spawning an abundance of endurance events like triathlons as well as the phenomenally popular obstacle course races (OCR) around the world. Designed to push participants to their limits, both mentally and physically, OCRs are generally set in unforgiving terrain involving varying levels of man-made and natural obstacles, icy cold water and a lot of mud.

In the United Kingdom, obstacle racing saw an 80 per cent growth in entrant numbers between 2011 and 2013 – from 40,000 to 205,000 – according to Muddy Race, a leading obstacle racing website. In January 2014, Muddy Race also reported that the UK obstacle racing industry was worth more than £12m annually.

In the US, four million people took part in an OCR event in 2014 – this according to *Obstacle Race World: The State of the Mud Run Business*, a new report by American fitness trainer and research analyst Melissa Rodriguez.

To date, Tough Mudder has hosted 250,000 participants at its UK events and welcomed its two millionth participant globally this August, while Reebok Spartan Race reached its one millionth participant this year.

Rodriguez, who oversees industry research for the International Health,

In the UK, obstacle racing enjoyed an 80 per cent growth in entrant numbers between 2011 and 2013, from 40,000 to 205,000



The obstacle races are popular among both men and women

Racquet & Sportsclub Association (IHRSA), says a rise in participation in related activities – such as running, triathlons, adventure racing and CrossFit – has helped drive the growth of obstacle course races.

JOINING FORCES

So what's the appeal? Many organisers of OCRs describe their events as life-changing. But they are also accessible, with almost all races popular with men and women and designed to cater for all levels of fitness. Some even host junior races for children, appealing to the whole family.

"Our participants, both veterans and newcomers, love Tough Mudder because our events provide a challenge that's primal, irreverent and unlike any other athletic

EXTREME TRAINING



24 Hour Fitness
partnered with
Atlas Race events



Human Race owns and
delivers over 50 UK
events each year

► experience," says John Fidoe, Tough Mudder's vice president of marketing.

Participants become part of a community from the moment they sign up for a race, receiving training tips and nutritional advice to prepare them for the challenge. During the event, they experience teamwork and camaraderie as they negotiate the obstacles – as well as an exhilarating cocktail of excitement, fear and adrenaline.

Health club operators are increasing joining forces with OCR companies to take advantage of this seemingly insatiable appetite for extreme fitness challenges. The partnerships take a variety of formats, from contra-marketing deals and discounts to dedicated classes and training programmes to get people get challenge-fit.

"People who are already at the gym have an interest in fitness and health, even if they're just starting out. Linking with an event such as ourselves opens the doors to something that can motivate people to continue to go to the gym, to train and reach their goals," says Coleen McManus, general manager of Spartan UK.

The partnerships also provide useful ways for both parties to leverage their brand. Indeed, some OCR organisers like Reebok Spartan Race have plans to strike out even further. The company intends to host more than 20 free workouts next year, with the help of the likes of parkour, bootcamp and CrossFit operators. There will also be bespoke Spartan training classes in national fitness chains. The future for OCR looks bright indeed.

VIRGIN ACTIVE JOINS FORCES WITH TOUGH MUDDER

Virgin Active partnered with Tough Mudder, which runs team-orientated 10- to 12-mile obstacle courses, at the start of 2015.

The three-year agreement sees Virgin Active providing in-club training to help prepare participants for the challenge. Working with Tough Mudder, Virgin Active developed Mudder Maker, the official training class for Tough Mudder. "Virgin Active has a great understanding of everything that Tough Mudder entails, from the variety of obstacles and terrain, to the importance of completing these challenges as a team," says John Fidoe.

Linking with an event
such as ourselves
opens the doors to
something that can
motivate people to
continue to go to
the gym, to train and
reach their goals

During the 45-minute class, participants work in groups of three or four at their chosen intensity level. They take on nine obstacles before facing The Eliminator, which consists of the Centurion – where they have to do as many reps of a designated body weight exercise as possible – and the Gauntlet, where they push a tackle shield-wearing instructor across the studio.

"There's a great fit between the two brands, and Virgin Active's expertise and facilities greatly enhance the training experience for Mudders preparing to tackle our events," says Fidoe.

Class participants have a reward card, which is stamped after each session; they receive an additional stamp for any personal bests achieved during The Eliminator. These can be redeemed for rewards such as Tough Mudder T-shirts.

Approximately 23,000 members have attended the classes since they launched in UK clubs in May.

FITNESS FIRST AND JUDGEMENT DAY

Judgement Day races offer a combination of natural and man-made obstacles, with no two races the same. The company doesn't post course maps or a list of obstacles and it varies distances and terrains, so participants never know what to expect.

Launched in March, Fitness First's partnership with Judgement Day aims to drive awareness of OCRs and prepare members for races. In addition to discounted entry to races, Fitness First members can access training and



Reebok Spartan Race culminates in a world championships event

advice to prepare for the event, says a spokesperson for the health club chain: "Our personal trainers offer training programmes where you'll be tasked with movements and exercises that replicate a lot of the challenges you're likely to encounter during an OCR like Judgement Day. With our Freestyle group training sessions, members also develop strength, power, agility and speed, which are all essential to succeeding in an event like this."

The chain is working with Jon Albon, current OCR World Champion and Spartan World Champion, who works with personal trainers to advise how to tackle the hardest of obstacle courses and give tips for preparing and recovering from an event.

Fitness First also offers outdoor group training classes to prepare members for the types of environment they might experience during OCRs. And its OCR training programmes on the Fitness First website have proved to be one of the company's most popular workout regimes, with more than 2,000 downloads to date.

24 HOUR FITNESS AND ATLAS RACE

US group 24 Hour Fitness partnered with Atlas Race early this year. "We chose Atlas Race because it has a young, entrepreneurial team, and its races were a little less intimidating than many of the larger obstacle race formats. We felt its races reflected our membership well. Many people would be doing this obstacle race for the

Obstacle racing connects our members with fun outdoor activities that provide more purpose to the time they spend in our clubs

first time and Atlas Race events are accessible, with attainable finishes," says Richard Boyd, the group's senior VP of fitness & strategic initiatives.

The partnership, which has now ended, saw 24 Hour Fitness promote Atlas obstacle events to members, with discounts for those who registered for races.

Boyd continues: "Obstacle racing, as with many other sporting events, gives us an opportunity to engage with our membership base. It adds value for our members and connects them with fun outdoor activities that provide more purpose to the time they spend in our clubs. We offer a group training programme, Ignite, which is a terrific introduction to group fitness and also helps prepare people for all of our experiential races."

"We're constantly introducing new fitness event opportunities for our members. We have a number of special events coming up that are both challenging and help our members continue their fitness activities outside of our clubs. Some of our exciting new programmes include a series of fun runs, Fitness On the Rocks and our own outdoor obstacle event series, which will be held locally at school athletic fields."

LA FITNESS / PURE GYM AND REEBOK SPARTAN RACE

Reebok Spartan Race offers 5km, 13km and 20km courses, culminating in the annual Reebok Spartan World Championships. The races feature global rankings to encourage competition, and participants who complete all three distances in one year earn a place in the Spartan Trifecta club.

"Spartan isn't just a race – it's a lifestyle where we encourage a positive change in attitudes towards

EXTREME TRAINING



Spartan races feature global rankings to encourage competition

► workouts, nutrition and everyday challenges," says Spartan UK's McManus.

"Partnering with LA fitness and Pure Gym has allowed us to reach a broad group of people. Gym partners can offer Spartans access to membership and training for race day, and it's a great fit as both parties want to inspire everyone up off the sofa, to get exercising and to challenge themselves to do something new," she adds.

The company's relationship with Pure Gym includes cross-promotional opportunities, with Pure Gym members receiving discounted entry to Spartan races.

"We advertise the races in our clubs and on the internet and have a presence at Spartan events," says Francine Davis, director of strategic development at Pure Gym. "We don't offer specific Spartan training, but it's common for people in the gym to train with each other and put a team together with our personal trainers for a race."

Xercise4Less offers discounted membership for 'Total Warriors'

Spartan isn't just a race – it's a lifestyle where we encourage a positive change in attitudes towards workouts, nutrition & everyday challenges

The company also looks for other ways to reinforce the relationship. "We have a monthly gym challenge across our 106 gyms. Burpees are Reebok Spartan Race's exercise of choice, so one challenge was to do as many burpees as possible in 60 seconds, with the winner receiving free entry into a Reebok Spartan Race."

XERCISE4LESS PARTNERS WITH TOTAL WARRIOR

Low-cost gym chain Xercise4Less is the official place to train for those who want to take part in a Total Warrior Event. The races cover 10km, 12km or 10 miles of rugged terrain featuring 25 to 30 specially designed obstacles.

Xercise4Less gives 'warriors' discounted gym memberships for £9.99 a month (peak is usually £14.99), while its own users receive a 15 per cent discount on entry to Total Warrior events. ►



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Open water swimming is one of the Human Race disciplines

- The chain has also introduced Warrior classes – one-hour sessions that include running, circuits, Tabata and resistance work to prepare participants for the events. “We run three classes a week in all sites and consistently have 30 to 40 people in each class,” says Lauren Rainforth, PR and events executive at Xercise4Less.

NUFFIELD HEALTH AND HUMAN RACE

Human Race owns and delivers more than 50 events around the UK, from triathlon and cycling to running and open water swimming.

The company has a new partnership with Nuffield Health, which launched as HCM went to press.

“The new partnership runs across all Human Race public events,” says Sandy Case, new business director of Human Race Events. “It gives Nuffield Health an opportunity to share its knowledge and expertise, build further awareness of its brand and showcase its services along the journey that every Human Race participant takes, from registering for the event right through to the race day itself and beyond.”

“Our participants are interested in their health and wellbeing and are seeking advice relating to their preparation, training, recovery and injury prevention. They use gyms to train in and often require physio services for the inevitable aches and pains that can crop up during training. They require nutritional advice to enable them to perform at their optimum level, and recovery advice for post training/exercise. Nuffield Health was an ideal partner who ticked all the boxes.”

For Nuffield Health, Human Race offers a full 12-month event platform, with over 50 events and a receptive audience of close to 250,000 people who all share a passion to be fit and healthy.

“The relationship is a true partnership, where both teams will be working together to create new events, share knowledge, educate participants and generally help improve the experience each person will have when signing up for an event, whether they be a beginner or an expert,” concludes Case.

Nuffield Health will also be title sponsor of the Eton Super Sprints weekend and the Kingston Run Challenge as part of its involvement. ●



Human Race offers a receptive audience of 250,000 participants

Our participants are interested in their health and wellbeing and are seeking advice relating to their preparation, training, recovery and injury prevention



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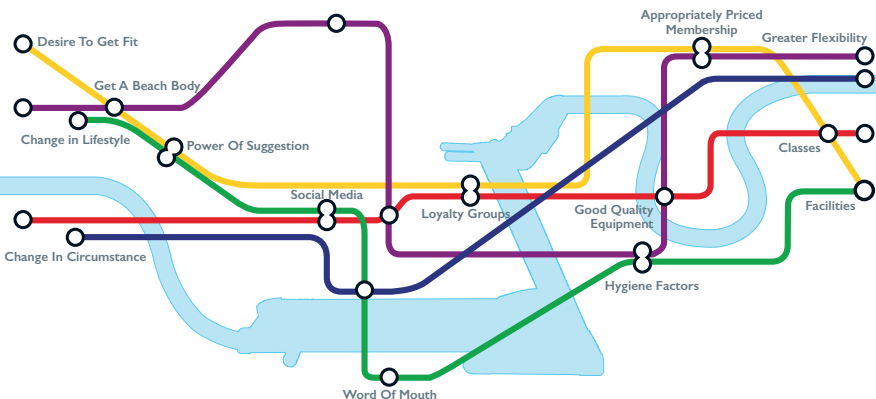


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The Path to Purchase

Tim Baker takes a look at the journey to becoming – and staying – a member

When was the last time you, or someone you know well, joined a gym or health club? Can you remember what triggered the event: what made you (or your friend) decide to look around and start your search? What was the process you went through, and why did you make the decision you did?

Chances are, unless this was yesterday, you won't be able to remember all the points along your path to purchase. Your recall will probably be of a structured, rational and step-wise process that led you to a balanced and well-researched decision. But the reality will have been a fragmented, unstructured process that was influenced in large part by the relatively emotional outpourings of friends and reviewers and how these – and your own observations – made you feel.

If it was a few years ago and you started with some kind of online search,



86%

of buyers will pay more for a better customer experience – but only 1% feel companies consistently meet their expectations

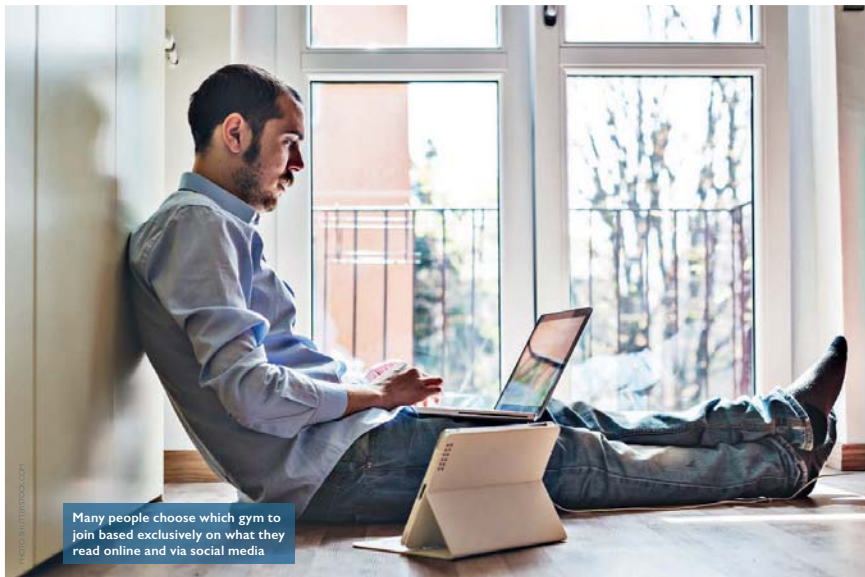


whatever you remember is likely to also be completely out of date.

