

health club management

APRIL 2012

preventative healthcare

PRE-DIABETES INITIATIVES FROM THE US

INTERVIEW

MARK
MANTELL

The head of Spirit Health
Clubs on competing with
the budget operators

ACTIVE
AGEING

The impact of exercise
on the ageing brain



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Mental health

There's a wealth of evidence highlighting the positive impact that physical activity can have on mental health, from the immediate feelgood effect of an endorphin rush through to longer-term benefits such as its proven ability to delay or even prevent cognitive decline, including Alzheimer's (see p46). Exercise has been shown to help with a wide range of other mental health conditions too: preventing and treating depression and anxiety, for example, as well as helping with post-natal depression and attention deficit disorder.

This presents us with two clear opportunities: firstly, to further engage with GPs to drive exercise referrals for mental health, for both treatment and prevention; and secondly, to engage with a broader range of prospective members by communicating a compelling, and in many cases immediate, benefit.

Indeed, a survey conducted by mental health charity MIND found that 83 per cent of respondents exercised to lift mood or reduce stress, and seven out of 10 gym users with no mental health issues felt their mental wellbeing would suffer if they did not exercise. Quite aside from winning over the GPs,

there's a strong commercial argument in favour of promoting the mental health benefits of working out to prospective members.

For a member, while improvements in fitness levels can take months – if they happen at all – working out can deliver immediate, tangible shifts in mood. And quick results mean higher levels of motivation and retention – the 'feelgood factor' is a key driver in encouraging regular exercise. If, instead of falling back exclusively on messages such as weight loss, gyms also highlighted mental health and happiness, they might attract a broader, more motivated group of members.

Meanwhile, from a GP perspective, there's a clear role for exercise as medicine for mental health. And with evidence suggesting that one in four people experiences a mental health condition – a condition that's chronic for one in five sufferers – there is unquestionably a need for the fitness industry's offering.

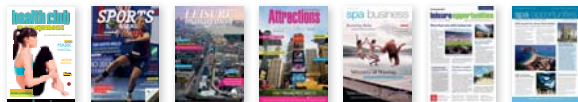
To date, however, much of our industry's work with the medical sector has focused on the physical benefits: the role of exercise in managing obesity and thereby preventing diseases such as cancer and heart disease, for example. Evidence currently being gathered through the FIA Research Institute to prove the value of gym-based exercise also focuses on physical, rather than mental, markers.

Given the prevalence of mental health issues, it's time we focused more on this area. Some GPs are already tuned in our value in this field, but with exercise still surprisingly low on many GPs' agendas, there is much to do. And if referrals happen, we need to ensure people are pointed specifically in our direction, rather than to physical activity in general. The industry must provide specific evidence, deliver more specialist qualifications, rethink the way it packages its offering, refine its messaging.

As with all preventative healthcare messages, the challenge of communicating longer-term benefits to consumers – the role of exercise in preventing Alzheimer's, for example – will always be in giving some urgency to the message, making people act today for something that might not happen. But a two-pronged approach – prevention/treatment for GPs, happiness for consumers – is well worth considering.

Kate Cracknell, editor

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write to reply



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



Fitness First believes it has created a successful formula for the Middle East

international standards in the middle east region

I was interested to read the recent feature on the fitness industry in the Middle East (HCM March 12, p71). While certain areas might lack international standards of service, at Fitness First Middle East we pride ourselves on a superior customer service delivery.

One of our core values is member experience, from the day they join throughout their time with us. We continually invest in our staff and our clubs, introducing the latest innovations.

The market in the Middle East is indeed fragmented, simply because of smaller operators and residences running their own gyms. This, however, is not uncommon in a number of western countries, including Canada and the US.

To address this, we provide an offering that extends far beyond that of the

smaller operators and residential gyms. We are better funded, better equipped and have a management team that brings to the table a wealth of experience and know-how which allows us to successfully operate across the Middle East region.

We offer our customers a one-stop club that provides them with a full service fitness environment, including added value elements such as free group exercise, swimming pools, freestyle (functional training) areas, members' lounges for socialising, and luxurious changing and relaxation areas.

Our continued and significant growth, as well as our customer loyalty, is a testament to our successful formula.

mark botha
sales and marketing director,
fitness first middle east

sport and fitness are moving closer together

I read with interest your editor's letter in the February edition of HCM, which looked at the concept of 'the sport of fitness' (HCM Feb 12, p3).

I believe there's an increasing demand for innovation in the world of fitness, which for some segments of the population has led to a desire for structure and competition – the bedrock of sport as we traditionally understand it. Fitness and sport are increasingly closely linked.

Fifteen years ago, the sports club was the focus for mass participation, with team sports dominant. Since then, there has been a swing towards individualisation in sports and leisure activity. Sport needs to accommodate itself to today's lifestyles to keep people playing beyond school.

At Trys Rugby, we are looking to leverage the success of touch rugby, whose English leagues attracted 15,000 players last year. It's a five- or six-a-side format, faster and non-contact; it's played on floodlit, synthetic surfaces available year-round; and it's suitable for all ages and genders – not only those serious about rugby, but also those who are just looking for a fun way to get fit.

Traditional team sports will always have their place, but the future of the British sports industry is about change, and fitness and health are top of the agenda.

andy baker
ceo, trys rugby centres



Sport must adapt to today's lifestyles to keep people playing beyond school



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£4.1m refurbishment planned for Essex centre

Castle Point Borough Council (CPBC) is to undertake a £4.1m refurbishment of Waterside Farm Leisure Centre in Canvey Island, Essex, after the scheme was given the green light.

The project was approved at a special cabinet meeting on 8 March, with work due to start in May. Morgan Sindall has already been appointed as the lead contractor.

Work will include a refurbishment of the dry side changing areas, sauna and first aid room, as well as an expansion of the fitness suite.



Gunnell (centre) attended the launch of the gym

Sally Gunnell opens revamped Suffolk gym

Olympic and Commonwealth gold medalist Sally Gunnell has unveiled a new-look gym at Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre, Suffolk, following a £250,000 refurbishment project.

Abbeycroft Leisure manages the facility, which has received more than 110 pieces of Matrix Fitness equipment – including the Virtual Active workout experience.

The gym also offers a new functional training area, which has a TRX suspension area and a Power Plate zone. Kettlebells and ViPR training bars are also available.

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=C1foW>

Tone secures Active Villages contract in Devon

Tone Leisure has secured a contract to operate phase three of an ongoing Active Villages programme in three Devon districts.

Funded by Sport England and Devon County Council, the initiative is designed to provide rural communities with the chance to experience the fun of sport and encourage people to adopt active lifestyles.

Due to commence last month, the contract will see Tone deliver the Active Villages programme in North Devon, Mid Devon and South Hams.

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=K6z2B>

Eco-friendly Redditch centre completed

A Worcestershire leisure centre is set to see its energy bills cut dramatically after work was completed on a project to allow it to use waste heat from a nearby crematorium.

Heat generated from the flue gas cleaning process at the Redditch Crematorium will be reused throughout the Abbey Stadium Leisure Centre under the innovative, yet controversial, project.

Redditch Borough Council (RBC) is behind the scheme – completed by Drivers Jonas

Deloitte alongside ISG – and aims to create one of the greenest leisure centres in the UK, with the process providing 42 per cent of the facility's yearly heat requirements.

Julian Record, director of Driver Jonas Deloitte, says: "The Abbey Stadium project is an innovative development that has enabled the council to reach two key objectives



The innovative project will significantly reduce the centre's energy bill

– reducing the energy demands of the centre and the crematorium emissions."

RBC calculates that installing the new scheme will cost approximately £85,000, yielding annual gas savings of around £16,800 based on current fuel inflation – giving a payback period of just over five years.

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=p5N3u>

LA Fitness launches member pledge

LA Fitness has launched a new Member Pledge scheme as part of its strategy to improve customer service and member experience across its 79 sites in the UK. As part of the Member Pledge, the company has launched a new website outlining its policy on everything from security to flexible membership contracts and what to do if personal circumstances change.

In a statement, the company said it recognised that the gym sector has "not always had the best reputation for customer service", but that it was determined to underline the work it has done behind the scenes to create a better member experience.

LA Fitness chief executive Martin Long says: "This Member Pledge sums up the progress we have made over the past two years to improve our service standards – not just in the first few days of your membership, but throughout a member's fitness journey with us.

"We know we don't always get it right, but we think this shows our confidence in how much we have improved."

The pledge was launched as the privately-owned company announced its trading figures. During the nine months to 31 January 2012,



LA Fitness CEO Martin Long says the pledge is a key initiative

the number of LA Fitness members increased by 11,000, taking the total to 200,000. Like-for-like sales for January rose by 3 per cent compared to 2011, while the annual member retention rate rose by 4 per cent.

In the 15 months to October 31, 2011 LA Fitness posted a turnover of £112m – up from £92m – and underlying earnings of £20m, which is a 9 per cent like-for-like increase on the previous comparable period.

The group is in the midst of a £30m investment and brand repositioning programme, which has seen it refurbish most of its 80-strong gym chain and overhaul its member experience. Details: <http://lei.sr?a=b3E3b>

Anytime enters central London

Anytime Fitness, the health and fitness club franchise, has announced the opening of its first location in central London to further expand its presence in the UK market.

The new facility is located on Pentonville Road, Kings Cross, and has been developed in partnership with Life Fitness to offer a 325sq m (3,500sq ft) fitness suite.

Open 24 hours a day, the Anytime Fitness venue will cater for more than 1,000 members and offers CV and strength equipment.

It's the latest club to open as part of Anytime Fitness' UK roll-out, which recently saw a second Bristol site open. Anytime aims to have a 50-strong estate by the end of the year.

Anis and Jay Suterwalla, owners of Anytime Fitness Kings Cross, explain: "With the fitness suite being in constant use, it was vital that we



The Kings Cross site is Anytime Fitness' first club in central London

chose a supplier that would be able to offer us strong support and service."

Life Fitness account manager Antony Morrison adds: "[The equipment] offers consumers a wide spectrum of exercises that can be performed across all muscles groups."

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=t4e0D>

New FIA guidelines for children in gyms

The Fitness Industry Association (FIA) has announced the launch of new guidelines for its members who are looking to offer gym use and group exercise to under-18s (see HCM Feb 12, p36).

Issues such as having appropriate insurance cover, risk assessment and marketing to young people are among those included in the new guidelines, as well as safeguarding measures.

The FIA also says its new guidelines will deal with the training and qualifications needed to be able to adapt exercise sessions to cater for children as part of mainstream adult classes.

SkillsActive, REPs, Fit for Sport and the Chartered Institute of Sport and Recreation Management helped shape the guidelines.



The guidelines will help operators cater better for young members

FIA CEO David Stalker says: "We have received more enquiries requesting information to allow children into gyms. Therefore, working with other experts, we have launched a competent set of guidelines for our members."

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=T5loc>

Uttoxeter leisure centre consultation starts

East Staffordshire Borough Council has started a new public consultation examining options for the future of a Uttoxeter leisure centre, which may lead to a new facility being built.

The development of a new building on the site of the town's existing leisure centre and the

partial redevelopment of the current venue are also among three preferred council options.

A further 13 potential sites will also be put to residents, with a previous consultation showing marginal support in favour of a new build.

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=k5Raz>

Eco-friendly Redditch scheme completed

Abbey Leisure Centre in Selby, North Yorkshire, has suffered "significant damage" after a fire last month, just 18 months after a £1.1m revamp was completed.

In a statement to the full council, Selby District Council (SDC) leader Mark Crane said that parts of the venue's roof had collapsed and the swimming pool area had been "devastated".

North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service has commenced its investigation into the cause of the blaze, which it is believed may have started in the first-floor sauna area.

Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust operates the centre on behalf of the council, with facilities including a 180sq m (1,938sq ft) health and fitness centre that opened in August 2010.



The gym was opened by Jason Gardener

New-look gym opens at Celtic Manor in Wales

Dylans Health and Fitness Club has been re-opened at the Celtic Manor Resort near Newport, South Wales, as part of a £652,000 refurbishment of its fitness facilities.

Olympic gold medalist Jason Gardener unveiled the new-look facility at The Lodge, with the work carried out by the resort in collaboration with Technogym.

Among the equipment installed as part of the project is a full range of Excite+ cardiovascular stations, Visioweb and Element+ strength equipment, as well as the Wellness System. Meanwhile, Technogym is also working with the resort to overhaul the fitness facilities at The Forum Health Club, which closed from 4 March for work to be carried out.

Resort director of golf and leisure Matthew Lewis says: "People expect a five-star experience and this new equipment will help us to deliver that in our health clubs."

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=D5z6o>

KAL to launch budget gym brand in May

Kirklees Active Leisure (KAL) will launch its first budget gym in Huddersfield, Yorkshire, in May.

The SMART Fitness-branded site will offer monthly memberships from £14.95 and is the first low-cost club in the town.

The gym will be fitted with Technogym equipment, with the 110 stations including a combination of cardio machines, cardio theatre and strength machines. Situated at the KAL-operated Huddersfield Sports Centre, facilities will also include a functional training area with TRX suspension machines and a free weights area.

KAL first announced its plans to launch a budget gym concept in November 2010. Although KAL is looking to roll out the SMART Fitness concept, a spokesperson said that there were no concrete plans for the next site.

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=h9g8A>

Technogym reveals "Our Greatest Team"

Technogym has launched its own legacy programme for the 2012 Games as part of its role as official Games fitness equipment supplier. The Our Greatest Team campaign will be fronted by Technogym's Olympic ambassador, Christine Ohuruogu, and will be run in partnership with the BOA.

The initiative will include 'I Pledge', which will call on members of the public to make a pledge – big or small – to improve their lifestyle by making a better choice or fulfilling a sporting goal. Technogym is opening this up to the UK fitness industry and aims to reach more than 5,000 clubs, schools, universities and local authority centres, with the vision of creating a network of I Pledge community hubs.

Read more: <http://lei.sr?a=C6zoH>

New Nottingham centre opens

Nottingham City Council (NCC) has opened the new £9m Victoria Leisure Centre in Sneinton – part of its wider investment in local facilities.

The council worked with inspiredspaces – a company established by Carillion – to lead the project through a public-private venture, the Local Education Partnership.

A 70-station gym fitted with Technogym and Power Plate equipment and a fitness studio are among the facilities at the new centre, which has been designed by London-based architects Levitate.

Other facilities include a 25m, six-lane swimming pool with separate teaching pool and a fun splash play area for children, as well as a health suite with sauna and steamrooms.

NCC portfolio holder for leisure, culture and tourism David Trimble says: "The new



A 70-station gym is among the facilities at the £9m Nottingham centre

Victoria Leisure Centre will provide state of the art health and fitness facilities for all sections of the local community.

"I firmly believe that the top quality facilities will encourage more people to take part in and enjoy leisure activities."

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=m7w5o>

Support needed to get disabled more active

The London Assembly has called for leisure operators and schools to improve efforts to help disabled Londoners stay physically active.

A report by the Assembly's Economy, Culture and Sport (ECS) Committee claims that little progress has been made in increasing the number of disabled people taking part in physical activities across London in the past six years. The report, published this week, is a follow-up on the 'A Sporting Legacy for People with Disabilities' survey in 2006.

Despite continued efforts of successive mayors and improvements to facilities, 90 per

cent of disabled Londoners still fail to achieve the recommended level of physical activity.

The report recognises that, in its Inclusive and Active strategy, former London Mayor Ken Livingstone set out (and current mayor Boris Johnson has since continued with) the right overall approach. However, the report also sets out a number of possible improvements. These include promoting active travel options through Transport for London, ensuring teachers have the right skills to keep disabled children involved in school sports, and considering using London 2012 volunteers to encourage disabled people to stay active.

Details: <http://lei.sr?a=K9B9x>

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Redevelopment at Soho Gyms

London-based independently owned gym chain Soho Gyms has completed refurbishment works at five of its six clubs in the capital.

According to managing director Michael Crockett, the upgrading of the club portfolio is part of a strengthening of the Soho Gyms brand.

Speaking to *Health Club Management*, he said: "We decided to position ourselves at the lower end of the high-end market. As part of that decision, we made it a priority to look after the members we already have and make sure they are taken care of."

Three of the gyms – Covent Garden, Camden and Clapham – have seen major works to improve facilities.

The Clapham gym now offers an extra 10 per cent floorspace, including a new second studio which can open into the main studio for extra capacity. There's also a bigger gym floor, a new LED lighting scheme, improved changing areas and a new café area.

Similar works were completed at Camden and Covent Garden.



Soho Gyms has invested just over £1m in redeveloping its clubs

The one remaining club to receive a major facelift is located in Earls Court. Crockett says agreement has been reached with the landlord to add an additional floor and he expects to complete the refurbishment later this year. The company has so far spent just over £1m on the redevelopment programme.

"We are looking to build more gyms in London soon, but felt our priority was to make sure our existing gyms were all on-brand and reflected our unique Soho spirit," says Crockett.

truGym opens fourth site in Bromley

Independently-owned budget chain truGym has launched its fourth health and fitness club in Bromley, Kent.

The 1,300sq m (14,000sq ft) club, which opened in March, joins sites in Maidstone, Peterborough and Plymouth in the portfolio.

The equipment at each club has been supplied by Evolution Fitness.

All truGyms are open from 6am–10pm and are manned during opening hours. Monthly membership begins at £9.99, which includes a selected range of group exercise classes such as Body Pump, Yoga and Zumba are also available at an extra cost.

According to Parm Singh, director and owner of truGym, the company is looking to expand aggressively and will also look to add franchising services.

"So far all clubs have been company-owned, but we are looking to open our first franchised



truGym offers monthly memberships starting from just £9.99

club later this year," Singh told *Health Club Management*.

"In fact we've very recently recruited our first franchisee, so we're actively looking for a site for him to operate."

Singh added that he is looking to add seven further sites to the portfolio during 2012, increasing the total number of truGyms to 11. Details: <http://lei.s?a=P7M3D>

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Neil King
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Strong uptake for lifeguard course

Nearly 3,000 trainers from leisure facilities throughout the UK have signed up for an update as part of the latest edition of the National Pool Lifeguard Qualification (NPLQ). It is thought that a further 2,000 people will sign up in the coming months, with a number of updates across the UK and Ireland currently at capacity in the 8th edition of the NPLQ.

The latest edition has been designed to focus on the role of the lifeguard and aims to follow the route that lifeguards would typically take once they have completed their qualification. NPLQ content is delivered in a manner that allows the learner to experience the reality of the lifeguard role on the course and to apply knowledge in a working environment.