Even the way you started your search will have been different. A quick look at some publicly available Google analytics shows how particular search terms have become more or less popular over the years: for example, the numbers searching for 'health clubs' has declined markedly, while searches for 'the gym' have increased almost in inverse proportion (see Figure 1 – incidentally, those big spikes are in January of each year and the smaller ones in September).

Our changing vocabulary reflects the changing attitudes towards, and customers' expectations of, gym and health club memberships.

This in turn affects the paths we take to arrive at the point of purchase – and this should, in turn, affect the online tags we deploy to get our gym's search engine optimised.



Many people choose which gym to join based exclusively on what they read online and via social media

SYSTEMS 1 & 2

The details along the path to purchase change with the times, as different influencers become more or less prominent – price is obviously a key influencer at the moment, and gyms have had to work to give good reason to choose them. Even with this pressure, though, there are very successful gyms in the mid and upper end of the market. They are successful because of the way they make their members feel.

While the path itself may change, by and large the same elements will trigger the search for a gym (or new gym). These will include dissatisfaction with

the current provider; a desire to get fit or get a beach body, the post Christmas hang-over, somebody else suggesting it, a change in lifestyle, a life-changing event, and a change in circumstance.

Once the path has been embarked upon, we have good opportunity to influence decisions along the way. It's important, though, that we're prepared at each point where the potential member might be influenced, and that our preparedness focuses us on how members feel about us.

Here's why it's important to focus on feelings: we can create rational 'path to purchase' models that encompass key

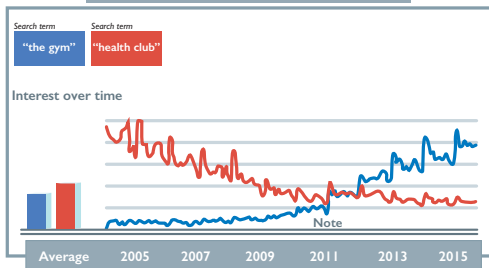
points like trigger – aware – evaluate – engage – select – experience, but we can't expect buyers to act in this rational, structured way as they make choices.

Daniel Kahneman, in his landmark book *Thinking, Fast and Slow* describes how we operate in two systems – 1 and 2. We spend most of our lives in system 1, where our brains use less processing power by following heuristics (simple 'rules' – or assumptions – by which we live our lives) to make our decisions: that orange sign in Sainsbury's means it's a bargain, Volvo cars are the safest, Aldi is cheaper, and so on.

System 2 engages when our heuristics are challenged: if all cars are very safe, then we have to explore the other elements of each car before we can make a decision (fuel consumption, tax band, price, servicing costs, interior space, value, features etc). This takes time and energy and, for the most part of our daily lives, we actually don't need to use system 2. Even if we are in system 2, if another suitable heuristic happens along, then system 1 starts to engage once more: OK, all cars are safe... BMWs are stylish. Or Hyundais are great value.

The engaging power of the heuristic is dependent on the type of person, so the price heuristic acts more strongly on online buyers, while the service heuristic acts more strongly on those who value personal service. If it weren't for

FIGURE 1 - GOOGLE SEARCH TERMS



CUSTOMER INSIGHT

- heuristics (and system 1), then marketing would have a much harder time of it.

HOW DO YOU FEEL?

Why is this important for gyms? Just like any other service, we need to keep members in system 1 for as much of the time as possible. Maya Angelou put it more succinctly: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

And people tell others how you made them feel. That's what drives reviews and word of mouth commentary. McKinsey tells us that 70 per cent of buying decisions are based on how the customer feels, but *Forbes* magazine showed how woefully inadequate most companies are in this area, when it recently reported a CEI survey which said 86 per cent of buyers will pay more for a better customer experience – but only 1 per cent feel companies consistently meet their expectations. This is system 1 stuff.

Figure 2 shows a typical path to purchase model. Of course, it's not so much a straight path as a meandering, circular walkway. The model is really for our benefit, to give some sort of structure to our thinking; in reality, the buyer leaps from one point to another in a somewhat random fashion.

WHY I BUY

These are the triggers. We can promote our gyms at the right times (January and September from the looks of the search

data in Figure 1), talking about both the reasons for joining a gym and why it should be our gym in particular. We can also trigger this situation by failing to keep our members feeling happy with us (so activating system 2 for some reason).

It's at this stage that the potential member is becoming aware of the need

to think about gyms, and evaluating what it is they might want. They are contemplating the issue and may not go further. They become more proactive as they move to the next phase.

HOW I BUY

Here the member is getting active and exploring the options. Now we should promote ourselves on the differentiating factors we have: we don't need to persuade them they need a gym, we must persuade them they need *our* gym.

Social media (TripAdvisor, review sites, Facebook, twitter, etc) is clearly a significant source of information these days. But many people seeking reviews don't bother looking at the good ones. As they say, what's the point in reading loads of people saying nice things? They seek out the more negative reviews to see what the issues are, whether they are consistent problems and what you as a business have done about them.

These are conversations, just like in the pub – except you have the opportunity to join in, engage and explain things and put them right. Your response – how you deal with an issue – is what matters. That's what leaves the lasting feeling. And that's what a lot of people reading the reviews are looking for: how will

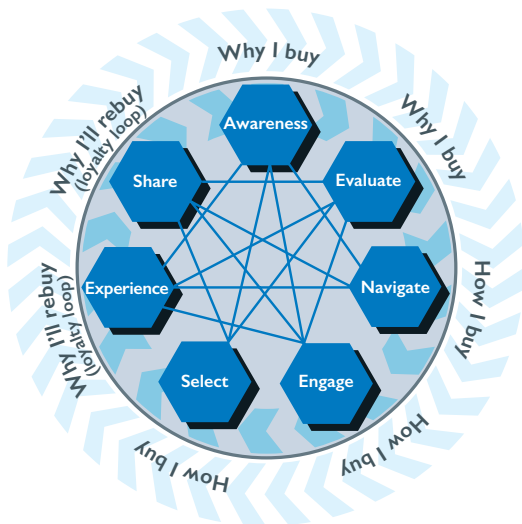


FIGURE 2 - PATH TO PURCHASE





According to McKinsey, 70 per cent of all buying decisions are based on how customers feel



The first purchase is **only the start of the journey**. Problems should be seen as **opportunities to show you care**, and how you are **prepared to act**



you make them feel? These days, it's increasingly likely that members will join without ever visiting the gym in person: the website and social media are your shop windows and you need to ensure that, as well as covering the hygiene factors (good quality equipment, appropriately priced membership, classes, changing rooms, showers etc), you convey the right feeling about the place in what you say and how you respond.

The perceived need for greater flexibility is a good example of an opportunity for gyms to positively affect the way members feel. Many gyms have not responded well to this change. Chains could easily generate greater loyalty by offering group membership as standard: why should a member be restricted to only one location in a chain, and why should it cost more to use other locations? You don't need separate loyalty cards for each Costa Coffee you call into.

Independent gyms should, equally, be forming into loyalty groups so the member knows they will find a similar atmosphere to their regular gym. The rise of the likes of payasUgym, ClassPass and MoveGB clearly demonstrates the attraction of flexible options (see p90).

WHY I'LL REBUY

The first purchase is only the start of the journey. This point is critical. We now have the opportunity to deliver experiences that can make the member feel not just affection but real love for us, so they will share their experiences with others and become an advocate. Word of mouth recommendation from friends is so much more powerful than advertising in generating sales, although advertising is needed to maintain salience.

A well-known airline client I had some years ago discovered that the way it dealt with issues for passengers had a stronger, longer lasting effect on loyalty than any amount of smooth, professional handling. I'd never advocate creating issues just so you can show your problem-handling skills, but problems that will inevitably arise should be seen as opportunities to show you care, and how you're prepared to act. That's in large part how my client became the world's favourite airline.

Why not set yourself the goal of being the town's/area's/country's favourite gym? It's in these areas that lasting, valuable differentiation can be achieved. But to work, it has to be lived. One final quote for encouragement, this time from Emmet and Mark Murphy in *Leading on the Edge of Chaos*: "A 2 per cent increase in customer retention has the same effect as decreasing cost by 10 per cent." ●



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim Baker is chair of Touchstone Partners, a leading research consultancy in the leisure, consumer and shopper sectors. Touchstone's core expertise is in market exploration (to identify opportunities), pricing, brand equity and proposition development.
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THE Uber-all economy

Imke Schuller of *The Futures Company* reports on health club loyalty in the new economy

The world's biggest provider of accommodation does not own a single hotel room: Airbnb. The biggest taxi company does not own a single taxi: Uber. The biggest media company does not own any content: Facebook. The world around us is changing rapidly, giving rise to new business models.

The health club industry is no exception. Increasingly sedentary lives and convenient food solutions are leading to a steady rise in obesity; it's no surprise that health and wellbeing are increasingly heading to the top of the agenda – for the government, businesses and individuals.

Separately, people's lives are becoming more fluid and flexible, so there's a need for on-demand solutions in the health and fitness space. Anytime, anywhere. Consumers' expectations are shifting, and digital technology is enabling this change.

Meanwhile the continued slow growth of the UK (and global) economy is challenging the current business model of the health club industry – particularly the squeezed, often undifferentiated, middle. To be successful in the 21st century, health clubs will need to rethink the way they engage with customers, the way they recruit new users – and ultimately, the way they do business.

At The Futures Company, we have identified two main challenges facing the fitness industry. Firstly, loyalty is no longer a given: consumers are becoming more promiscuous and less willing to sign up to loyalty programmes or subscriptions. And secondly, the new 'uber-all economy' redefines what consumers truly value.

LOYALTY REDEFINED

Health clubs tend to operate on a monthly or annual subscription basis –

a membership model. This leads to a transactional relationship with customers: access to equipment and facilities in exchange for a fee.

With a perceived lack of emotional differentiation between different clubs' propositions, customers become more open to shopping around to find the equipment, class, instructor or location that meets their needs for each workout.

This changing consumer mindset lies at the heart of recent 'exercise passport'

innovations such as ClassPass and MoveGB (see p90), as well as now well established concepts such as payasUgym.com, which allow people to pick and choose locations for each workout rather than being tied to just one gym.

Indeed, this shift in mindset is key to the boutique model generally, where exercisers typically pay on a by-class basis.

Aided by technology, consumers are becoming more value-conscious, carefully choosing where to spend their money.

But importantly, it's perceived value rather than low price that's key – consumers want a great experience. They're keen to try and explore new things: 59 per cent of UK respondents in The Futures Company's *Global Monitor* values and attitudes tracker say they "like to try new products and services", as opposed to 41 per cent who "like to stick to products and services they know".

The reaction from health clubs tends to be to offer discounts for longer-term memberships, free guest passes, trial periods – all



The new breed of boutique studios keep customers with their great products, not by imposing a contract



Millennials value flexibility – they want to use more than one gym

with the objective of recruiting loyal customers. But is this a timely approach? Aren't clubs fostering the transactional model even more by trying to force their customers into subscription?

Health clubs need to redefine how they provide value to their customers. In our recent *Consumer Headlines* report – an annual strategic planning report identifying the current debates in consumers' lives – we identified a growing need for differentiation through reciprocal relationships. In the future, we will see even more of this kinship economy, and value will be defined by the relevance health clubs provide and the connections they create and enable.

This is particularly true for the Millennials and Centennials. Experience, human interaction, flexibility and convenience (allowing for more productive time) are high on the agenda of your potential new recruits. More importantly still, to win with those aged under 30, gym owners must embrace, even encourage, a certain degree of promiscuity of membership.

FLEXIBLE, PERSONAL, ON-DEMAND

The second challenge is how true value will be defined by health club customers in the future of our 'uber-all economy' – a term coined by J Walker Smith, chair of The Futures Company.



To win with those aged under 30, clubs must embrace, even encourage, a degree of promiscuity of gym membership



Consumers' busy lifestyles lead to greater prioritisation of time and effort. They expect more relevant, timely and convenient solutions. Health clubs are no longer competing only with other health clubs. More flexible, personalised services are right up there: Jawbone, for example, is providing an in-app fitness coach that monitors and analyses personal data and then provides feedback and suggestions against a peer group benchmark.

With consumers' constant connectivity and access to data and information comes an ability and willingness to research – to review, monitor and judge. Within this

context, consumers will value three things in health clubs:

● **Value from personalised service:**

'One size fits all' membership does not work any more, and health clubs are no exception. How adaptable to consumer groups, needs and occasions is your offering? This goes beyond personal trainers. Technology challenges the current model, but also provides opportunities. How can the data from personal fitness trackers be used to enhance the current business model?

● **On-demand solutions:** Easy access to information and technology means consumers expect immediate responses ▶

Tribal events like Tough Mudder can engender great loyalty





Clubs are having to compete with the convenience of virtual fitness

- and immediate solutions, wherever they are and whenever they want. However, the current health club model is still built on physical sites and fixed assets – customers generally still have to go to the health club, rather than having the health club come to the customer.

New innovations such as virtual classes streamed into the home are beginning to break down these barriers (see p72, and also *HCM* June 15, p70). These virtual offerings provide on-demand fitness solutions in the convenience and privacy of people's own home, but with the benefit of social interaction with like-minded individuals. So how does your offering fit into consumers' increasingly fluid and flexible lifestyles?

- **Flexible pricing:** Uber, for example, uses surge pricing – prices rise when demand is higher. How are health clubs currently using the supply-demand model to make better use of idle assets and entice customers into the club during quieter, off-peak times? Can assets or staff be dispatched to the client, rather than asking them to come to the club?

WHAT'S YOUR MISSION?

In our ever-changing world, health clubs need to adapt to new consumer demands and needs. For the younger generations, experience, social connections and 'tribal wellness' are high on the agenda –

“
Uber uses surge pricing. How are health clubs using the supply-demand model to make better use of idle assets?
”

witness the rise of Tough Mudder, BMF, Color Runs and so on (see p38). Loyalty to a specific club is not.

Do you understand what Millennials and Centennials expect from a gym – what their drivers and motivations are?

Most health clubs lack differentiation, and consumers will find it increasingly difficult to be loyal to a club that offers nothing special. How can you better share your club's values to attract new users? What's the mission of your health club: to fight obesity? To be the enabler of social connections, to provide a community and a sense of belonging?

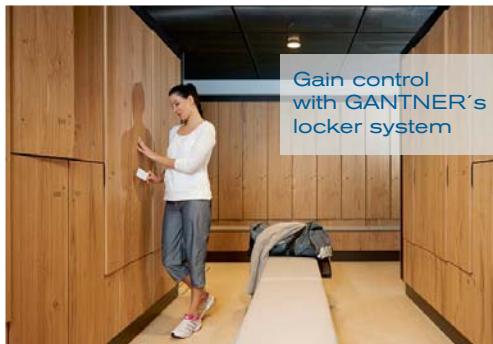
Think about how your club's values can transform the gym from a transactional environment into a place that offers value through reciprocity and connectedness.

In our on-demand economy, busy consumers are expecting increased productivity in everything they do and engage with. How can your club be better integrated into customers' lives? In what ways can your services be personalised to sub-groups, or even individuals – and how can digital technology enable this? The business models of tomorrow will have to be more flexible, adaptable and make better use of the supply-demand cycles, to make best use of idle assets while servicing customers any time, anywhere. ●

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Imke Schuller is a director at strategic consultancy *The Futures Company*. She's the health and beauty sector lead for the EMEA, helping clients to anticipate change in their operating environment and to find new ways of adapting to an ever-evolving business context.
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Up close & personal

**Bryan K O'Rourke takes an in-depth look at
beacon technology and its implications for health clubs**

Do you know precisely where your customers are now, and what might therefore be the most relevant products or services to communicate to them at this very moment in time? Chances are your answer to that will be 'no' – but that needn't be the case, thanks to the strongly emerging category of beacon technology.

Beacons are small, low-cost pieces of computer hardware that use battery-friendly, low-energy Bluetooth connections to transmit messages or prompts directly to smartphones or tablets. This technology has the potential to transform how retailers, event organisers, educational institutions and even health clubs communicate with their customers and create more personalised experiences – and that's because beacons precisely know, within inches, where a consumer is. It's this micro-location capability that sets beacons apart.

RAPID ADOPTION

Back in 2014, Fitness First announced its intention to use technology to help redefine its gym experience and bolster brand trust. The health club group was already actively engaged with Apple and Samsung over the potential use of beacon technology, and outlined a road map to address the gym industry's previous innovation inertia.

Fitness First and other leading club operators in the health club industry are now all evaluating the potential of beacons, and they are not alone. According to BI Intelligence projections

from *Business Insider*, by the end of 2015 about 32 per cent of retail locations owned by the top 100 retailers in the United States will have deployed beacon hardware and software. By the end of 2016, this percentage is expected to have jumped to 85 per cent of retail locations.

Earlier this year, US retailer Target announced the launch of 50 retail stores with beacon technology. UK retailer House of Fraser and grocer Waitrose have also, along with other brands, adopted beacons having recognised the need to mimic mobile and online behaviour in their physical retail stores.



**Technology can
create a new era
of personalisation,
enabling brands to
offer higher levels
of service and
more targeted
promotions**



So how does this work? When using an app, for example, prior search histories and other user information – along with beacon technologies that track the exact location of customers in a store – combine to provide targeted information and offers. It's an example of how technology can create a new era of personalisation, enabling brands to offer higher levels of service and more targeted promotions, along with greater intelligence about consumer behaviour.

HEALTH CLUB BEACONS

In the world of health clubs, beacon technology could provide deep consumer insights on how members use clubs. For example, knowing that certain members are going into a group exercise studio would enable tracking of how members actually use the club. If members are reading a group fitness schedule located outside a studio, an app could automatically ask if they'd like to see what the class looks like and share a video overview. If a user had previously purchased small group training, when they arrive at a club, a beacon could sense that and provide an offer to join a discounted small group class that morning.

The intelligence on actual member usage could in turn lead to improved club design, and even the redeployment of equipment to optimise its use.

In the case of advertising, where there's high foot traffic, non-members could have offers extended to join a club as they walked by. With advertisements that include signage, beacons could be



Shops can use beacons to send special offers to passers-by



Where there's **high foot traffic**, non-members could **have offers extended** to **join a club** as they walked by



embedded to offer more specific information when prospects are nearby.

An even bigger opportunity lies in the data that's gleaned, and the deep insights into customer behaviours that result, creating actionable opportunities. Imagine segmenting and targeting users based on locations they frequent – for instance, identifying that fitness addict by seeing her hit a beacon in her gym every day, and then providing her with a group fitness promotion in the evening when she's browsing her favourite news app.

Other uses of beacons are also possible. The devices could be used to keep track of staff working in your fitness facility, for example. Beacons could monitor how often and for how long staff engage with customers, to enhance service training and track sales conversion rates.

The technology could also send alerts to members of staff when a certain task needs to be carried out, for instance.

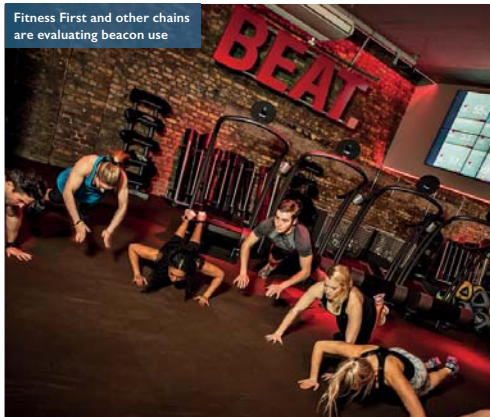
Using beacon technology, retailers are also able to track vendor activity and even monitor deliveries.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

But for the implementation of beacons to be a success, club operators need customers who want to use them; the main barrier to the potential success of beacon technology is that customers have to voluntarily download and install a smartphone app for it to work.

In addition, although there's scope for beacon apps that cover an entire street or mall, most brand apps are likely to be unique, meaning they will be in competition with others. While customers

Fitness First and other chains are evaluating beacon use



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TECHNOLOGY



Customers must choose to download beacon apps



Health club operators, along with retailers and others, will need to educate their customers about the benefits that beacon technology provides



► may be happy to download an app for a couple of brands, they might not want to download an app for every shop, gym and grocer they visit.

As with all new technologies, beacons face challenges. Health club operators, along with retailers and others, will need to educate customers about the benefits beacon technology provides and demonstrate the special benefits people would get from their use.

Some are concerned about specification wars between Apple, Google, Samsung and others as they each try to land grab this new space. Each of these tech players will develop its own specifications, so there will be iBeacons that work only with iOS products, and beacons just for Android devices. The concern is the lack of a central and open standard, resulting in a fragmented user experience – this due to the fact that businesses would need to purchase, install and manage beacons that support each platform, in addition to developing iOS and Android apps.

INTERNET OF THINGS

The technology is still very exciting, however, because it represents a first step towards the Internet of Things. Most thoughtful brands are striving for new ways to connect people with contextual data exactly when they want it. With Apple, Samsung and Google putting an emphasis on this technology, beacons will likely evolve and be a part of the proximity marketing landscape.

While the introduction of beacon technology poses various challenges, if health club brands offer a good experience to members, they will benefit from enhanced engagement and far better insights into in-club activities, as well as customer and staff behaviour.

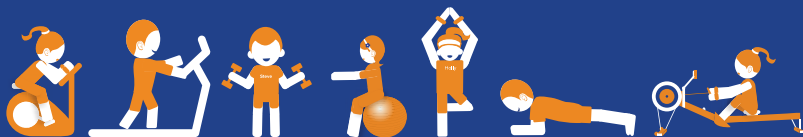
Although NFC and to some extent radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology have made similar promises in the past, the widespread adoption of smartphones and the fact that mobile devices are playing a larger role in the consumer experience means that beacon technology has a good chance to go mainstream in the next few years. ●

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bryan O'Rourke is an entrepreneur, consultant, executive and investor. He has presented as a keynote speaker at industry and corporate conferences on four continents. He is widely published and quoted in periodicals like *Inc. Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*. Bryan recently contributed to a newly released book with other European thought leaders titled *Essentials of motivation and behaviour change*. To learn more, visit bryanorourke.com

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Chrissie Wellington

The former triathlon and Ironman world champion, now part of the team at *parkrun*, talks to Kate Cracknell about breaking down barriers to participation, and about daring to find out what you're capable of achieving

How did your sporting career start?

It's a rather long-winded story, because I wasn't one of those kids who always wanted to be a professional sportsperson.

I was always driven and determined, but I channelled it into my academic studies. I enjoyed being healthy and active, and I was in some of the school sports teams, but I didn't perform to county standard or anything like that. I then went to university and my priority was getting first class honours. Sport was just something I did for the social aspect.

When I left uni I wanted to be a lawyer, so I signed a law contract and had nine months before I started to go travelling. In that time I did very little sport, and a lot of drinking, so when I came back to the UK I started running to lose weight.

I had no understanding of training or kit. I just went out and ran. I was studying international development by this stage – I'd decided this, rather than law, was actually what I wanted to do – and I simply enjoyed the relief that running gave me from my studies.

How did this progress to triathlons and Ironman events?

I decided to do the 2002 London Marathon and trained quite hard for it, but again not in a knowledgeable way. I was surprised to do it in three hours and eight minutes, and surprised by how much I enjoyed it. So I joined a running group at Battersea track with the legendary Frank Horwill. I definitely wasn't a high flyer in his squad though – he had much better people than me.

I was aiming to do the 2003 Ironman in under three hours, but I was hit by a car a few weeks before and couldn't take part. So I started swimming again, which is when someone suggested I do a triathlon.

I did a few as a novice, using borrowed kit, and I did OK – I came third or fourth

in a couple of Olympic distances – but I didn't set the world on fire.

By then I was working in my dream job, as a government policy advisor on international development, and I wanted to get some experience working overseas. I took a sabbatical and went to live and work in Nepal. That's where I gained my strength – both physical and psychological – in endurance activities. I wasn't very good technically, but I started mountain biking and I could keep going all day at high altitude.



Where the **marathon** was once the **pinnacle**, now you have to do an **Ironman or ultra-marathon** to set yourself apart



On my return to the UK, however, my first triathlon was a disaster – my wetsuit didn't fit, so I sank and had to be rescued. The second one went better and I qualified for the Amateur World Championship, so I got a coach and trained really hard on top of my full-time government job.

Much to my surprise I won the event, and based on that – at the age of 30, in February 2007 – I made the difficult decision to become a professional athlete.



Overseas travel is still a passion for Wellington and her husband

But really my whole journey into triathlon was accidental: a case of tapping into a talent I never knew I had, and I guess being brave enough to throw myself into it without knowing if I'd be any good. We're all so scared of failure, aren't we, that it can be debilitating.

I worked incredibly hard; I had discipline, self-motivation, a willingness to hurt, an ability to bounce back from adversity; and I had physical talent.

But nevertheless every step along the way was a revelation to me. I honestly never expected to become four-time Ironman world champion or to break numerous world records.

Extreme events like Ironman are increasingly popular among the public. Why do you think this is?

I think people are slowly realising that the sense of achievement that comes from having a family, for example, or succeeding at work will only take them so far. They're looking for new goals.

And it's human nature to want bigger and better. Where the marathon was once the pinnacle, now so many people have done it that you have to do an



Chrissie Wellington is a four-time Ironman world champion

PHOTOS: LARRY MAUBER

Ironman or an ultra-marathon to set yourself apart from the crowd.

The crucial point is that it feels more attainable now, because more 'normal' people are doing it. When you see someone like me complete an Ironman, yes, it might be an inspiration – but what really inspires you is the person next door who might be a bit overweight, might not have been able to run very far, who goes on to do it. It's that sense of 'if they can do it, I can too'.

What about the other end of the scale – the people who don't exercise at all. What do you believe are the barriers for people?

Different barriers affect different people. For some people it will be practical barriers – time, childcare, opportunities, access to transport. Then there are financial barriers, particularly for sports like triathlon. There are psychological barriers too: body image, fear of judgement. And there are barriers that affect whole groups: disabled people, for example, and women – the lack of female coaches or women higher up in our governance structures is an impediment to inspiring more people to get involved.

Also our media, while it can be a great catalyst, it can also be a barrier.

The media can portray certain images, convey certain messages, that aren't always facilitating the involvement of people in physical activity.

And finally government can be an amazing catalyst, but some of the policies it implements are an incredible barrier to participation. Look at what Michael Gove did with his education policy and sport in schools. Tore it apart. It's going to take decades to recover.

But we all have the ability to bring about change: you can change people on a one-to-one level by inspiring them to do something they might not otherwise have thought to do. I try to do as much as I can at many different levels, whether it's on a personal or governmental level, or through my work with parkrun.