Julian Bennett, course leader and a Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) UK national trainer



The 8th edition of the NPLQ has already been taken up by 3,000 trainers

assessor, says: "The new format of the course is great, and encourages the candidate to excel in their chosen career."

IQL UK manages the NPLQ on behalf of RLSS UK. IQL executive director Tara Dillon says: "We couldn't be happier with how the updates have been going and how many people have already signed up."

Premier unveils online nutrition course

Premier Training International (PTI) has launched its new online Certificate in Nutritional Advice for Physical Activity, which is Active IQ-accredited and targets fitness professionals currently qualified at Level 2.

The course, which carries a total of 20 continued professional development (CPD) points, examines a number of subjects in relation to the components of food, optimal sports nutrition and communication.

Students need to be an accredited Level 2 gym instructor or group exercise instructor to be able to sign up to the course, or hold an equivalent qualification.

Premier Global sales and marketing director Victoria Branch says: "These online courses



The course offers advice on optimal sports food

allow learners to progressively advance their individual careers, without impacting on the client base and work that they already have." Details: <http://lei.sr?a=g9O3>

FIBO launch for the MuJo concept

FIBO 2012 will see the launch of MuJo, a new range of exercise machines set to challenge perceptions of resistance and strength training by enabling users to match everyday movements using selectorised equipment.

MuJo - Mu[tiple] Jo[int] selectorised fitness equipment -- uses moving axis CAM technology to train a range of joints in a single exercise, replicating natural body movements.

Developed to complement conventional strength training equipment in gyms and

health clubs, the patent-pending technology allows users to train bi-articular muscles and multi-axial joints through exercises that mimic everyday movements such as running, kicking and throwing.

Explaining the concept, Douglas Higgins, inventor and co-founder of MuJo Mechanics, says: "Muscles are best exercised over their full range of motion, and many important muscles cannot be fully exercised by moving a single joint in just one direction."

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in brief...

Second LA club for Crunch

Crunch Fitness will open its latest location in the heart of Burbank, California, US, this month – its second club in the LA area.

The 2,415sq m facility will offer top of the range CV and strength equipment, a dedicated personal training area, an online fitness and nutrition programme, Kids' Crunch, a sauna and locker rooms.

Hundreds of weekly classes will be offered in the large group fitness studio and indoor cycling studio, including AntiGravity Yoga, Pole Dancing, The Ride and LaBlast, which is taught by celebrity instructor Louis Van Amstel.

The club's expansive windows offer views of the Hollywood Hills.

"There's no better place to introduce our 'fitness meets entertainment' philosophy than to the entertainment capital of the world," says Crunch president Keith Worts.

Disney attraction closes

Disney has closed a new theme park attraction promoting healthy eating and exercise – because it was deemed offensive to overweight children.

Habit Heroes – which soft-launched at Disney's Epcot resort in Orlando, Florida, in February – used obese cartoon villains to highlight the dangers of junk food, watching too much TV, and a sedentary lifestyle.

But critics accused Disney of stigmatising overweight kids, and as a result the attraction has been closed indefinitely.

New headquarters for Just Fit

German operator Just Fit opened its 16th club on 1 April.

The 1,400sq m, two-storey facility is located in the operator's new headquarters in Northrhine-Westfalia. Nevertheless, the gym is open to the



The showcase gym will offer the latest fitness equipment from 13 different manufacturers

public, with membership starting at €3,790 a month and a target of 1,500–2,000 members by the end of 2013.

The showcase gym will offer a range of the latest equipment from 13 different equipment manufacturers.

Meanwhile, all elements of the Just Fit administration – which are currently distributed over diverse clubs – will work together in the new HQ. "This will simplify the communication between the section departments and will give rise to new synergies for future-orientated thinking and work processes," says CEO Frank Böhme.

The first step will be the expansion of the Just Fit academy, with an expanded portfolio of training and seminars that will also be made available to external participants, as well as Just Fit staff.

Refurb for Dubai ladies-only gym

Dubai Ladies Club has refurbished its gym, installing the latest equipment from Precor – including the AMT with P80 consoles.

The club was originally set up in 2003 by Her Highness Sheikhha Manal bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. It has the only private beach for women in Dubai, and the first women-only dive centre. Facilities also include an 85sq m fitness centre, five-star Moroccan-style spa, childcare centre, restaurant and café.

As well as providing a luxurious oasis in which women can work out and relax, the club aims to help its members develop their interests and talents. As a result, it offers events and talks, including art exhibitions, fashion shows and lectures.

Membership starts at AED300 (£52) a month, up to AED10,000 (£1,722) a year.



The club has an 85sq m fitness centre, which has been fitted out with the latest Precor kit



THE CLOCK REALLY
STARTS TICKING WHEN
A PROJECT BEGINS...

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PROJECT
MANAGEMENT

MAXIMIZE
BUDGET



The club is a ladies-only facility offering a wide range of equipment and group classes



Fitness First opens in Abu Dhabi

Fitness First Middle East has opened its first club in Abu Dhabi – a ladies-only club in Marina Mall.

The new club is spread over 1,600sq m and offers best-in-class cardiovascular and resistance equipment, in addition to an extensive selection of free weights. Audio and visual entertainment is available throughout the club.

Included in the membership, group exercise timetables encompass all the class offerings from Les Mills, as well as Zumba. Also on offer are yoga classes such as Hatha Yoga, Iyengar Yoga, Power Yoga and Fitness First's exclusive Dynamic Flow and Gentle Flow Yoga, led by Yoga Alliance-certified instructors.

PT is also available through internationally accredited trainers.

In addition, members benefit from keyless security lockers and an exclusive lounge with wireless internet and complimentary drinks.

A second Abu Dhabi club – located in Dalma Mall – is due to open this month. As a part of its expansion plans, Fitness

First Middle East aims to take its estate to 34 clubs across the region by July 2012.

Fitness First Middle East is a subsidiary of the Landmark Group, a leading retail and hospitality conglomerate in the Middle East and India, with clubs in the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Fitness First is a global brand that originated in the UK in 1993. It has since grown into a network of over 430 clubs.



The new Abu Dhabi club offers an exclusive lounge and complimentary drinks

in brief...

San Fran airport yoga studio

San Francisco airport opened what is believed to be the world's first in-airport free yoga studio in January.

The 14sq m studio is located in the airport's brand new Terminal 2 – a space for travellers to escape from the hustle and bustle of the airport, taking time out to practise yoga while they await the departure of their flight.

It's open to anyone who holds a flight ticket, and is equipped with a few yoga mats and chairs. With no instructors or video screens, however, users will need to carry out their own workout.

DiR budget uptake

As announced in *HCM* last year (*HCM* Sept 11, p18), Barcelona-based operator DiR has introduced a low-cost fee which allows members access to its 18 clubs, but during restricted hours only.

More than 20 per cent of members have now taken up this option, but more significantly DiR reports that 15,000 new members have joined as a result of the new offer.

Gold's Texan acquisition

Gold's Gym International has acquired all 11 Spectrum Athletic Clubs in San Antonio, Texas.

Spectrum will continue to operate its 12 clubs in southern California.

Spectrum is owned by private equity firm Brentwood Associates, Los Angeles. Gold's is owned and operated by TRT Holdings, Irving, Texas.

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Dave Monkhouse joins BEE as master trainer

New owner and training director for BEE scheme

BEE, the industry's leading 'peer to peer' customer experience training programme, has a new owner and new programme director. Previously owned by Fitpro and managed by BEE master trainer Lesley Aitken, the programme is now owned by Norwich-based Optimus Consult, which lists David Albutt, former executive secretary of CLOA, as one of its directors.

Optimus has appointed Dave Monkhouse as the new programme director and master trainer with immediate effect.

Monkhouse is an experienced trainer for organisations including Quest, as well as a coach and consultant to the active leisure industry.

BEE trains staff from front-line departments to deliver 'bite-sized' modules to the rest of the organisation, focusing on developing soft skills and changing attitudes and behaviours. BEE will work with customer insight company Leisure-net Solutions to align its programme with Leisure-net's customer research and feedback services, including Net Promoter Score.

Camley joins Olympic Park Legacy Company

Mark Camley has been named as the Olympic Park Legacy Company's (OPLC) director of park operations, responsible for managing the 250 acres (101 hectares) of open space.

One of the first major projects to be undertaken by Camley in his new role is the opening of the park's South Plaza, which is located between the Olympic Stadium and the Aquatics Centre.

Camley says: "To be part of one of Europe's largest regeneration projects is a great opportunity. I want to create a park that is loved by local communities and is visited again and again."

New development chief for Quest

UK quality scheme Quest Sports Development has named management consultant Paul Brivio as its new development manager. The appointment is part of Quest's bid to "refresh and re-invigorate itself".

In his new role, Brivio will be responsible for modernising the scheme to bring it into line with the Quest 2011 Facility Management model – "a flexible, relevant, valuable tool for continuous improvement for all leisure sites".

Brivio has more than 20 years' experience in the leisure industry, from his first role as an assistant leisure centre manager, working his way up to commercial director level.

He says: "I will work to make Quest Sports Development relevant to the current transformation and change agenda. This



Brivio will be responsible for modernising the Quest assessment scheme

means moving away from simply measuring and assessing processes and moving towards a focus on impacts and outcomes."

His role will include supporting sports development professionals to be more productive, creative and innovative.