Tell us about parkrun

parkrun operates weekly 5km runs – or 2km for kids – which take place in local parks, and it's free to participate. The philosophy is 'weekly, free, 5km, for everyone, forever'.

That's what's so great about it: it breaks down all the barriers to participation. It's free, so the financial barrier is broken. The runs take place in your local area, so they're accessible. They're regular; so it becomes habitual – that's very



Wellington became a professional athlete in 2007, at the age of 30

important – although you don't have to turn up every week. It isn't intimidating because it isn't a race. You don't need any specialist equipment – you don't even need running shoes. It's as much a social occasion as it is a physical activity event, so people look forward to coming and seeing their friends. And there's also the opportunity to volunteer for those who can't run, which in turn brings its own kind of health benefits.



parkrun has over a million runners and is looking for new UK venues

PHOTO: DAVID DOUGHERTY

- ▶ It's a small organisation that's achieved a lot on not very much in terms of human and financial resources. With 1.1 million registered participants, we deliver the majority of runs in the UK every week – yet other organisations currently get a lot more funding. That's something we're hoping will change.

Who are your 1.1 million participants?

It's a diverse mix. When people register, we ask how much activity they do every week. Around 20 per cent of our female participants, and 18 per cent of male participants, are inactive or relatively inactive when they register – doing zero to one form of exercise a week.

That percentage is going up too – we're increasingly successful at getting inactive people involved. My job is to look at the data and work out how we can do even better, getting groups such as disabled people, BME communities, young people – especially from deprived backgrounds – and women involved. Women represent 51 per cent of our registrants, but only 40–42 per cent of our participants, so we need to help them translate intention into action. We've done some research that's being analysed at the moment, to understand why they've registered and then not come, and we'll design interventions accordingly.

We can do more with our marketing too – using appropriate imagery and



parkrun breaks down all the barriers.

You don't need any specialist equipment – you don't even need running shoes



subtitles for videos to make them disability-friendly, for example. We're also trying to train guide runners, so we can welcome visually impaired runners.

Finally, working with local leaders is crucial – finding the people who are best able to influence their communities, whether that's individuals, charities or NGOs – rather than us trying to beat out about parkrun from our white middle class ivory tower.

What are parkrun's growth plans?

We believe there can easily be around 1,000 venues in the United Kingdom

alone. Junior parkrun in particular is growing at a rate of knots.

It's a demand-led model – the community has to want a parkrun – but it isn't expensive to set up. Each community has to contribute £3,000 – a sum that never comes from individuals but from local authorities, health authorities, trusts and grants and private sector donors – and we contribute another £3,000. And that's all that's needed for the lifetime of an event. We provide all the equipment, technology, support and training. You just need a team of volunteers, a suitable running course and permission from the relevant landowner.

What's your view on the importance of physical activity?

Sport – and physical activity in general – is so powerful. It brings communities together, it builds bridges, informs, educates and empowers.

I never thought we'd see successful triathlons in the Middle East, but now we are – and women are taking part alongside men. And in Rwanda, I saw three million people – in a country of nine million – come out to support the Tour of Rwanda. Team Rwanda brought together Hutus and Tutsis, people from both sides of the genocide.

It's such a powerful force for good in the world and I think it should be protected and promoted. ●



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CONFESSIONS OF A HOLLYWOOD STUNTMAN

Miha bodytec is a game-changer. With its innovative EMS technology (Electro Muscle Stimulation), the method is one of the best-kept celebrity success secrets in achieving a body that is tight and firm and ultimately flawless. Many high-performance athletes have also used the technology to supplement their usual training and to rapidly increase their strength and endurance. Far ahead of his time, Bruce Lee had toyed with EMS in increasing his muscle development, while Usain Bolt has been relying on the miha bodytec technique for a number of years.

The miha bodytec device triggers muscle growth via electronic impulses sent to the body which ensure in a unique way that 90% of muscle fibres are activated all at once, offering a full-body workout with contractions of roughly 85 per second. But its main appeal to many is its complete convenience.

Now even those less dedicated to exercise are able to make the time, without having to sacrifice other aspects of their life they might miss. In one 20



Hanton is an in-demand
Hollywood stuntman

minute session, your body can burn up to an average of 500 calories and this does not even account for the calorific burn that continues three days onward from training during rest. Plus if using weekly, one's muscle mass and metabolism rate will see a significant boost, burning excess fat all the more. With a technique that is fast and furious, the days of being a gym rat are no longer necessary.

'GREAT DISCOVERY'

At just 23 years old, Bobby Holland Hanton found his first break as the double for James Bond in 2008's *Quantum of Solace*. Since his film debut, he has played doppelgänger for the likes of Batman, Captain America and Thor to become one of the most in-demand stuntmen in Hollywood. Hanton is able to offer world-class skill and supreme fitness to every role and using miha bodytec has only helped enhance this incredible athletic ability.

"It is great for maintaining the body I need to film when I haven't the time to get to my normal gym". Hanton discovered



The nature of his job means that Hanton needs to keep in top shape at all times

the EMS trend through friends and then went home to read up about it online. As a self-confessed thrill seeker, he grew intrigued by the revolutionary method and since his first trial he hasn't looked back: "It was a great little discovery" he says.

Having to contend with a busy schedule, it had been difficult to find a formula that works completely. "Staying fit is my job but balancing it with my lifestyle sometimes seems virtually impossible. Between plane hopping and being on set, it can be difficult to maintain a strict workout routine, not only in finding the time but just with how physically demanding it can be."

What's more, he is often required to morph his appearance into leading men and has to constantly change his physique, sometimes with limited time between roles. Miha bodytec allows one to tailor their workouts for personal goals so is effective in tackling specific muscle groups, also catering to body shaping, weight loss, muscle strengthening and many more. With the device, almost anything is possible, all with just one workout per week. "Miha bodytec provides me with an easy solution to maintain my physique all year round. Twenty minutes in the suit is the equivalent of a good three or four full sessions in the gym, so it can be the boost I need to stay on form".

Acting out dangerous stunts comes with a degree of risk and during the rehearsals for the film *Green Lantern*,



People of all shapes and sizes can benefit from the miha system

things almost went horribly wrong. Hanton had to perform a move where he landed and slid across a concrete floor, but upon repeating it several times he injured his back. He slipped two discs and his leg was near paralysed for a month, and he sustained serious sciatic nerve damage. "It took over a year to get back to full fitness," he says.

NEW STUDIO

As someone whose pay cheque hinges on them being at peak health at all times, this came as a real drawback. Miha bodytec would be wholly proficient as a method of rehabilitation to aid with

recovery post-injury or surgery, applying zero pressure to joints or tendons. In fact, the device can be used specifically to alleviate back pain as it enhances your muscular balance gently and progressively and restores the area to better health.

As such a fan of the fitness method, Hanton has opened up his own gym, The Body Shape Studios in Surbiton, exclusively for EMS training. He is keen to spread the word on miha bodytec and to encourage others into getting fit – particularly those who would usually be opposed to the idea. In a 2014 study conducted by Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), it was revealed that 67% of men and 57% of women in the UK are either overweight or obese.

The main ambition with miha bodytec is to make a positive change and provide people with the confidence to fulfil a happy and active lifestyle. By introducing an easy and efficient method of exercise that is available for all, they are one big step closer to doing so.

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GOOD FAT

Could brown fat offer a lifeline in battling obesity – and if so, how do we activate it in our bodies?

Kate Cracknell offers a summary of the latest research

White or brown, bad or good? We're not talking about the nutritional value of sliced bread here – we're talking fat, with a raft of research emerging over the last few years that challenges all our preconceptions.

Up until just a few years ago, it was thought that adults only ever had 'bad' fat – the normal white fat that stores calories, meaning you'll put on weight if you have too much of it.

However, over the last few years we've begun to understand that some people have a different kind of fat in their bodies – a fat that might actually help them lose weight by burning calories rather than storing them.

Step forward brown fat. Until recently this was thought to be present only in children, but in 2009 it was discovered that, although it dwindles with age, brown fat is still active in up to 7.5 per cent of adults. While white fat primarily stores energy as triglycerides, brown fat dissipates chemical energy as heat;



Some people have a different kind of fat in their bodies, helping them burn calories rather than storing them



the more brown fat you have, the more weight you can lose, the faster your metabolism will be and the better your insulin sensitivity, leading to lower risk of type 2 diabetes.

Even better, it's been shown that energy-storing white fat has the capacity to transform into energy-burning brown-like fat – cue rising numbers of research studies as scientists strive to find more ways to turn white fat into brown fat.

But it may not prove to be a magic bullet to treat obesity, warns Jan Nedergaard, a physiologist at Stockholm University in Sweden. He believes stimulating brown fat is more likely to help keep healthy people from becoming fat, rather than making obese people skinny: "Everybody would like to take a fat person and make him slim, but that demands a high-burning capacity that brown fat probably doesn't have."

Nevertheless, with the mindset that prevention is in any case better than cure, we take a look at some of the studies that are starting to shed light on this fascinating topic.



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Exercise can cause
white fat cells to turn
beige and burn calories

BEIGE IS THE NEW BROWN

It's not quite brown fat, but in July 2012, a Harvard Medical School study published in the journal *Cell* reported the discovery of beige fat – another type of fat that's present in "most or all human beings", which has the ability to both store and burn calories.

The scientists discovered that beige fat is similar to brown fat in some ways. Both contain iron, which gives them their distinctive colour, and both have an

abundance of mitochondria – a part of the cell that is able to produce heat and burn calories.

However, there were also some significant differences. Brown fat cells give off high levels of UCPI – a protein that mitochondria need to produce heat and burn calories. In comparison, beige fat cells usually express low levels of UCPI.

But this is where physical activity comes in, because it was also discovered that beige fat could be stimulated to

produce a lot of UCPI when exposed to irisin – a hormone released by muscles during exercise or when muscles shiver due to exposure to cold temperatures.

It was also found that the cells differ from each other genetically. Brown fat cells originate from muscle stem cells. In comparison, beige fat cells emerge from white fat cells – making it possible for them to store fat when levels of UCPI are low, but burn it when muscles release irisin through exercise.



HOT & COLD

Exposure to cold and consumption of chemicals found in chillies seem to increase the number and activity of brown fat cells, according to a 2013 Japanese study published in the *Journal of Clinical Investigation*. Subjects who were exposed to cold also had fewer white fat cells at the end of the study.

Researchers exposed eight people with little or no brown fat cells to moderately low temperatures (17 degrees Celsius) for two hours each day over the course of six weeks. Compared with the control subjects who went about their normal lives, the cold-exposed people had about 5 per cent less body fat at the end of the study, and they also burned more energy when exposed to cold.

The researchers also looked at people who ate capsinoids, normally found in chili peppers, for six weeks. They burned more energy than the control group when exposed to cold, but didn't lose any more white fat than the control group.

However, a previous 12-week study found this longer period of capsinoid ingestion led to significant body fat decreases in mildly obese people. Capsinoids appear to induce brown fat in the same way as the cold, by 'capturing' the same cellular system that the body's nervous system uses to increase heat production, according to lead researcher Takeshi Yoneshiro.

HOW THE BRAIN IS ABLE TO 'BROWN' FAT

A 2014 Yale School of Medicine study, published in the journal *Cell*, uncovered a molecular process in the brain known to control eating that transforms white fat into brown fat. Researchers demonstrated that neurons controlling hunger and appetite in the brain control the 'browning' of white fat.

Working on mice, the team stimulated this browning process from the brain and found it protected the animals from becoming obese on a high-fat diet. The team then studied the molecular changes in hunger-promoting neurons in the hypothalamus and found the attachment of a unique sugar – called O-GlcNAc – to potassium ion channels acts as a switch to control brain activity to burn fat.

"Our studies reveal white fat 'browning' as a highly dynamic physiological process that the brain controls," said lead author Xiaoyong Yang. "We observed that food deprivation dominates over cold exposure in neural control of white fat browning. This regulatory system may be evolutionarily important, as it can reduce heat production to maintain energy balance when we're hungry. Modulating this brain-to-fat connection represents a potential novel strategy to combat obesity and associated illnesses."



Stimulating the fat browning process from brain could help prevent obesity – even among those on a high-fat diet

BROWN FAT 'TALKS BACK' TO THE BRAIN

Brown fat tissue serves as an organ that communicates with the brain through sensory nerves, to inform how much fat we have and how much we've lost while the brown fat is generating heat, according to a 2015 Georgia State University study recently published in *The Journal of Neuroscience*.

Researchers found that brown fat tissue 'talks back' to the brain by activating sensory nerves – nerves that increased their activity in response to chemical activation and heat generation.

"Brown fat is an active organ that's relatively important for metabolism – and we've found a new pathway of its communication," says the study author Johnny Garretson.

"As brown fat gets hotter and starts to generate heat – doing good things for our body – it increases our metabolism and helps us burn white fat. As it's getting hotter, the lab found that it tells the brain it's getting hotter. We think this is some type of feedback, like a thermostat, and as it gets hotter it probably controls how the brain is talking back to it."

This signals the existence of a feedback loop between brown fat tissue and the brain via the nervous system, which could become a tool in the fight against obesity.

A POSSIBLE NEW DRUG

An experimental drug has been found to speed up metabolism and burn off fat cells, according to a 2015 study conducted on hundreds of mice by the Houston Methodist Research Institute.

Dubbed 'GC-I', the drug works by activating the receptors for the thyroid hormone, which play a role in regulating the metabolism – the body's conversion of food into energy.

"CG-I dramatically increases the metabolic rate, essentially converting white fat into a fat like calorie-burning brown fat," says the study's author Kevin Phillips PhD.

In the study, both genetically obese mice and those with diet-induced

obesity received GC-I treatment daily. The genetically obese mice lost weight and more than 50 per cent of their fat mass in approximately two

weeks. They also showed anti-diabetic markers, such as a six-fold improvement in insulin sensitivity – how well the body clears glucose from the bloodstream. Mice with diet-induced obesity experienced similar improvements.

"Our data demonstrate that GC-I is a novel fat-browning agent that may have a use in the treatment of obesity and metabolic disease," adds Phillips. The drug has not yet undergone testing for weight loss in humans, but is being tested in clinical trials for lowering cholesterol under the name sobetirome, albeit in much smaller doses than would be



The drug is as yet untested for human weight loss

BERRY GOOD

In 2015, scientists at Washington State University found that berries, grapes and other fruits can convert excess white fat into calorie-burning 'beige' fat.

In the study, recently published in the *International Journal of Obesity*, mice were fed a high-fat diet, but those that also consumed resveratrol – the antioxidant found in fruits – gained about 40 per cent less weight. Based on the resveratrol intake the mice needed, it's calculated that humans would need just 12 ounces of fruit a day to see the effect – especially blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, grapes and apples.

"Polyphenols in fruit, including resveratrol, increase gene expression that enhances the oxidation of dietary fats so the body won't be overloaded," says professor of animal sciences Min Du. "They convert white fat into beige fat which burns lipids off as heat – helping to keep the body in balance and prevent obesity and metabolic dysfunction."

The polyphenols in fruit, including resveratrol, serve to enhance the oxidation of dietary fats



▶ JUST CHILL

In 2015, researchers at the University of California found that exposure to cold temperatures increases levels of a newly discovered protein that's critical for the formation of brown fat.

With extended exposure to chilly air, the protein – called transcription factor Zfp516 – also helps the more abundant white fat in our bodies become more similar to brown fat in its ability to burn energy.

In the study – which was published in the journal *Molecular Cell* – mice with boosted levels of the Zfp516 protein gained 30 per cent less weight than control mice when both groups were fed a high-fat diet.

"If you can somehow increase levels of this protein through drugs, you could have more brown fat, and could possibly lose more weight even if eating the same amount of food," says principal investigator Hei Sook Sul.

The researchers discovered that the Zfp516 protein activates uncoupling protein 1 (UCPI), found only in the mitochondria of brown fat and involved in the generation of heat.

"The amount of UCPI produced by brown-like fat cells will be lower than that of classical brown fat, but since 90 per cent of the fat in our bodies consists of white fat, finding a way to make that tissue more brown-like could have a significant impact," adds Sul.

When the researchers disabled the gene for Zfp516 in mouse embryos, the embryos did not develop any brown fat. In another experiment, researchers found that the mice with higher levels of Zfp516 protein were able to convert more white fat tissue into brown-like fat when they were exposed to cold air.

Cold exposure boosts the protein Zfp516, which can make white fat act like brown fat

STRESS YOURSELF SLIM

Published in *Cell Metabolism* in August 2015, a new study has shown that energy-storing white fat can be turned into energy-burning brown-like fat – but only when the body is exposed to severe and prolonged adrenaline-releasing stress, such as burn trauma.

Adrenaline turns on UCPI, the protein expressed by brown fat cells that makes mitochondria burn calories without making any chemical energy – just heat.

The researchers at the University of Texas Medical Branch enrolled 72 patients that had sustained severe burns over approximately 50 per cent of their bodies; 19 healthy people served as a comparison group.

Samples of white fat were taken from the burned patients at different time points following the injury. The metabolism of the fat samples, the make-up of the fat cells and the patients' resting metabolic rates were measured.

In patients, there was a gradual shift in molecular and functional characteristics of white fat to a more brown fat phenotype over time, suggesting progressive browning of white fat in response to a burn injury. "Our study provides proof that browning of white fat is possible in humans. The next step is to identify the mechanisms underpinning this effect and then to develop drugs that mimic the burn-induced effect," says lead author Labros Sidossis. ●

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HOME DELIVERY

Streaming exercise classes into the home shouldn't be seen as a threat to health clubs and leisure centres, say the experts. In fact, it could be the way to engage more people with exercise. So will it become a widespread trend? **Kath Hudson** reports



DEAN HODGKIN

Consultant to The énergie Group
and Ragdale Hall

The struggle our industry has gone through to only marginally nudge up the penetration rate suggests there remains a significant population subset who just don't feel they belong in a health club. If you combine them with the legions of people who, for genuine work and family reasons, find it very difficult to attend our facilities, then there's a huge group of people to whom online classes might appeal, provided the marketing message is right.

It needs a considered approach. As with activity tracking devices, there's potential for this technology to provide an exit route from the gym. However, if suitably embraced, it could also be the



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

ideal path to strengthen relationships with members – and could finally help us dent the perennial retention problem by extending member contact beyond the four walls of the club.

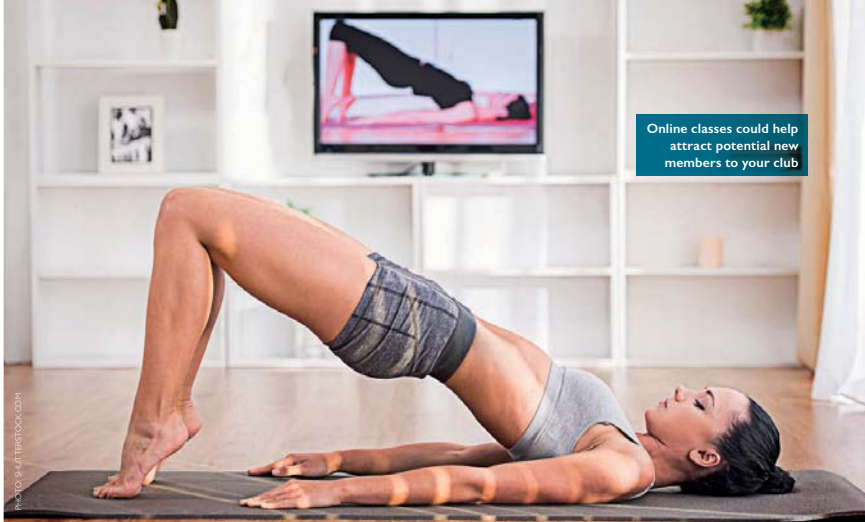
If targeted towards non-members, the service has the potential to be a powerful prospecting tool, offering a try-before-you-buy option on the user's terms. Once familiar with the club's philosophy, comfortable with their own ability and satisfied they can commit to regular exercise, there should be a resultant steady stream of newbies to our health and fitness facilities.

Online classes could be sold as a pay-as-you-go service, thereby creating a

whole new revenue generator for the club. A further benefit to this is that your club can be open for business on a 24-hour basis.

Research has shown that most people prefer to exercise in a group environment rather than alone: the great attraction of exercise classes lies in the primal urges that drive us to seek a sense of belonging, inclusion, community and social status.

If this is communicated to the individual through an online class service, I foresee many fitness journeys that may begin solo but that will then progress to us welcoming a new member through our doors.



Online classes could help attract potential new members to your club

MALCOLM BLACK

Les Mills Media: CEO and chair

We believe in making the planet fitter by helping people fall in love with fitness, so they want to work out. Providing an option to work out and join an exercise class at home fits into this; there's definitely demand for this service.

The Les Mills Global Consumer Fitness Survey (2013), conducted by Nielsen, shows that home exercise complements gym-based workouts, with 82 per cent of gym members or casual gym users also choosing to exercise at home.

Many streaming services are positioned as a club alternative, but Les



Mills On Demand – which launched in June – is positioned as a club supplement. It gives our club partners another way to engage with members, and offers exercisers more flexibility and value.

Providing at-home digital exercise can also demonstrate a more complete offering from clubs, to attract new members and to help retain existing ones.

Online classes can act as a lead generator too: our strategy is to introduce more new people to Les Mills workouts, then direct them towards live classes in clubs via our club locator function. Judging by anecdotal evidence taken from social media, this approach seems to be working.



PAUL BOWMAN

CEO: Wexer Virtual

The modern fitness member expects and demands flexibility, as well as solutions crafted and available at their fingertips anytime and anywhere.

Virtual fitness makes it possible to meet these demands, not only by making group fitness available within the club 24/7, but also by making it possible to reach members outside the gym.

Streaming exercise classes is a great example of this new consumer-centric way of delivery. By adding virtual fitness classes to their own apps, clubs can offer access to group

fitness on members' own consoles (TV, smartphones and tablets). Online streaming is a particularly good way of engaging the millennials, and having a brand presence on phones is particularly key to staying relevant.

High-end clubs generally absorb the cost in order to add value to memberships, whereas budget chains are using it as ancillary revenue. More could be made of this revenue stream if advertising were sold; it offers good potential to boost the bottom line.

Clubs are naive if they think they're not being affected by online gym memberships. If you're not a digital business, you're a dying business.



Grant hopes mypureyoga will encourage new people to attend live classes

► COLIN GRANT

The Pure Group: CEO

As more people are spending more time online and wearables are becoming more popular, health and fitness clubs need to stay relevant.

Mobile technology is going to play an increasingly important part in people's lives – consumers are now spending more time using mobile than they do desktop – so we've created online yoga class portal mypureyoga.

Providing an online streaming service has advantages for both potential and existing members. Existing members can keep up their yoga practice while they travel, which means we retain our relationship with them while they're away. We also allow non-members to



access mypureyoga, as it allows us to engage with consumers who may feel too intimidated to enter a yoga studio's class environment. Hopefully it will act as a stepping stone towards them coming in to the club.

It also gives us the opportunity to engage with consumers before we enter a new overseas market.

It's very early days to say what the impact will be – I don't have a crystal ball to predict it – but it's something we can't ignore. We're setting ourselves up so that, if online streaming does take off, we're there. We believe the growth potential is huge, probably exponential, and we want to make sure we're positioned and ready to capitalise on the trend.

STEFAN TILK

Fitness First Germany: MD

The online gym market – specifically paid content for TV and video – is growing very fast, at more than 70 per cent a year. It attracts a new and different consumer segment: people who are unable to visit a real gym for some reason, or who simply don't want to; consumers who live outside of conurbation areas; and those who want to combine online and offline fitness.

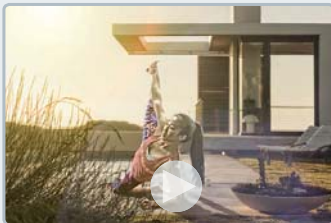
This is why Fitness First Germany acquired online gym NewMoove in October 2014. We believe in creating as many opportunities as possible to engage with the consumer. But we

realise, these days, this might need to be done digitally: people are searching for information online first. They also expect tailored services based on their personal data. For both, our industry needs answers: perfect information on websites; digital services like apps and trackers; and integrated solutions of machine, group, outdoor and online training so all data is captured.

Companies who meet these demands will grow faster than their competitors, and in the long term we will see market aggregation in the fitness sector. Investment in digital is expensive, so bigger chains will likely dominate, but smaller chains and clubs can gain access to digital through specialised providers.



COMING TO A SCREEN NEAR YOU...



Launched at the end of June 2015 in the US, UK, Finland and Sweden, Les Mills On Demand features 30-minute workouts of some of Les Mills' most popular exercise classes, including BodyPump, BodyCombat and Sh'Bam. The service integrates with computers, tablets and smartphones, and the retail price direct to consumers is £9.95 a month. Clubs will be able to offer members this service at a reduced price, and will also be able to share in the revenue generated from those members.

Virtual class provider Wexer started life in 2008 as an online gym brand, and this year's new launch takes the brand back to its roots. The new Wexer Streaming solution offers more than 700 videos covering a wide range of exercise classes. Around 600 videos are in English, with the others in languages including Spanish, Finnish, Danish, Swedish and French. Wexer Streaming integrates into any existing health club application: a Wexer plug-in provides the content while the clubs provide the front-end branding. The service allows clubs to offer online memberships where members can stream classes on their iPhones, Androids and/or smart TVs.

Asia's first multi-lingual online yoga channel, mypureyoga, launches in Q4 2015, offering a wide range of complimentary high-quality yoga videos: classes and tutorials from Pure Yoga's best and most experienced teachers. Users choose the yoga style, level, duration and language. Users register, for free, on mypureyoga.com; a more extensive offering of premium content based on a monthly subscription and exclusive online workshops will soon be launched. Going forward, the service will evolve with new content and additional languages.



Launched in 2011, NewMoove is a leading online fitness and healthy living portal in German-speaking countries, and the most downloaded Smart TV sports app in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. It offers more than 400 HD fitness videos in 12 categories – including yoga, pilates and functional training – as well as a huge range of personalised services such as personal coaches, individual training plans and nutrition programmes.



Crunch Live – crunchlive.com – is the online class offering from US-based Crunch Gyms. Launched in October 2013 for US\$9.99 a month, users get access to 75+ online workouts inspired by Crunch's most popular classes, including yoga, pilates, kick butt cardio, hip-hop, strength training and more. New workouts are added monthly, with 15-minute 'quickies' also available if consumers are short of time or have specific areas that need a bit more attention. Videos can be accessed from your phone, iPad, laptop, desktop or smart TV.





Spin class popularity increases the need for differentiation and added value

How to break away from the pack

There's little doubt indoor cycling studios have become a valuable spoke in the fitness sector's wheel. Look in any leading club during the morning, lunchtime or evening peak periods, and you'll see instructor-led spin classes have filled studios to the seat posts. Members love these classes and clubs are enjoying increased loyalty and incremental revenue too.