Kildare takes over as Aquaterra chief executive

Aquaterra Leisure has announced that Antony Kildare has taken up the post of chief executive officer.

A former executive director of East Midlands Development Agency, Kildare's previous roles also include a directorship at Ernst & Young and a period on secondment to the Department for Trade and Industry, where he worked on the Cox Review.

Simon Kaplinsky, chair of the Aquaterra's board, says: "We're absolutely delighted to have secured the services of a chief executive of Antony's standing. He brings with him a superb range of skills and experience gained in industry, investment, public sector and not for profit business and is the ideal person to lead our specialist sports and leisure staff."



Aquaterra's new CEO Antony Kildare previously held a directorship at Ernst & Young

Gladstone expands UK sales team

Gladstone Health and Leisure has expanded its team with two new sales positions.

Ian McGregor has been appointed as regional sales manager for the North of England, while new regional sales manager Kenny Campbell will look after sales and account management for Scotland and Ireland.

McGregor has a 12-year career in the fitness industry, starting out as a fitness instructor before moving into management at Greens Health and Fitness. He has also worked for equipment supplier Technogym.

Kenny Campbell is new to the health and fitness industry.

PEOPLE PROFILE



spenser pession

After spending his childhood in the Italian Alps, Pession was a member of the British Skiing Team from 1992 to 1995, taking part in the 1994 Olympics. He now works as operations manager at Sutton Arena

Was a career in active leisure/sport always your dream?

I was fortunate to find out, at the early age of three, what I was good at and most importantly what I enjoyed doing – skiing and ski racing. I won my first ski competition at the age of three and my sporting career spiralled up from there. When it came to deciding what career to follow as an adult, I tried to re-live my experience as a three-year-old, choosing to do what I thought I was good at and enjoyed doing. This brought me to the leisure industry.

What was the high-point of your competitive skiing career?

Taking part in the 1994 Winter Olympic Games in Lillehammer, Norway, where I came in 31st in the Giant Slalom race. I was British National Champion in 1993.

My career as a youngster peaked in 1985 when I won the World Children's Alpine Ski Championships ("Topolino") in Italy.

You worked as a skiing instructor after your competitive career?

Yes – I wanted to give back to the would-be ski racers what skiing had given me over the years. I spent a number of seasons in Bariloche, Argentina, and in Cervinia, Italy – coaching up-and-coming kids between the ages of 11 and 16.

What made you change your career and start out in fitness?

A long nomadic lifestyle – in between snow seasons – was the reason why I wanted to settle down, as well as having a family. Once I took this decision, I chose to focus on an industry to which I knew I could bring a wealth of knowledge and experience: the sports and leisure industry.

How has your career in fitness progressed?

Once I left the ski racing world, I completed a Sport and Exercise Science

Degree at Brighton University. I then worked in the fitness industry as a fitness instructor and ran Martin Bell Ski & Training Camps in the UK for children's athletic development and racing skills.

I diversified from the fitness to the management line of work by first becoming a lifeguard, then a leisure centre team leader, then a duty manager, to my current role as operations manager.

I remained connected to the ski world throughout. I ski coached in Argentina and Italy over several winter seasons.

I've recently been selected to act, along with other former Olympic athletes, as a motivator to up-and-coming young athletes by accompanying them to watch events at the London 2012 Games.

What is your typical day-to-day?

I run the operations team at Sutton Arena until around 6 or 7pm. I oversee a number of full-time and part-time staff across the site that look after health and safety, activities, events and customer service. Every day is different, which is what makes the day exciting.

What do you think is the biggest weakness in the fitness industry?

One of the biggest problems the fitness industry faces today is finding ways to engage and encourage people to be consistently physically active.

The challenge is to integrate being active as a natural part of people's daily lifestyle – Everyone Active's policy of encouraging five 30-minute activity sessions each week aims to motivate activity in daily life as well as in Everyone Active centres.

The economic climate is also a challenge to our industry – one in which people may have less spending possibilities. 'Pay as you go' options, as well as better value memberships, are essential.

What drives you?

My family – my wife and my son.



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generational differences

• melissa rodriguez • ihrsa research manager

The IHRSA *Trend Report* is a quarterly report that tracks membership trends and consumer attitudes towards health club membership. Conducted in partnership with the Leisure Trends Group in the US, the report examines why people join, stay at and leave their health clubs. While the study is limited to the US, the results are relevant for club operators worldwide. Each quarterly report contains responses and analysis based on the following questions:

1. Are you currently a member of a health club (a fee-paying member with a daily, monthly, seasonal or annual pass)?
2. What keeps you coming back to use the health club you currently belong to?
3. Which of the following are personal goals that lead you to use the health club you currently belong to? (respondents are then given a list from which to choose, including getting fit and overall wellbeing)
4. What keeps you from joining a club?
5. Why did you quit your former club?

The report for the quarter ending 31 December 2011 provides a special focus on Generations X (individuals aged 31–45) and Y (individuals aged 21–30), plus insight into opportunities for operators.

During this quarter, 17 per cent of Generation X and 19 per cent of Generation Y were health club members. The following were the top five reasons why they continue to use their club:

- Overall health/wellbeing
- It's in a convenient location
- To make progress with my personal goals
- Access to group exercise and fitness professionals
- To have fun

Both generations are more likely than Baby Boomers (those aged 46–55) to select “to have fun” as a reason for remaining a health club member. Based on this, as well as the importance that these two segments place on access to group exercise and fitness professionals, club operators must consider offering a variety of on-trend, entertaining fitness programmes – these may go a long way in retaining Generation X and Y members.

Consistent with results from former members overall, cost is the number one reason Generations X and Y cite for



The study identifies the top five reasons why members use their club

leaving their health clubs. “I moved/the location was no longer convenient” was another common reason for leaving, with Generation X more likely to cite this reason than Generation Y.

The IHRSA *Trend Report* also provides insight into the barriers to joining a health club and opportunities for owners and managers in targeting Generations X and Y.

The report is available as a pdf by visiting www.ihrsa.org/research. It's free of charge to IHRSA members, or US\$49.95 for non-members.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Ask an expert: Equipment maintenance and repairs

Joan Carter, vice chair of CYBEX International, offers her thoughts on the topic of service contracts

Service and maintenance contract pricing varies widely based on the equipment type (CV or strength), the number of pieces in a single location, frequency of preventative maintenance, whether emergency visits are included, turnaround times, etc.

Most servicers will customise a contract based on your needs. They should be able to provide you with a list of all items to be cleaned, checked for wear, lubricated, adjusted and items to be recorded such as mileage or usage rates. Make sure you have an opt-out clause built into the agreement, in the event that you want to change the terms or the provider.

Preventative maintenance (PM) is crucial to keep equipment functioning properly and safely. Whether you do it yourself or include it in your maintenance contract, even the best fitness products in the world require periodic maintenance.



PM is crucial, advises CYBEX's Carter

If your service contract includes PMs, they are usually scheduled in advance and downtime can be as little as five minutes for a strength piece or up to 45 minutes for treadmills. For equipment that is down due to a parts failure, common items should be carried in the servicer's inventory and repair can begin when the technician arrives.

For non-standard parts requiring custom painting or manufacturing, delays can be a week or more, depending on the item and manufacturer. A rough guideline is to expect service within 48–72 hours of a problem report and, if a part is ordered, a replacement visit in less than 48 hours of receipt of the part. CV equipment will typically require more maintenance and service than strength, with usage and the manufacturer's recommendations the determining guidelines.

Read more answers at www.ihrsa.org/industryleader



SATS is the leading pan-Scandinavian chain with over 100 clubs in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland

Three chains make their mark in Oslo

Elixia, SATS and now EVO: all three chains are making their mark on the fitness scene in Oslo, capital of Norway – a country which enjoys no VAT on fitness memberships.

Elixia was part of a six-country chain that now is only present in Scandinavia. Its Colosseum club in Oslo – one of the largest clubs in Europe – has 8,500 members enjoying 5,000sq m of space spread over three floors. A large multi-functional hall is shared with the investment company Nordea: Nordea owns the hall, Elixia covers the cost of cleaning and electricity, and usage is shared 50:50.

Group exercise is very popular in Scandinavia – the Colosseum club alone has 20,000 group exercise participants a month, with group exercise classes in the hall catering for 150+ members. New trends are therefore quickly adapted in this market, such as group TRX classes with up to 28 people. Most clubs here offer online class bookings, with attendees having to hand over a ticket to the instructor to take part (waiting lists of up to 50 are not uncommon).

Meanwhile, EVO Fitness has established 20 'compact clubs' in just two years, all of which are located in Oslo. Its facilities are open from 5.00am to midnight, with a turnstile entry system that has bars from floor to ceiling and closed circuit

cameras monitoring the entrance. There is an intercom system that allows members to speak to a live person if there are any problems or emergencies.

The proprietary software developed by EVO, in which the company invested €2m, encompasses online sales, online changes by members to their records, and access to information for management. Membership to the clubs is sold online only, and costs 295 Norwegian krone (€40) a month with monthly cancellation possible. A non-refundable 100 krone electronic key fee is charged each time someone joins (also for stop-and-start members).

Other than twice-daily cleaning, EVO clubs have no personnel costs. Several personal trainers work in each club, but they are freelance and pay the club a small monthly fee. In exchange for below-market rental fees, the personal trainers are asked to perform certain functions, such as an initial assessment or programme design. One personal training regional manager oversees five clubs.