Indoor spin studios are now a must-have facility. From budget clubs to bespoke, single-purpose boutiques, if your club doesn't have a spinning studio, it seems you're missing out. Just ask Equinox in the US, who are to imminently float Soul Cycle, taking advantage of the slipstream from the wider sector.

But as soon as the instructor-led classes finish, all those shiny spin bikes and that dedicated space sits idle, dark, and all rather uninviting. The question gym owners and managers have started to ask is: "How do we get lycra on seats outside instructor classes? And inexpensively too?"

A second issue is that with almost ubiquitous availability of indoor cycling studios, progressive clubs are looking for ways to differentiate and value-add, to stay ahead of the pack.

Running Unlimited, who brought us business class running with the innovative



Experience some of the world's most beautiful rides while you work out

Zone dome, has been working hard to solve this dilemma. "We've been speaking to club owners and managers across the country, working with them to distil a solution for their empty studios," says Ryan Crabbe, product development lead at Running Unlimited. "They all wanted the same thing: an authentic, film-based cycling experience, that's fully automated and based on tried and tested technology... so we created WorldRide."

WorldRide is a beautifully filmed virtual cycling solution. Imagine a wall-sized screen playing a stunning HD film of a peloton ride along Pacific Coast Highway in California, or a breathtaking ascent from rainforest to a snow-capped peak on New


Zealand's Mt Ruapehu. The immersive experience is remarkable.

Programmed to your studio's schedule, the WorldRide system delivers tailored workouts matched to each film with virtual coach audio (no one likes those talking heads), with curated music to match. Cadence, resistance or zone, and other cues appear on screen to prompt riders. WorldRide is fully automated – turning itself and the projector (or TV) on/off, and even lowering/raising an electric screen where they're installed. All for less than £2000. "We're all about creating film-based experiences, making use of technology for the benefit of the health and wellness space," adds Crabbe.



CLICK TO PLAY THE WORLDRIDE SHOWREEL

PHOTO © SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / ARLEN



Two fitness professionals
will be flown to Australia
to train with the likes of
Olympian Jack Bobridge



WIN a trip to AUSTRALIA!

to train with a top pro cycling team

WORLDRIDE DELIVERS TOTAL IMMERSION

Get ready to pack your bags. We're flying two fitness professionals to Australia for one week, to train with the Pacific's top professional cycling team!

If you're among the first 10 WorldRide orders received, you'll have a 1 in 5 chance of being on that plane heading for the Australian summer.

It won't be feet up on the beach though, as you'll be embedded alongside world record holders and Olympians like Jack Bobridge - with their sights firmly set on gold at Rio. We've even arranged for you to ride in the team car during a professional race to experience the excitement and high drama in extreme close up. Don't miss this once in a lifetime total immersion experience. Call WorldRide to discuss your gym today.

WorldRide makes your gym a destination

Imagine the world's best rides in HD film playing on an entire wall in front of your spinning studio. It transforms your gym and gives your riders a brilliantly engaging experience. WorldRide offers a selection of invigorating rides through some of the world's most iconic cycling scenery.

The first 10 orders will
also win a new season
Rapha cross training top.

Independent or guided rides

WorldRide is fully automated and easy to use, offering a virtual audio coach on every ride, driving up usage of your studios at any time. Your instructors can lead classes, lifting your spin classes to a whole new level. To ensure it's great every time, we provide fact sheets, workouts, and music for every ride.

An authentic peloton experience

WorldRide is the only gym solution that lets you feel what it's like as rider in the

midst of the cut and thrust of the peloton. Experience the energy, dynamism and action that pushes everyone to dig that little bit deeper.

Endlessly fresh films

We changed the game by putting HD cameras in the midst of the pack, and we continue to break new ground with our forthcoming mountain bike series. Our ever expanding road series now also includes some of Europe's most epic ascents, and there's more on the way.

Transform your gym for £2000

Get the world's best rides filmed in HD, choreographed to music with bespoke virtual coaching for every ride and a three-year warranty, all for under £2000.

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ALL THE RAGE

Stephen Tharrett and Mark Williamson of brand insights firm *ClubIntel* share the findings of the 2015 International Fitness Industry Trend Report

Over the past decade, several fitness industry-serving organisations have put out studies that proclaim to have identified the fitness trends to keep an eye on.

Unfortunately, predicting trends takes more than asking people's opinion – it requires digging down and understanding the behaviours of an industry. The American Council on Exercise (ACE), the International Health, Racquet and Sportclub Association (IHRSA) and ClubIntel therefore decided a 'true trend'

report was needed – one that measured behavioural practices, looking at what the industry was actually adopting and how adoption rates were changing over time.

Our collective goal was to identify what was 'all the rage' – in other words, what it is that currently occupies the pinnacle of popularity in our sector.

This article provides a brief glimpse into the work and the resulting outcomes which appear in both the executive summary and full report entitled *2015 International Fitness Industry Trend Report – What's All the Rage*.

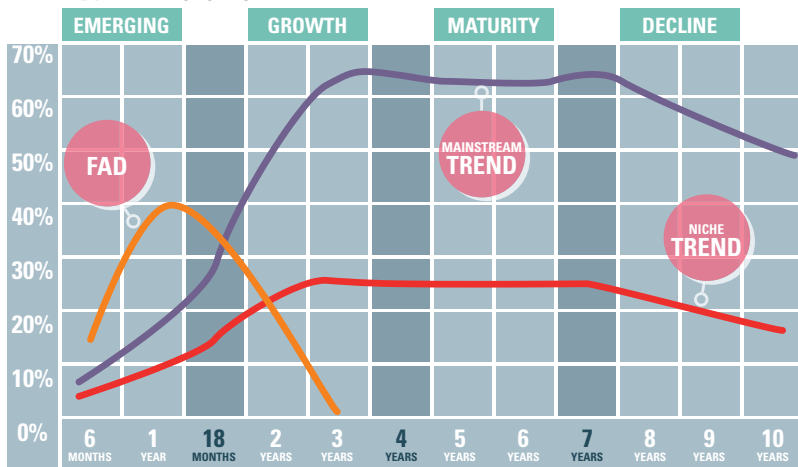
FAD VERSUS TREND

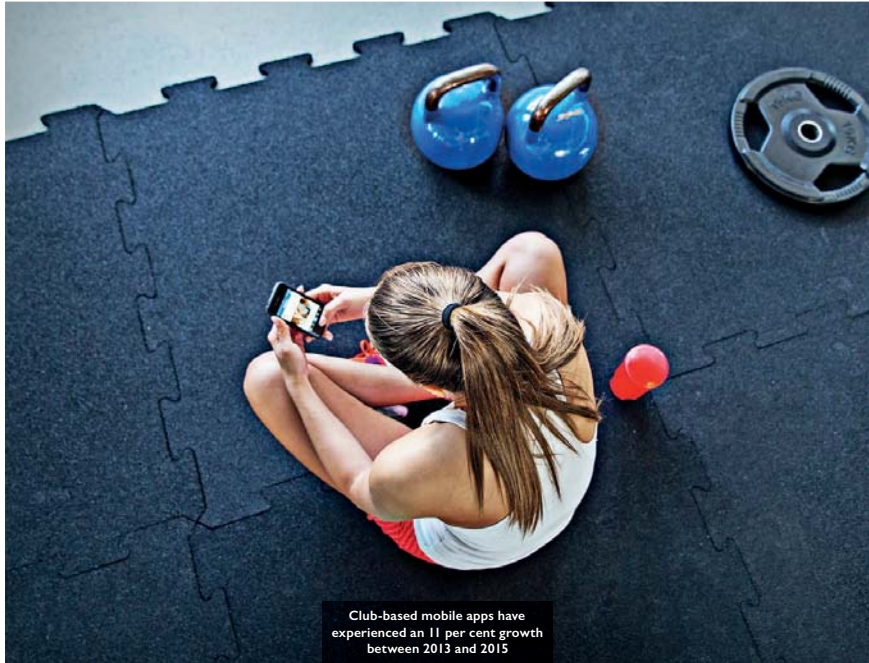
It's important to understand the difference between fads and trends.

Fads are short-term phenomena that arise quickly, take the world by storm and just as quickly fade into obscurity. They span every aspect of human culture. In business they have been known to create mercurial success and mercurial failure. In social spheres, fads have created short-term changes in social consciousness that were just as quickly forgotten.

Fads are a virus that can quickly take over business thinking, sometimes

FIGURE 1 LIFECYCLE OF A TREND





Club-based mobile apps have experienced an 11 per cent growth between 2013 and 2015

generating short-term profit but more often than not causing permanent harm.

Conway Twitty, a singer from the 50s and 60s, said about fads: "Fads are the kiss of death. When the fad goes away, so do you." It's vital to see fads for what they are and not incorporate them as a central point of your business strategy.

Meanwhile, trends are events that evolve into movements. They have the ability to gain momentum and create long-term societal and business impact. Trends have vitality, often ingraining themselves within the cultural roots of society, whether it's a social or a business trend. The power of a trend can manifest itself in the attitudes, values and behaviours of its audience.

Bill Clinton, former US president, said: "Follow the trend lines, not the headlines."

Consequently it's trends, not fads, that industry leaders need to focus on as they map out strategies for their businesses.

The lifecycle of a trend (see Figure 1) is not dissimilar from the lifecycle of an industry, business or even living organism. It begins with a period of emergence, similar to birth and childhood. This is followed by a growth stage – a period of



**Fads are the
kiss of death.
When the fad
goes away, so
do you**



rapid evolution and adoption, not unlike puberty. Maturity then arrives – a time when a trend achieves a highly developed stage of life and growth takes a back seat. And finally there's decline – a period in which a trend typically loses ground or possibly even becomes extinct.

Understanding what's 'all the rage' required us to conduct a two-

dimensional analysis looking at the interplay between a trends level of industry adoption and its absolute level of growth. We define this as the Adoption Matrix (see Figure 2). Where a trend falls in the matrix tells us if it's emerging, growing, mature, in decline, or if it's a niche trend rather than mainstream.

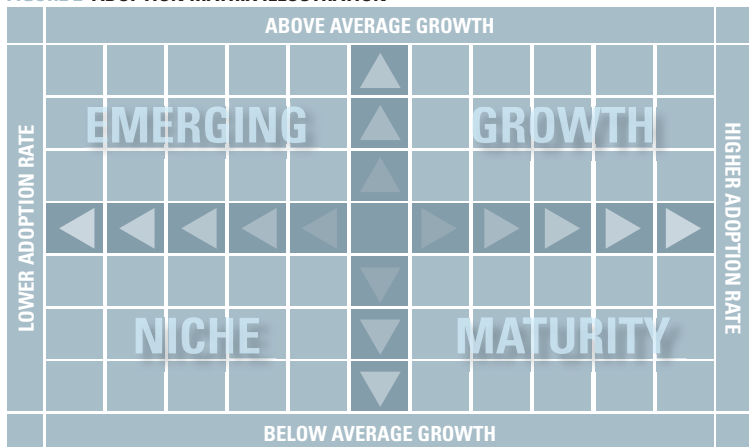
RISE AND FALL

So what are the insights garnered from the study? For the purposes of this section, we've used the word 'trend' to define a specific practice of the industry; over time we will be able to establish whether they are actually trends or fads.

Among the top 10 trends by level of industry adoption, six are programme-driven, three are equipment-driven and one is technology-driven. In essence, what it speaks to is the industry's heavy reliance on programming and its snail-like pace in adopting new technologies to enhance its value proposition.

Among the trends with the greatest absolute growth over the past two years, 60 per cent are programme-driven – for example, HIIT classes, HIIT small group training, barre classes and ▶

FIGURE 2 ADOPTION MATRIX ILLUSTRATION



- suspension training. Three (21 per cent) are technology-driven: the use of social media, offering transparent online pricing of memberships and services, and the development of fitness club-based apps.

Among the eight trends that have captured less than 10 per cent of the industry – making them niche trends – three are technology-driven (such as online training offerings and the use of internet middlemen) and four are equipment-orientated (cold plunge, yoga wall, high altitude training rooms and whole body cryotherapy). Interestingly, only one programme trend – hot yoga – would fall into this segment.

Over the past two years, more than 20 trends have seen a decline in market penetration. Of the trends whose decline was more than 4 per cent, 80 per cent are programme-driven.

When you factor in this statistic alongside the fact that 60 per cent of the fastest-growing trends are also programming trends, in our professional opinion this sector may actually be fad-driven more than it is trend-driven. We will be able to establish this once we have additional years' data.

Notably, non-US markets have achieved considerably higher levels of adoption for technology-driven trends.



There's a heavy reliance on programming and a snail-like pace in adopting new technologies



This suggests the international market has been quicker to adopt technology as part of its value proposition and operating platform than the US.

Group cycling, traditional yoga and recumbent bikes were the only trends to be classified as mature. A significant majority of the 90-plus trends that were measured fell into either the emerging or niche categories, indicating that in the majority of cases, these trends may not evolve into mainstream trends. ●

WANT TO READ MORE?

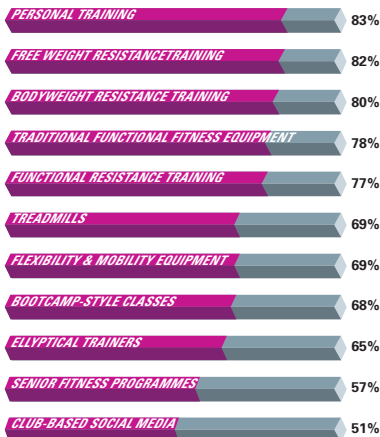
During the second quarter of 2015, ACE, ClubIntel and IHRSA commissioned a fitness trend study among global health and fitness professionals. The study measured adoption rates and growth rates for over 90 fitness practices across multiple categories (programmes, services and training protocols, equipment and facilities, and technology) and industry segments (region, size of business, type of business model, and so on).

The results of the study were released last month, with special thanks to Melissa Rodriguez of IHRSA, Todd Galati of ACE and Jim Peterson of Healthy Learning.

For further detail, please download the executive summary from ACE (acefitness.org), IHRSA (IHRSA.org) or ClubIntel (club-intel.com).

The full report can be purchased from the ClubIntel store (club-intel.com) or Healthy Learning (healthylearning.com) for US\$99.95.

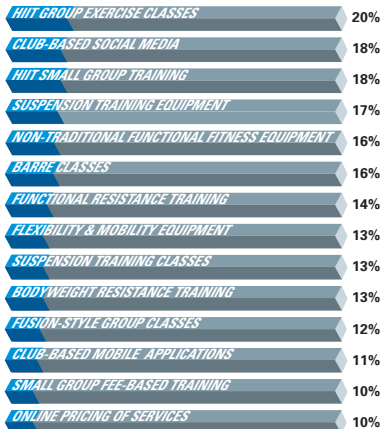
TOP 10 INDUSTRY TRENDS BY PER CENT ADOPTION 2015



60% PROGRAMME-DRIVEN

SIX OF THE TOP 10 TRENDS BY ADOPTION PERCENTAGE ARE PROGRAMME- AND SERVICE-DRIVEN TRENDS, WHILE ONLY ONE IS TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN

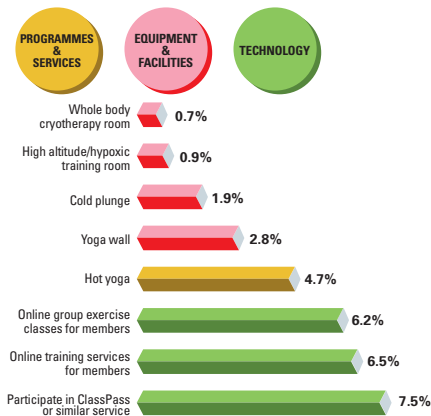
TOP 10 INDUSTRY TRENDS BY ABSOLUTE PERCENTAGE GROWTH 2013-2015



60% PROGRAMME-DRIVEN

EIGHT OF THE TOP 14 TRENDS BY ABSOLUTE GROWTH ARE PROGRAMME- AND SERVICE-DRIVEN TRENDS, THREE ARE TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN AND THREE EQUIPMENT- AND FACILITY-DRIVEN

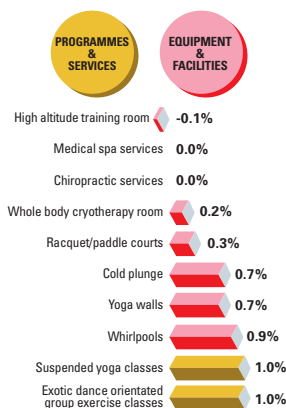
PRACTICES SERVING NICHE IN 2015 Percentage adoption by health and fitness industry



50% FACILITY-DRIVEN / 38% TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN

NEARLY 90% OF ALL NICHE TRENDS ARE EQUIPMENT- & FACILITY-DRIVEN OR TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN

PRACTICES IN NEUTRAL FROM 2013-2015 Trends with less than 1% absolute growth from 2013-2015



NEARLY 50/50 DRIVEN

THE TRENDS EXPERIENCING IDLE TO SLUGGISH GROWTH ARE EITHER EQUIPMENT- AND FACILITY-DRIVEN OR PROGRAMME-DRIVEN

STUDIO INNOVATIONS

What's hot in the world of studio equipment?
We round up some of the latest product launches

GOING PINK FOR BREAST CANCER

Functional training specialist TRX has launched a pink at-home version of its suspension trainer to support research into breast cancer. The new pink version will be available in the UK for the first time from TRX's dealers from October. The package includes suspension trainer, suspension anchor, door anchor, mesh carry bag, door placard, app and a 'getting started' guide.

TRX will donate 10 per cent of the proceeds from sales of the pink TRX home kit to breast cancer research. The launch is to be supported with a marketing campaign featuring sportspeople and celebrities.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **TRX**



SPACE-SAVING SOLUTIONS

D2F Fitness recently launched BattleX studio and functional training equipment – a compact, portable battle rope training station, available in a range of sizes, that allows up to 16 people to simultaneously participate in group battle rope training sessions. Complete with a central reinforced platform, instructors can stand in the middle of the unit to deliver classes and motivate participants. The unit can be easily moved to provide operators with maximum flexibility for programming. It can be used in studio spaces and outdoors.

XStore (left) is D2F's new modular, scalable solution designed to meet the increasing need for sophisticated space planning and storage for functional training accessories. Available with a variety of shelving combinations, gyms can configure bespoke storage units based on available space, layout and accessories to be housed.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **D2F**



WOOD WORKS

WaterRower has developed a range of wooden studio kit – NOHRD by WaterRower – which includes swing weights and wall bars.

The swing weights work in a similar way to kettlebells or dumbbells. The handles and the tower – which holds the weights – are both handcrafted from solid hardwoods in ash, cherry or walnut. The weights are iron granulates in a hand-stitched leather pouch suspended from the wooden handles. The tower holds a smartphone or tablet for viewing workout videos for the swing weights.

Meanwhile the wall bars are for functional training, strength and rehabilitation exercises, and come with either 10 or 14 bars. The hinged pull-up bar works in conjunction with suspension training straps, while resistance training bands can be tied to any rung on the bars. Accessories include a multi-adaptor and workout bench, which hook on to the wall bars to extend the range of exercises.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **WaterRower**



AN ECO-FRIENDLY OPTION

The urethane Eco Rep Set is the latest addition to the Escape range of group exercise and studio equipment. Eco Rep Set plates are crafted using a process that reduces their impact on the environment and are made from 93 per cent recycled material. The plates are coated with urethane to ensure they are extra hard-wearing and durable. The set is glossy black with a green and black clamp collar, to ensure members can make any plate changes quickly during studio classes. The Eco Rep Set is also available with Escape's Rep Set Hollow Bar.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **Escape**



HOT OFF THE LIW PRESS

Physical Company launched 11 products at LIW 2015, including a number of new items for the studio.

The Titan Bag has been developed in partnership with Wild Training founder and personal trainer James Griffiths. A key feature of the multi-functional weighted bag is its multiple-reinforced handle positions. Designed to add load to exercises, its detachable handles allow for wide-swinging, halo-style exercises to boost the effectiveness of rotational movements.

Also new is the Tyre2. A tyre but with four sides, the square design allows the weight to flip in a predictable direction. The design also allows a large area in the middle of the product for users to carry and lift without being restricted by the inner shoulder found in circular tyres.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **Physical Compar**



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SUPPLIER SHOWCASE



We take a look at recent projects by **Premier Software**, **D2F Fitness** and **Matrix Fitness**

MANAGING DIVERSITY

CLIENT: Reynolds

SUPPLIERS: Premier Software

Reynolds is a family-run business with more than 20 years' experience in the health and fitness sector. With a collection of four individually styled fitness spas in Kent, Reynolds required a scheduling and business management solution that could be rolled out across several locations. The solution also needed to effectively manage Reynolds' multiple membership types.

"We have over 11 different membership types, each with a specific focus – from flexible packages to Treat and Tone, corporate packages to bespoke personal training programmes," says Kieran Street, sales director at Reynolds.

"We selected CORE by Premier and it has given us the perfect platform to manage our membership types across both our leisure and spa facilities."

CORE by Premier has been designed to provide a single solution to suit both standalone and multi-location environments. Its single database structure allows instant access to guest profiles, as well as the ability to schedule appointments for any site.

Reynolds uses CORE's online membership sign-up facility, a paperless solution that includes instant bank account and postal validation as well as Guestline Epos integration. The end result has been a more customer-focused solution for membership sign-ups and management.

CORE's call centre functionality has been particularly beneficial for Reynolds, with on-site staff able to focus on delivering a first-class service while bookings are managed independently by a central reservation team.

Street continues: "CORE by Premier also offers us the ability to be highly targeted



Family-run business
Reynolds operates four
fitness spas in Kent



**Our marketing was more blanketed before.
Now we can be much more direct and
personal with our communications**



with our marketing communications. For example, automated birthday emails and SMS offers add a personal touch, meaning our members feel loved.

"We also have the ability to remind clients that their membership is about to expire, which has helped a great deal with member retention."

Street adds: "Our marketing was definitely more blanketed before the introduction of CORE, but now we can be much more direct and personal with our communications."

CORE by Premier has also been instrumental in business intelligence at

Reynolds. When asked what aspect of the software the company found the most beneficial, Street highlighted CORE's extensive reporting capabilities.

"The reporting services are very good. They provide us with a wealth of business data, which can be crucial when deciding how best to move the business forward and set future goals."

"The training provided by Premier has also been excellent, covering everything we needed to know and leaving us feeling confident with our choice of software."

www.premiersoftware.co.uk

Software at the CORE of your business

ONLINE SUITE

CORE's suite of online services allows guests or members to book appointments, studio classes and day packages at specific locations, directly allocating the resources 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The suite can be customised, and with integration to PayPal, ensures a seamless customer journey.

Online Appointment booking and Package booking directly integrates with existing web solutions. Bookings are based on available staff, rooms, equipment, and staff qualifications. Medical and contra indications prevent inappropriate treatments being booked. In addition, Group Activity booking allows members to schedule classes, automatically reducing availability.

Provide a paperless solution to membership enrollment with CORE's online sign-up, including direct debit, instant bank account and postal address validation.



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or call for a free consultation.



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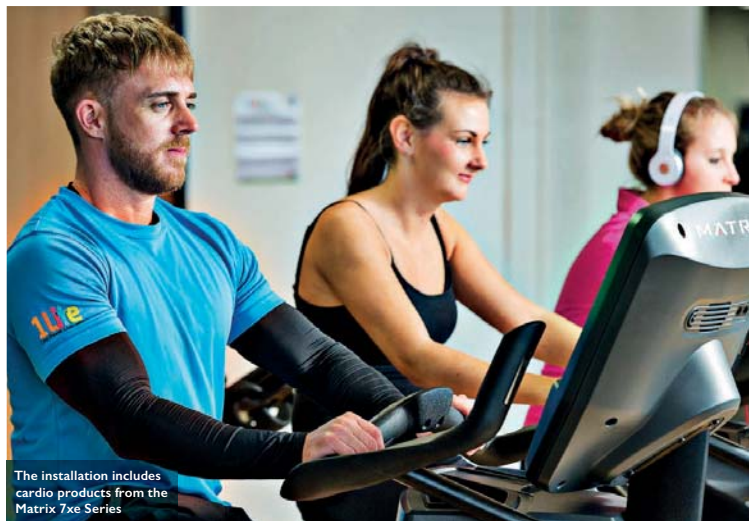


PHOTO: PAUL CARROLL PHOTOGRAPHY

The installation includes cardio products from the Matrix 7xe Series



With the new modern facilities, we have every chance of helping everyone get the most out of life



Grantham Meres Leisure Centre is at the heart of the South Kesteven District community. It offers a great range of affordable leisure facilities that cater for all sporting backgrounds, from beginner recreational use to elite level competition.

Following a three-month programme of investment totalling £600,000, the gym has doubled in size and is quickly becoming one of the most popular facilities in the East Midlands. The site is one of 45 local authority venues managed by lifestyle and management solutions company l1fe – a company that aims to engage with people in local communities to create tailored solutions that support local outcomes, drive participation and deliver results at a local level.

Customer consultation revealed a need for Grantham Meres Leisure Centre to appeal to a broader audience. As a result, the gym has undergone a significant transformation, with the introduction of 50 per cent more equipment, including the installation of cardio products from the Matrix Fitness 7xe Series.

DOUBLING UP

CLIENT: Grantham Meres Leisure Centre

SUPPLIER: Matrix Fitness

The investment has also funded a new dedicated group cycling studio – complete with IC7 Indoor Cycles powered by ICG, which can also be found on the gym floor. The studio features Myride virtual entertainment and instructor technology, enabling customers to participate either in timetabled live classes or in virtual classes, following the instructions of an on-screen trainer – a first for the district.

A second, multi-purpose studio supports a greatly enhanced group exercise programme – over 120 classes every week, compared to 38 before the expansion.

In addition, functional training opportunities in the new gym have been enhanced, with dedicated zones housing

Magnum plate-loaded kit and free weights, as well as fixed resistance equipment from Matrix's Aura range.

Ian Rushbury, head of fitness at l1fe, says: "Visitors have been blown away by the quality of finish, technology and variety of equipment on offer. Our research told us we needed to appeal to a broader range of local people, and with the new modern facilities and great new services, we have every chance of helping everyone get the most out of life."

Jo Rich, director of key accounts for Matrix Fitness, adds: "Fitness trends are transient, so it's imperative to have a really good understanding of what's important to your loyal customers to ensure longer-term business success."

She continues: "l1fe's collaborative approach means it's expert in ensuring the facilities it manages deliver what's required to keep customers coming back. Initial feedback from staff and patrons of Grantham Meres Leisure Centre has been extremely positive."

Details: www.matrixfitness.co.uk

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PHOTO: JAMES MOY - PRESS ASSOCIATION

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

CLIENT: Lotus F1 Team

SUPPLIERS: D2F Fitness
and Matrix Fitness

Formula 1 is the highest class of single seat auto racing in the world. Every year, 20 drivers from 10 different teams compete for both constructors' and drivers' world championship titles.

During the 19-race season, the forces exerted on Formula 1 drivers are immense – in fact, the demands on the whole team are enormous – so providing the right resources to ensure the physical fitness of the team is paramount.