SATS remains the leading pan-Scandinavian chain with a total of 111 clubs in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland. Its main markets are Stockholm (40 clubs) and Oslo (23 clubs). The SATS brand also enjoys high consumer awareness: 99 per cent prompted brand awareness according to a Superbrands Norway 2007 survey.

news in brief

Vivafit opens in Cyprus

On 17 February, the first Vivafit club was opened in northern Cyprus by master franchisees Gizem Mentes and Bulut Erkal.

Irsen Küçük, prime minister of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, cut the ribbon of the club, located in Nicosia. He spoke of the important role that such investments play in the economic development of the country.

As at early March, the club – the first in a predominantly Muslim culture – already had 140 members and, with membership priced from €55–67 a month, had achieved break-even two weeks after opening.

The club offers a studio for pilates, Body Balance and Sh'Bam, a circuit-based gym, a room for nutrition consultations and changing rooms.

events diary

Visit www.ihrs.org/calendar

12 April 2012

Marketing and Selling to Older Adults (Webinar)

10 May 2012

Emerging Technology Strategies to Enhance Membership Growth & Experience (Webinar)

30 August–1 September 2012

13th Annual IHRSa / Fitness Brasil Latin American Conference & Trade Show – São Paulo, Brazil

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Locate a quality IHRSa club at www.healthclubs.com

Small group personal training

'SGPT' can drive penetration of personal training in your club, says a new IHRSA report

According to *The 2011 IHRSA Profiles of Success*, 91 per cent of IHRSA member clubs offer personal training (PT), but most of these have sold PT to fewer than 10 per cent of their members. Step forward small group personal training (SGPT) as a way of further penetrating the member base.

It's really only during the past five or so years, since bootcamp-style classes came into their own, that many clubs have begun offering SGPT. Because the format is so flexible and dependent on the creativity of the trainer, individual programmes may vary dramatically, but certain elements remain consistent: class size, frequency, and a strong focus on each participant's progress.

creating exclusivity

Small groups range in size from four to 20 participants, all engaging in the same activity simultaneously, or in different activities in a circuit-style format. Unlike group exercise classes – which don't limit the number of participants and which are open to all members, at any time, on a drop-in basis – SGPT typically requires students to take part two to three times a week over a series of weeks. Because a commitment is necessary – in fact, it's what members are often paying for – they tend to form tight, cohesive groups, and receive personalised attention that they wouldn't enjoy in a standard group class.

Most SGPT uses equipment that can be employed as a USP. "Why would someone be willing to pay for a small group programme?" asks Pete McCall, an exercise physiologist and spokesperson for ACE. "Well, you get to use equipment that isn't normally available on the floor. It's like VIPs in a nightclub: they get to go into the roped-off section. You're giving your clients a special area to hang out in and special equipment for them to use."

measurable progress

Visible and measurable progress is the third critical component of the SGPT



SGPT gives your members the results they want, as well as improved revenues for the club

class format. To facilitate and document this, McCall suggests that assessments be conducted both at the beginning and end of the series. "Each workout should be a little more difficult than the previous one, and there should be a progression toward a certain training goal," he recommends.

Constant improvement is one of the many reasons that members stick with, and return to, SGPT classes, and what makes them such a success. Because they're motivated by the group environment, the friendships SGPT fosters and the camaraderie it creates, the participants see results. "Through small groups, the club becomes, in reality, that third place the industry is always talking about. It's not the office and it's not home – it's the club, and people get really connected to it," confirms McCall.

select your trainers

One challenge posed by SGPT is training to different levels of participant experience. Often one class has to accommodate both beginners and high-level athletes simultaneously; in such a situation, a trainer has to be hyper-vigilant to provide a more personal experience. This, in turn, makes

identifying and training SGPT trainers critical. Not every one-on-one superstar makes a good small group trainer.

In choosing an SGPT trainer, clubs are advised to look for someone who: is concerned about, and appropriately trained on, safety measures; is a creative programmer; is adept at teaching to different levels; is able to foster inclusiveness; and who possesses an engaging and motivating personality. Few club programmes place such high demands on a trainer's skills as SGPT.

driving revenues

By maximising your club's personal training programme, you can give members the results they want and expect – and the result for your club will be more revenue and improved member retention. *IHRSA's Guide to Personal Training: How to Generate Profits and Improve Member Satisfaction, Second Edition*, sponsored by the American Council on Exercise (ACE), will get you started on the path to both.

To acquire a pdf copy of *IHRSA's Guide to Personal Training: How to Generate Profits and Improve Member Satisfaction*, log on to www.ihrsa.org/personal-training

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FIA UPDATE NEWS

Towards a digital legacy

David Stalker, CEO of the FIA, explains how a new 2012 partnership between the FIA and Sport England will engage consumers to be active and grow memberships

Health Club Management is the FIA's Public Affairs Media Partner



vanguard

We live in a digital age in which consumers are used to buying online, and in which we expect instantaneous outcomes at a click of a button. So it's no real surprise that over the last three years, there has been a huge increase – in fact, a 400 per cent increase – in online searching for places to find, book and play sport and physical activity.

But with no platform to fulfil this consumer desire, we are currently missing out on a prime opportunity to get more people active. Now a new partnership between the FIA and Sport England is set to change all this, helping us capitalise on the gap between interest and fulfilment and ultimately achieve Lord Coe's Olympic bid promise to "create a real and lasting legacy".

the hurdles

The commonly used measures to track sport and physical activity participation rates indicate that participation is growing slowly. We need to boost this trend by removing the obstacles to participation. The latest Google statistics demonstrate that these are no longer purely physical (matters to deal with proximity to services), financial (matters related to affordability) or psychological (matters to deal with personal motivation and stage of change). One of today's highest hurdles to participation is digital (our sector's relatively low adoption of modern technology).

the solution

The new partnership aims to remove this barrier by creating a digital legacy: a world-class customer experience public website to search and find sport and activities in one place.

Scheduled to be live pre-Olympics, the website will provide an easy to use, searchable consumer interface by location or activity. So if someone wants to find an activity close to where they live, they will key in a postcode or region. The website will upload a list of activities, their availability and who to contact to make the booking. Alternatively, if someone

The new website will be a one-stop shop for consumers to search for sport and activities



is inspired to try a new activity, they can search for the activity itself and the website will display the locations at which they can participate.

information is key

Key to the success of the digital legacy project is having accurate information to present to the consumer: details of where the opportunities to be active actually are, with the offering presented in a way that is easily received and understood. Currently this 'front end' information is fragmented at best and inaccessible at worst.

Meanwhile, the 'back end' data so valuable to operators – consumer data, online search stats, etc – is insufficiently used to grow participation. We do not use such data to tailor services and communications to customers at an individual level and to sufficiently 'sweat' our assets. This makes it harder to respond to the opportunities that are presented to us, or to harness the marketing power of major partners.

The initial, searchable 'back end' data for the website will be sourced from Sport England's Active Places and the FIA's membership database and cross-referenced

through the project's partnerships: NGBs, health clubs, leisure centres – anyone who offers sport and physical activity.

Listed organisations, or organisations/consumers who want to list an activity not yet detailed on the site, will be able to add this information, with the details then validated. There will also be a user registration process, which will provide a profile of people searching for activities and booking activities – consumers who are starting to be active or being active more often. This will provide a holistic picture of the demand for sport and physical activity.

the partnership

Creating this 2012 digital legacy is a formidable task, so with the backing of Sport England, the FIA has formed an expert partnership team including The Leisure Database Company, open-source technology specialists Haulmont, and marketing services provider McCann Worldgroup.

And of course your engagement is essential. To capitalise on first mover advantage and grow your membership, contact the digital legacy team: +44 (0)20 7420 8560 / Rachel.Barber@fia.org.uk

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ride24

Hailed as "the ultimate thigh-busting, stamina-draining" challenge, RIDE24 will see teams racing on their bicycles around the Goodwood Motor Circuit in Sussex in a 24-hour relay.

The team which has completed the most laps around the 2.4-mile course over the 24-hour period wins the coveted title.

A rider village will keep racers fed and watered, while physios and mechanics will also be on-hand.

There are various entry and minimum sponsorship options. Monies will go to UK charity Action Medical Research. Details: www.action.org.uk



Take part in a 24-hour bike relay at Goodwood

PHOTOGRAPH BY ACTION MEDICAL RESEARCH



Join 1,200 swimmers in Bournemouth

15 JULY 2012 bournemouth pier to pier swim

Join 1,200 swimmers in Bournemouth's annual, crowd-pulling favourite on behalf of the British Heart Foundation charity.

Starting at 12 noon, teams or individuals will swim the 1.4-mile distance – starting at Bournemouth Pier and finishing at Boscombe Pier.

Entry costs £20 and the aim is to raise £190,000 in total. For more details: www.bhf.org.uk

Trek through the Bolivian peaks



25 OCT–5 NOV 12 andean mountain trek

Choose any charity in this open event that is set in the Cordillera Real highlands – with more than 600 peaks over 5,000m – in western Bolivia. The aim is to climb one of its most imposing giants: Huayna Potosi, which stands at 6,088m.

The journey begins in the capital of La Paz and takes in the scenic heartland of the Aymara Indians and the Incas, as well as Lake Titicaca – one of the highest navigable lakes on earth. The deposit is £675 and minimum sponsorship is £4,450. Details: www.charitychallenge.com

9–10 JUNE 2012 blenheim triathlon

Cancer Research is calling for participants to take part in the Blenheim Triathlon, to raise funds to help find a cure for cancer and to enable more people to hear those all-important words: "all clear".

Set in the stunning location of the Blenheim Palace grounds in Oxfordshire, individuals or teams can choose from two distances: the Super Sprint – a 400m swim, 10km cycle and 2.5km run; or the Sprint – a 750m swim, 20km cycle and 5km run.

For three- to 14-year-olds, there will also be the mini sport kid's duathlon, with various distances available. Details: www.cancerresearchuk.org



Take part solo or in a team



FIBO in Germany attracts over 50,000 visitors from around 60 countries

APRIL

18-21 | SPATEC Europe

Venue Don Carlos Leisure
Resort & Spa, Marbella, Spain
Summary

A two-day forum of meetings between UK and European spa owners, directors and senior personnel, with more than 70 leading international spa suppliers.
Web www.spateceu.com

19-22 | FIBO 2012

Venue Exhibition Centre Essen, Germany
Summary
Over 560 companies attend FIBO showcase products, concepts and solutions for the fitness, wellness and health industries. Show areas cover equipment, products and services, sports nutrition, wellness, beauty and medical fitness.
Web www.fibo.de

25-28 | Russian Fitness Festival

Venue Olympic Stadium, Moscow, Russia
Summary
The mission of the festival is to develop mass physical education and healthy lifestyles in Russia. It includes a conference, fitness convention, trade show and open aerobic championship.
Web www.fitness-convention.ru

27-29 | Australian Fitness & Health Expo

Venue Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre, Sydney, Australia
Summary
Exhibition, seminars and training for the Australasian fitness industry. Offering training techniques, equipment, advice, live demonstrations and new products.
Web www.fitnessexpo.com.au

28-29 | RLSS Regional Training & Networking Event

Venue Hilton Hotel, Warwick
Summary

An event for those in the industry who are looking to get updated in the RLSS UK (Royal Life Saving Society) qualification or gain a new qualification.
Web www.rlssbooking.org.uk

MAY

2-3 | SIBEC UK

Venue Forest of Arden
Marriott, Birmingham, UK
Summary
SIBEC UK brings together 120 of the most important and influential suppliers and buyers of the UK leisure, health and fitness sector. It focuses on the local authority, trust and education markets, with two days of interaction, face-to-face meetings, forums and networking opportunities.
Web www.sibec.co.uk

13-14 | Holistic Health

Venue NEC, Birmingham, UK
Summary
Holistic and complementary therapy exhibitors showcase their latest products, equipment innovations and training courses. The event also hosts an annual educational congress.
Web www.beautyserve.com

13-14 | BeautyUK

Venue NEC, Birmingham, UK
Summary
This show is the Midlands' largest beauty trade exhibition and training congress, which takes place alongside the Holistic Health event.
Web www.beautyserve.com

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everyone's talking about . . .

studio scheduling

When you have lots of members with different interests and a wide variety of classes on offer, what should be scheduled when, and how do you cram it all in?

A friend of mine bemoans the fact that, at her gym, the yoga class comes after Spinning. So, the yogis have to stand around waiting while the bikes are put away and then lay their mats down on a sweaty floor, in a studio made cool by air con for a high intensity CV class. Not the most zen start to a yoga session.

But is there any way to avoid this? Should yoga come first, or would the room then be too warm for a vigorous group cycling class? Would this in any case be a bad move commercially – with yoga generally accommodating fewer members than other classes, should

it always be consigned to a later slot? Or might the high loyalty levels among yoga attendees make it worthwhile scheduling this class at peak times?

With operators having to balance the few hours of peak time against the needs of lots of members and lots of classes, this is indeed a dilemma.

So is there a 'one size fits all' solution, or do the criteria vary from club to club depending on what they are trying to achieve with their scheduling? One might assume that getting maximum visits is the most important thing, but this might not be the case for all operators.

With pressure on peak times, should classes be made shorter to achieve

greater throughput, or is this self-defeating? Little and often might suit some, but those who find it difficult to get to the gym might feel short-changed with less than an hour.

Should operators take heed of instructor preferences about when they want to work, in order to maintain a happy and motivated workforce, or do staff need to fit in with what works for the club? Should the popular instructors be put in the best slots, or scheduled to boost attendance in the off-peak hours?

We ask our panel of experts for their thoughts on how to approach studio scheduling...

WHAT TIPS DO YOU HAVE FOR SCHEDULING? EMAIL US: HEALTHCLUB@LEISUREMEDIA.COM

phillip mills

les mills international • ceo



“Smart timetabling is one of the fastest and simplest ways to increase attendance numbers – the key to success in our industry. The trick is to analyse class popularity via attendance metrics and give your members more of what they want. It's that basic, but many clubs don't get it right, often timetabling around instructor availability instead.

Our research shows that there are five basic genres people want when it comes to group exercise: strength and weights, cycling, mind-body, dance and martial arts. A highly effective timetable should offer programming to reflect these needs, in the timeslots consumers most want them.

Keep it simple: identify your most popular programmes and your most popular instructors, and place them both across your peak hours. Less is more – I know from my own clubs that a huge variety of programmes doesn't grow attendance. Yet I often see timetables around the world with as many as 40 different class types – a nightmare for management and for members wanting a regular schedule of their favourite workouts. Overall, focus on keeping programming simple, results-driven and motivating.”

michelle bletso

everyone active • group fitness development manager



“We make timetable decisions based on black-and-white statistical information, not on a gut feeling. The criteria we consider when scheduling the timetable are the demographics, target market, club objectives, age and gender of current market, mix of facilities (for example, if there is a crèche) and whether our

sessions complement other classes being run locally.

We make sure there is a balance between hard and fast sessions, strength and toning, and sessions for unwinding. When starting a timetable off, it's best to ensure a balance and the attendance numbers will dictate what happens from there.

At peak times, we run sessions that fit the most people into one space, so non-equipment classes like Zumba and Body Combat are good. We find it's best to avoid yoga and pilates at peak time, as numbers are more limited. Short classes – 45 minutes, or even 30 minutes – also mean you can accommodate more people at the peak period.

Having your best instructors just before peak time, or just after, allows you to create more room, as their clients are more likely to be motivated to come later, or finish work earlier.”



Does less mean more? Some experts say scheduling a huge variety of classes doesn't make for greater attendance

tom withers

gladstone • head of sales



As a software provider, our piece in the jigsaw is to gather the data and feed it back to the operator, so they can make informed business decisions.

Gladstone provides the tools to capture data on the sessions – such as class occupancy and who's attended – and provides reports for the operator. For example, we provide a class/course

viability report, which shows the classes scheduled for the next week, the maximum and minimum capacity, and the current numbers signed up. However, the final decision on getting the right mix of classes is down to the operator.

Traditionally we struggled to persuade health clubs that recording class bookings was important – since classes were part of the membership, they were paid for whether or not they were well attended. However, in the last five years, we've seen a change, with clubs wanting more information about course programming in order to avoid over-subscribed classes and the cost of running unpopular classes. Now operators want to know how to use the data to provide the right customer service. Retention is all about understanding the customer and giving them what they want, including the right mix of classes.”

neil withington

physicals fitness club • owner and manager



I change the studio timetable every six months, basing the decision mainly on members' and instructors' feedback and industry trends. The change isn't always popular, but it does expose members to other classes, and I'm a great believer in cross-training.

Because we're an independent club, we can respond quickly to trends and I like looking out for the next thing. We were one of the first UK clubs to offer Body Pump and were an early adopter of Spin.

Now I'm trialling five Wattbikes for small group exercise classes.

I know our members well enough to anticipate what will be popular. Although it has softened, this was once a hardcore fitness club, so classes with an emphasis on fun – such as Zumba – go down less well than serious fitness. For this reason, I sold the studio space at dead time to a Zumba instructor and asked for a concession for our members. This generated an income, some more memberships and gave members more choice.

I've noticed that the peak slot has shifted forward: it used to begin at 6.30pm, but now it's 5.30pm until around 8.30pm. We start the more relaxing sessions at 7.30pm: people say they are too energised for bed if they are lively too late in the evening.”

MARK MANTELL

The head of Spirit Health Clubs talks to Kate Cracknell about a deep-rooted service culture, competing with the budget clubs, and the benefits of being part of a large hotel group

I think hotel clubs can sometimes be lazy, putting on a single member of staff and letting the environment try and sell itself," says Mark Mantell, operations manager UK & Ireland for Spirit Health Clubs (InterContinental Hotels Group – IHG). "But I believe you always have to strive to engage people – and even more so since the arrival of the budget clubs."

He continues: "I personally think low-cost clubs are a good thing: they're great for someone like me who just wants to get in, do a hard workout and get out. And the new market dynamic is good for the customer too, as it's really kept operators on their toes."

"However, like most operators, we've felt the pinch since the budget operators have arrived. To justify your price point, it's now more important than ever to articulate a clearly defined and very obviously different product. Members expect more these days, and mid-market and hotel operators need to show an increased commitment to them, with higher levels of engagement. There



needs to be a step change, whether in retention or service or whatever.