Lotus F1 Team approached one of its official technical partners, Matrix Fitness, about expanding its Human Performance Centre (HPC) to include an outdoor functional training area.

"The area needed to be capable of meeting the training requirements of people with different fitness levels and abilities," comments Daryl Coombes, Human Performance Centre training manager at Lotus F1 Team. "Formula 1 is a team sport, so while we need to ensure our drivers have access to equipment that will help them to excel out on the track, we also want to provide the entire



Formula 1 is a team sport. We want to provide the entire team with a facility that will support their individual fitness goals



The new XCUBE rig is installed at Lotus HQ in Oxfordshire

team – including development drivers, pit crew, engineering and office staff – with a training facility that will support their individual fitness goals."

Matrix engaged with strategic partner D2F Fitness to implement a solution that would meet the Lotus brief.

"We've worked with Matrix on a number of occasions to deliver bespoke XCUBE functional training rig solutions to clients across the UK, and were thrilled to be approached about this exciting project," says John Lofting, sales director at D2F Fitness. "Following initial discussions, we recommended that a customised XCUBE Oxygen functional training rig would allow Lotus to expand the fitness offering at its HPC without compromising on the existing indoor space."

The Oxygen rig installed at Lotus HQ in Oxfordshire has a number of fixed attachments including monkey bars, chin-up bars and dip station, as well as multiple points for suspension training.

"In addition to the XCUBE, we also supplied a number of functional training accessories – including Reebok medicine balls and kettlebells, a Fortitude Fitness Core Trainer and a selection of ViPR to support loaded weight training – that will enable the trainers to enhance the outdoor workouts," continues Lofting.

The final element of the solution was a BattleX group battle rope trainer. The BattleX trainer can be used outdoors but can also be moved indoors if required, and allows up to 16 people to simultaneously participate in a battle rope training session.

"The XCUBE is a fantastic addition to our HPC," says Coombes. "It provides us with that extra dimension in exercise choice, not only for the strength and conditioning coaches, but also for the factory staff and our Formula 1 and Junior Academy drivers."

"The health and fitness of the team is paramount in maintaining productivity to stay ahead of the competition."

www.d2ffitness.com
www.matrixfitness.co.uk



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- Develop exciting and rewarding functional programmes
- Increase member retention and drive revenue



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COME ONE, COME ALL

It's a disruptive model, but are 'exercise passport' memberships the shake-up the industry needs to improve retention and market penetration, getting more people, more active, more often? Kath Hudson asks the experts...



With the launch of initiatives like ClassPass and MoveGB, exercise passport schemes – whereby one membership gives you access to hundreds of classes, gyms and fitness facilities operated by numerous different operators – have gone up a gear.

Initially sceptical that buying in to flexible membership schemes might threaten their core business, increasingly operators seem to be coming round to the idea that this model makes sense commercially – and that's primarily because it fits with what consumers want. Not only do such schemes suit frequent travellers and those who live and work in different places, but they also meet the needs of dabblers – people who want to take advantage of a variety of exercise options rather than always visiting the same gym and doing the same workout.

HOME FROM HOME

It isn't in itself a new concept: the IHRSA Passport Program – which allows gym users to enter other clubs participating in the scheme at a discount of at least 50 per cent, provided that club is a minimum of 50 miles from their home – is now in its 31st year and has more than 1,700 clubs taking part across 40 countries.



Gymadvisor's Freepass package offers access to 840 clubs across Spain for €49.99 a month

Meanwhile the London Fitness Network was established 10 years ago by nine London-based trusts, after a poll showed 70 per cent of members would like a London-wide card and would be willing to pay more for the privilege.

This has since evolved into Health & Fitness UK – a partnership between GLL, Jubilee Hall Trust, Redbridge Sports & Leisure and Vision Leisure – giving people

access to 103 leisure centres from York to west Oxfordshire.

Phil Rumbelow, CEO of Jubilee Hall Trust, says people want a flexible product: "Consumers have shown they want choice. They often live and work, or study, in different places and they need a membership which caters for that. The fitness industry needs to be flexible, making it as easy as possible for more people to be more active, more often."

Other operators have embraced this concept too: just last month, Canadian chain GoodLife Fitness and US chain 24 Hour Fitness announced a reciprocal arrangement to allow travelling members access to each other's clubs.

ADDED FLEXIBILITY

The aforementioned schemes are all essentially structured around the need for flexibility when travelling – either further afield for work, or simply between home and work. However, with the budget gym chains doing away with long-term contracts, and boutique clubs adopting a premium 'pay as you play' model, consumers are increasingly expecting even their 'at home' memberships to offer more flexibility than the traditional 12-month contract model.

Acknowledging this trend – as well as consumers' growing demand for online reviews, service comparisons and the option to shop around online before committing to a purchase – payasUgym took flexibility to another level.

Launched in 2011, when co-founders Jamie Ward and Neil Harmsworth spotted a niche for an internet-based,

“ Millennials and Gen Y place value on **flexibility and choice**. A significant percentage of **young studio-goers** have **memberships at more than one facility** ”



Exercise passport schemes allow users to work out wherever best suits that day

pay as you go concept, pasyasygym allows consumers to buy daily, weekly or monthly gym passes – although it positions itself as a lead-generation service for health clubs, whereby people can test the water before committing to full membership at a club. It now works with 2,500 sites and 400,000 customers.

Europe saw the launch of a similar scheme, Gymadvisor, in December 2013. The Spanish-based service now works with 1,100 sites across Spain, the UK, Italy, Bulgaria and the Netherlands, providing an online database of clubs where people can make comparisons and choose from a range of different membership options.

"People want to spend less money and get more services than ever for the same price, and technology has made this very easy," says CEO Ricard Canela. "The fitness industry needs to make this task as easy as it can, providing people with all the information and transparency they need to make a final decision."

However, although it's similar to pasyasygym.com in that it sells daily and monthly passes – and in fact also personal training – in Spain Gymadvisor has also created bundles of passes which can be used at hundreds of gyms across its network, much in the same way that ClassPass works in the US.

Canela claims that this is a win-win for both gyms and consumers: "Gyms get more clients without spending their money on marketing, and users can access gyms in a flexible way."

Also launched in 2013 by The Retention People founder Alister Rollins, MoveGB aims to remove the barriers to exercise

CLASSPASS

With the growing number of independent studios and gyms catering to specific interests, ClassPass was created in New York in 2013, to offer a model for those looking for diversity and to find great studios they might otherwise not have known about.

A monthly fitness membership programme priced at around US\$99, it allows people to take classes at different studios and clubs – but users are only allowed to visit the same studio up to a maximum of three times

a month (see also HCM July 15, p62).

The network is now operational in more than 30 cities in the US and Canada, and came to London this year, with more than 6,000 clubs and boutique studios currently on board globally.

ClassPass receives the money direct from users and makes a payment to the club for each class taken.



Founder of ClassPass, Payal Kadakia

and create a flexible global membership of people who stay active for life.

"MoveGB was born out of a desire to create a better model for the fitness industry, which could more closely align the behaviour of consumers with the commercial models of fitness operators," says MD Justin Mendleton.

"We provide clubs with a constant stream of high value, long lifetime members and allow the consumer unlimited use of hundreds of providers in their city, and thousands beyond, which creates very long lifetime value."

GENERATION Y

According to the recent *IHRSA Consumer Report*, 80 per cent of Generation Y don't buy into the idea of membership at a single health or fitness facility.

"It's no wonder that memberships which support flexibility have taken off given this generation's priorities," says Payal Kadakia, founder of ClassPass. "Millennials and Gen Y place value on flexibility and choice. A significant percentage of young studio-goers have memberships at more than one facility. For example, 64 per cent of yoga ►

Generation X remain keen users of **traditional models** such as fixed memberships.

We **mustn't switch to serve** one customer group at the **expense of the other**



Whether it's military fitness or yoga and relaxation, flexible deals offer the variety exercisers want

- members, 68 per cent of cyclists, 78 per cent of bootcampers and 89 per cent of boxers have second memberships at other fitness studios."

Harmsworth agrees it was inevitable this would happen at some point, because customers are increasingly demanding greater choice and convenience. "For millennials, especially those living in large urban areas, the idea of committing to one method of getting fit, or one location, just isn't on their radar."

"This group view themselves as being very dynamic and discerning. This is the generation of AirBnB, Uber, Laundrapp and Deliveroo – services that cater for the needs of the individual and let them buy where and when they want."

"Flexible gym and fitness memberships are a natural, obvious development to engage with this audience."

Other industries have already been through this revolution, and as the health

and fitness industry matures it would seem this is a natural progression – so how should health clubs react? With many operators beginning to question the hard sell and draconian long-term membership contracts, Mendleton believes now is the time to start embracing new flexible ways of working.

"Operators need to ask themselves what they would want as consumers, and how they would like to be treated," he says. "For too long, we as an industry have relied on bad profits – profiting from members not using our services. This is not sustainable, creates very high attrition and hinders growth. The true vision of the dot com boom is now materialising, with the consumer being 100 per cent in control."

"It's important providers move with the times to create the most attractive proposition for the consumer, to harness both media and social attention on fitness. As an industry, we should be as powerful financially and politically as the pharmaceutical industry, but to do this we need to change to be more flexible."

However, as Harmsworth points out, while Generation Y might like club-hopping, Generation X still prefers a stable membership; a range of options should therefore be available.

"Generation X remain keen users of more traditional models, such as

GYMADVISOR FREEPASS

In addition to its daily and monthly passes, Gymadvisor offers three levels of package whereby users can visit clubs across its Spanish network.

€24.99 a month gets you five passes each month, to be used at any one of 390 clubs – although no more than three visits to the same gym are permitted. Meanwhile €39.99 gets you 10 passes.

Those willing to spend €49.99 a month get the Freepass package – 30 passes a month to be used at 840 clubs across Spain, but again with the same restriction of maximum three visits a month to the same club.



Gymadvisor founders Silvia and Ricard Canela brought the passport model to Spain

fixed memberships or subscriptions," Harmsworth explains. "This group is very stable and remains the biggest driver of income for the industry. It's really important that the industry doesn't switch en masse to serve one customer group at the expense of the other."

"The key is to offer the right product to the right customer at the right time, and sell it to them through a channel in which they like to buy." ●

MOVEGB

Launched in Bristol, UK, in January 2013, MoveGB now has 10,000 users each month and almost 1,000 partners across a number of UK cities, as well as New York in the US. New cities are being introduced every month.

Members pay a monthly subscription and the clubs are paid when their facilities are used. All facilities have to be made available as part of the scheme: if they cost operators more to offer, then the end user is charged more.

In addition, payment plans are always priced above partners'

membership prices, so as not to undercut; users accept paying a premium to benefit from the variety on offer. Different packages are available for different levels of access.

The main aim of the scheme is to get people active and keep them active by offering them choice and putting them in control of how they exercise.



Justin Mendleton, MoveGB MD

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Hot topic

Regular exercise could help reduce hot flushes in menopausal women and offer a natural alternative to HRT, according to UK researchers

Around three out of every four menopausal women have hot flushes, according to NHS data. They're the most common symptom of the menopause and are described as a sudden, uncomfortable rush of heat that, with no warning, spreads throughout the body. They can include sweating, palpitations and a red flush (blushing), and while some women are relatively unaffected, others can experience up to 20 episodes a day.

It's believed that regular exercise can help improve temperature regulation, skin blood flow and sweat control. So with this in mind, researchers at Liverpool John Moores University are looking into the role physical activity might have in helping with menopause symptoms – and the preliminary results look promising.

Less frequent, less severe

Findings from an unpublished study were revealed at the annual conference of the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology in June. The university team based its research on 17 menopausal women with an average age of 52. Ten of the women undertook a gym-based exercise programme for four months, while seven formed a control group and carried on life as normal.

The women in the active group exercised on a treadmill, static bike, rowing machine and cross-trainer and pushed themselves so they were out of breath but still able to talk. Workouts were built up over the four-month period, from three 30-minute sessions a week to five 45-minute sessions a week.

At the end of the four months, the women in the exercise group experienced far fewer flushes – falling remarkably from 64 to 23 a week on average. The severity of the flushes had also dropped by two-thirds. In contrast, the women who remained sedentary reported very little difference.



The women who exercised experienced far fewer, and less severe, hot flushes

PHOTO: WWW.SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

A natural alternative

For an objective assessment, the researchers also placed women in a hot water suit to induce a hot flush and then recorded their physiological reactions. According to lead author Helen Jones, the women in the exercise group sweated less and had less blood flow to the skin.

Jones believes exercise could be boosting the body's ability to regulate temperature. She explains: "If it's doing that when a flush is triggered, the sweating and skin blood flow responses are lowered because the control system is more efficient."

As the study was only a preliminary trial based on a small sample group, the researchers are now seeking further funding for a larger study. However, they do believe the early results show

promise, with exercise a possible natural treatment for menopausal symptoms.

Up until a decade ago, most women were prescribed hormone replacement therapy (HRT) drugs to help combat hot flushes and other side-effects. But the number of women taking HRT has dramatically declined since the early 2000s when it was linked to strokes, blood clots and breast cancer.

Jones concludes: "Because of the health scares in the past few years, not many women will be prescribed HRT. They're basically living their lives with hot flushes, which isn't a nice thing. We tried to use exercise as a non-pharmacological tool."

Exercise could also provide other advantages, she says: "Exercise training has additional positive benefits to postmenopausal women, importantly on cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease risk, which increases following the menopause. Exercise also can improve quality of life and mental wellbeing." ●

Because of the health scares, not many women will be prescribed HRT. We tried to use exercise as a non-pharmacological tool

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