"For us, the obvious opportunity to differentiate ourselves comes from the fact that we're part of the world's biggest hospitality company: IHG has 4,500 hotels around the world, with a strong service culture that we also embrace within our clubs. The depth of that culture, and the support and training that's in place to ensure it's consistently delivered across the Group, is unrivalled I think.

"A lot of operators will tell you they provide excellent customer service, and they certainly aspire to that, but they don't actually back it up with any sort of service delivery training programme. It's not just about being polite and friendly. It's about looking through the eyes of the member at all times, understanding exactly what each individual wants and not cutting corners.

"The other benefit of being part of IHG is the ability to offer a whole host of additional benefits to our members: discounts on hotel breaks, for example, as well as on food and beverage in the hotel lounges and restaurants after their workout. There are coffee mornings and lots of social evenings – curry nights,

quiz nights, race nights – and events such as Christmas parties held in the hotel facilities. Hopefully our members feel they're not just part of the club but part of a bigger picture.

"The club managers also work very much as members of the hotel management teams. They have their own business to drive, but they're very conscious of the role they play in delivering a broader experience for both members and hotel guests."

a sporting background

Mantell joined the fitness industry from a background in playing and coaching sport. "I was a professional swimming coach in Australia for a while, where I used to train kids up to national standard." Back in the UK, he played rugby for Blackheath and even turned his hand to Aussie Rules Football, representing Great Britain at the inaugural World Cup.

Moving into the fitness industry, and up through the ranks, Mantell went into regional management with Hilton Hotels before joining IHG in 2008 as head of Spirit. "Since then, I've also had other roles within IHG. The health club industry can be very insular, and it's nice to be part of a wider organisation where you have lots of opportunities to diversify and develop.

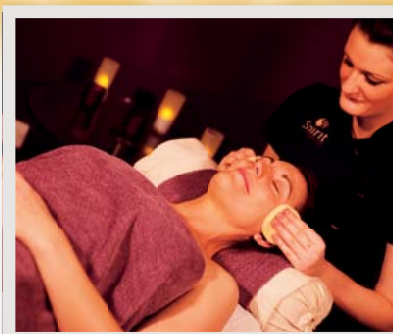
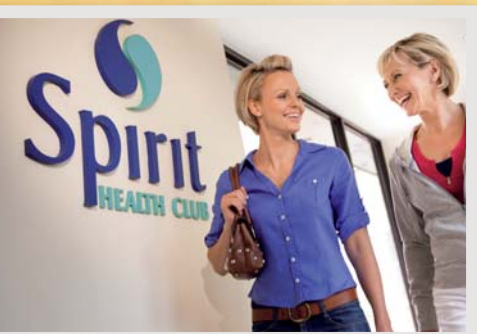
Those other roles have included a 12-month secondment to the hotel side of the business as area sales director:

"I think any good organisation is always looking to give its leaders some cross-exposure. We'd had a very successful year or two at Spirit and we were interested to see if we could take some of the thinking, some of the strategies, across the company."

It makes a change for the hospitality sector to believe it could be learning from the fitness industry, rather than vice versa, I suggest. "You're absolutely right. However, at Spirit we had successfully created a target-driven



Mantell says effective club operation is "about looking through the eyes of the member at all times" and understanding what each individual wants



culture and a sense of unity across a geographically diverse estate: providing cohesion for field-based employees, keeping them target-driven and giving them a sense of community. Those learnings were of value across the board."

the spirit estate

Spirit currently manages 39 commercial clubs that cater for both external members and hotel guests (see information box, p34). All are in IHG hotels: 37 in Holiday Inns and two in Crowne Plazas. There are also seven unmanned, IHG hotel guest-only facilities – "but those are really part of the overall hotel offering, rather than a separate profit centre".

So what's the relationship between Spirit and IHG? "Our strategy is completely aligned with that of the

Spirit currently runs 39 commercial clubs within IHG hotels, as well as seven hotel guest-only clubs, with a total of 45 beauty rooms supplied by Dermalogica

hotels division in that we are all striving to put the guest at the heart of what we do, but to a degree Spirit operates as a separate entity – a business within a business, with complete autonomy over commercial drivers such as our marketing approach, systems and so on. Where we benefit is that we can be part of any larger initiative that's adding positive value to the company, and we're also fully supported when it comes to things like customer service training."

Mantell continues: "The IHG model has a number of different ownership groups. We operate hotels in three different ways – as a franchisor, a manager, and on an owned and leased

basis. Our business model focuses on managing and franchising hotels, while our business partners own the bricks and mortar. Spirit Health Clubs is part of what we call the UK&I (UK & Ireland) managed estate, providing direct business support within an overall hotel management contract.

"We're not in every single Holiday Inn, although we are in the majority of the 65 hotels within the UK&I managed estate. However, ultimately it's up to the owner to decide if they want our brand in their hotel – if so, although we don't own the bricks and mortar, they incorporate our recommendations when building the gym, and we



about spirit health clubs

The Spirit brand is part of the InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) UK and Ireland managed estate. It began as Fitness for Industry in 1981, providing corporate management contracts and providing preventative healthcare programmes for employees. This extended to management contracts within hotels, including Paramount, Trusthouse Forte and Copthorne.

Following several mergers and acquisitions of its parent hotel groups, in 2000 the company was rebranded Spirit Health & Fitness Ltd and is now exclusive to IHG in the UK and Ireland.

Spirit currently operates 39 fully managed commercial clubs – 37 within Holiday Inn and two within Crowne Plaza – plus seven non-membership (hotel guest only) gyms. All have swimming pool, Life Fitness gym, sauna, spa pool and steamroom; 10 have dedicated group exercise studios (the remainder use hotel meeting rooms); and there are a total of 45 beauty therapy rooms across the estate, supplied by Dermalogica.

Peak membership fees range from £29 a month at the smaller 'band 1' clubs (up to 500 members) to £60 at larger 'band 3' clubs (around 1,000 members). Off-peak and corporate discounts are available, as well as for annual pre-payment.

Spirit also has a training academy for staff and external students.

All Spirit gyms offer members a swimming pool, Life Fitness gym, sauna, spa pool and steamroom, while 10 facilities also have dedicated exercise studios

run it for them on an autonomous, management contract basis.

"We've had a successful couple of years, and a number of franchisees who don't currently have Spirit in-house are beginning to look at the added value we might be able to offer if they were to convert their existing facility to our brand. Not only that, but independent hotel operators are also coming to us, looking to relaunch as Holiday Inn and take on the Spirit Health Clubs brand."

Expansion into other IHG hotel brands – InterContinental, Staybridge Suites, Hotel Indigo – is also a possibility going forward. "At this stage, though, we're not turning the Spirit brand over to an independent franchisee to put the badge above the door and do their own thing. It's all controlled and managed," explains Mantell. "We're also not actively looking to operate in hotel brands outside of IHG at this stage, although who knows what the future might hold."

pride in the brand

So who is the typical Spirit member? "We tend to be popular with the older demographic – 75 per cent of our members are over the age of 35, with 46 per cent over the age of 50. Many of our members would literally run a mile at

the thought of 22 treadmills in a row with loud music and bright lights. We focus on creating an environment where the member feels supported and at ease.

"For a number of reasons – from this unimposing environment, to our hospitality and service levels, to the added extras that come from being part of a hotel – people have actively chosen us. The important thing now is that we ensure our employees appreciate that. If you're in a marketplace with a couple of budget clubs and a couple of high-end clubs, staff might begin to feel they're a poor cousin – almost apologetic for not having as many facilities as David Lloyd, almost apologetic for charging more than a budget club.

"That's been a big focus for us in recent years, helping particularly our younger staff to recognise that while they personally might prefer a big gym with 20 treadmills, not everyone wants that. There will always be people who are drawn to low-cost clubs, or to a club with tennis courts. That's fine. That's not our battle to fight. But we're a preferred product for thousands of members who are fully aware of all the options and who have chosen us specifically. Provided our staff are confident in who we are and what we

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As part of the IHG Group, Spirit members benefit from discounts on food and beverage in the hotel bars and restaurants, as well as on hotel breaks

stand for – to the point that members and prospects can see that manifested in our clubs on a daily basis – I don't believe we should feel under pressure. We call this being 'brand-hearted'.

"We've therefore done a lot of work over the last few years in terms of understanding what the Spirit brand is. Any one of our team members in our clubs should now be able to tell you about the demographic profile of our brand as well as their own club. We've created a brand turnkey based on an awareness of who our members are, what they like, what their interests are, the reasons they're with Spirit. We've done all types of surveys into what our members want out of life. We now have, I strongly believe, a clear brand identity based on distinct and relevant USPs.

"The next step will be looking at how we communicate this to our members. We have to make sure we employ people with the right behaviours, who can communicate on the right level and using the right language with all the different user groups at our clubs."

engaging members

So what projects is Mantell most excited about at the moment? "Something that's worked very well for us is an initiative we launched last year called The Winning Spirit, tying in with Holiday Inn's sponsorship of the Olympic Games.

"All our existing and new members receive a passport, which contains their bronze, silver and gold goals. A bronze goal would typically be a behavioural goal rather than an outcome goal: coming to the gym twice a week for the first eight weeks, for example. Silver goals tend to be more outcome-orientated, and then there's the aspirational gold goal, which has to be achieved by the start of the Games.

"Even if you join the programme a month before the Olympics, although you'd have very short-term goals, you would still have behavioural opportunities to change something. And everyone who completes one of their goals goes into a national draw, where they can win some great prizes like weekends away.

"It's also a great tool that all our instructors can use on the gym floor. Rather than having a generic retention system where we say: 'Let's get people into appointments, let's get them back for assessments,' this is something tangible the guys can walk around with and discuss with members.

"Even if a new member has used a gym for years and doesn't want a full induction, we would still arrange to

meet them for their first workout. We might chat to them while they warm up, for example, just talking to them about their goals along the lines of: 'As an experienced exerciser, you know as well as I do how important it is to set goals, so what shall we think about for your first goal? In fact, let's record that on this Winning Spirit passport.' The initiative allows us to get quality contact with everyone. Just as importantly, we're setting the expectation that we'll contact them again in a few weeks to upgrade their goal."

And how about going forward? "I think it would have to be the opportunity to take the Spirit brand to new places. After a couple of years of consolidation, there's real interest at the moment in what we're doing – hotel operators are seeing the value of what Spirit could bring to their business and are proactively coming to us.

"Ultimately I'd like to see if we can refine Spirit as a product to be passed on to other hotel operators. To be able see a brand that you're passionate about grow – that's a very exciting prospect."



kate cracknell
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FAMILY MATTERS

TOM WALKER TALKS TO
THE FOUNDERS OF GOGO,
THE LARGEST FAMILY-
OWNED HEALTH CLUB
OPERATION IN FINLAND



When compared with other western European fitness markets, the Finnish health club sector is still maturing. The main Finnish players are franchise-based CMS Finland (part of the CMS International chain founded by Mike Chaet in 1965); the women-only Lady Line; Motivus; and Finnbody. The only international chains to have significant presence are SATS and Elixia.

According to IHRSA figures, only around 12 per cent of the 5.3 million-strong population are members of a health club, but this number is slightly misleading. Publicly-owned and operated – and somewhat old-fashioned – gyms at sports centres, schools and social clubs

are still immensely popular, especially among young males. A vast majority do not offer memberships and operate on a 'pay as you go' basis. As a result, the major players only hold around 22 per cent of the total market – a market that's worth a reported €350m a year.

The fragmentation is also clear in club ownership. It's estimated that there are over 650 health clubs in the country, yet of the leading chains only two – CMS and Lady Line – have more than 20 clubs.

FAMILY FOCUS

Set within this landscape, the family-owned GoGo ranks as a medium-sized business with its six clubs. The company opened its first site in Tampere – the



second largest city in Finland – in 1990 and has since developed into a chain with two distinct products. It currently operates three full-service GoGo Liikuntakeskus-branded sites and three GoGo Express budget clubs. The latest openings were a full-service club in Hervanta in January 2012 and a budget club in Jyväskylä in October 2011.

Based in Tampere, the company is wholly-owned and operated by two sisters – Taru Vähätalo and Päivi Aholaita-Mäenpää. Both have spent their entire careers within the fitness industry, starting out as fitness instructors before deciding to set up their own company when the eldest, Vähätalo, was just 25.

“We’re definitely the largest family-owned fitness operator in Finland,” says Vähätalo, who adds that, despite the fragmentation, the local fitness sector has always been fairly uniform in its offering.

She explains: “The fitness industry in Finland has been homogeneous for a long time. For years now every club, regardless of location, has had the same opening hours, same equipment, even the same price structure. It’s starting to change with the advent of budget clubs, but that is only a recent development.”

BREAKING THE MOULD

When the sisters set out to open their first club, they were aware of this uniformity and set out to find a USP.

NEW OPENINGS

GoGo Liikuntakeskus

Hervanta: Opened January 2012

Current membership: 1,200

Target: 2,000 by end of 2012;

2,500–3,000 by end of 2013

Total floor size: 2,000sq m, including 500sq m dedicated to group exercise

Equipment supplier: Star Trac

GoGo Express Jyväskylä:

Opened October 2011

Current membership: 1,500

Target: 2,000 by end of 2012

Total floor space: 1,100sq m

Investment: €500,000

Equipment suppliers:

Life Fitness, Concept2, Jordan

The family-owned fitness brand currently has six sites – three full service GoGo clubs and three GoGo Express budget clubs

Their background as group exercise instructors – combined with a research mission across North America to discover the latest trends – offered them an obvious answer: “We took the decision to invest in group exercise,” says Vähätalo. “We saw the potential in becoming a leader in exercise classes. Although we secured the site of the first club (Tampere Park) at the end of 1988, we spent months researching and looking for ideas, ‘collecting’ the classes we wanted to include before finally opening in January 1990.”

All GoGo clubs have large studio spaces: the biggest group zone at Tampere Park is 300sq m (3,200sq ft). Few could have predicted the emergence of the likes of Zumba, so it seems that the sisters showed remarkable foresight – the huge spaces are perfect for catering for the larger group-based exercises that have taken the world by storm in the past few years.

Each GoGo Liikuntakeskus offers 70 hours of group exercise every week – although the new club, which opened in January 2012, at present offers 52 hours as it currently has fewer members than the more established clubs.

Vähätalo explains that having the best selection of classes for members to choose from has been their goal since ▶



► the launch of the first club. "Group exercise is our passion," she says. "We've both been instructing classes for over 25 years and have formal training to back it up – I'm a physiotherapist and Päivi is an occupational therapist, so we know what works and how to get results. We also want to be at the forefront of trends. We're still the only operator in Finland to offer all 10 Les Mills programmes."

A look at the weekly menu of classes reveals that each GoGo also offers TRX, circuits, group cycling, dance-based classes and pilates – as well as age-specific classes ranging from sessions for parents with babies and toddlers through to sessions for people aged 70+.

It is a truly impressive assortment. The ethos of the full-service GoGo Liikuntakeskus is to build a community around the selection of group classes.

"We describe our target market as consisting of normal people who merely want to keep fit – and have fun while doing so," Vähätalo says. "We want people to come to us and feel at home and make friends through the classes they attend. We want them to feel that they are cared for and ensure they achieve the results they want."

GOING BUDGET

With this in mind, the pair's decision to branch out and open a budget club concept might at first seem a bit odd. Not so, however, when Vähätalo reveals the motivation behind the move: to beat any potential competition to market.

"We came across the McFit concept in 2005 while visiting Germany. We looked at it and our first impression was 'oh no, imagine if this comes to Finland!'" After a bit of reflection, however, we realised that it would probably only be a matter of time until somebody did open a budget offering, so we decided that it would be better to do it ourselves first."

GoGo's budget clubs have a customer profile that is 70 per cent male, while 70 per cent of class attendees at the full-service clubs are female

It took nearly three years until Vähätalo and Aholaite-Mäenpää found a suitable site for the first GoGo Express in the Tampere district of Lielahti. Opening hours for the 1,000sq m club were set from 6.00am–10.00pm and the price point at €18 a month. Unlike at the larger, full service sites, exercise classes were reduced to a minimum. The only group element at the Express sites are the virtual group cycling classes that use Star Trac kit and an automated DVD. Express sites are manned with just one member of staff at all times.

Vähätalo admits that, prior to the launch, she was worried they might be creating a cheaper alternative to their existing full service product and as a result lose members. Those fears were unfounded – a statement that can be confirmed by looking at the Express membership demography compared to that of the full-service clubs. "Around 70 per cent of our GoGo Express members are male," she says. "These are guys who are happy to come in, do their thing and then leave. When you compare that with the composition of our group classes in the full-service clubs – where 70 per cent are women – you can see that the two products complement each other rather well."

The success of the Express concept has led to a further two GoGo Express sites being launched – one facility in 2010 (also in Tampere) and another in late 2011 (in the city of Jyväskylä). Not only do these Express sites not pull members away from the full-service clubs as Vähätalo initially feared, but in fact they often act as 'feeders' to their larger sister facilities.

"What we do is that, after a certain period, we offer all GoGo Express members a taster offer – say a week's free membership – at the full-service club. We found that setting our budget membership at €18 considerably lowers the threshold for many to come and try the product out. After making that initial commitment to exercise regularly, we've then seen that many are prepared to upgrade to the full-service clubs if offered the opportunity."

Conversion is also helped by the fact that, at €55 a month, the full-service GoGo Liikuntakeskus membership is still cheaper than many competitors: a quick web search reveals that the two Elia clubs in Tampere offer off-peak memberships at €60 a month, while the cheapest full monthly membership option is €69 – if you're prepared to sign up for two years.

FUTURE

The GoGo Express club in Jyväskylä was the company's first outside the city of Tampere, where the sisters have lived most of their lives. Vähätalo hasn't ruled out entry into the Finnish capital Helsinki, where the market is much more saturated, but says the next club will be a second GoGo Express in Jyväskylä.

"We've just opened two new sites, so apart from the planned Jyväskylä opening, it's a case of waiting to see how the market develops," she says. "The main future plan is to see whether my two daughters are interested in joining me in the business. They're 25 and 23 years old and the eldest is already a club manager at one site. I've told them they've got another three years to decide whether they want to commit to a career within GoGo, and I hope they do. It would free up my time to seek new sites more actively."



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RHIANON WILLIAMS ASKS THE EXPERTS FOR THEIR THOUGHTS ON WHAT'S HOT IN GROUP EXERCISE

PHILLIP MILLS

CEO, Les Mills International

I've been involved in the fitness business for more than 30 years, and this is one of the most exciting times I've seen. There is a growing awareness of the need to combat inactivity and obesity, and as an industry we're perfectly poised to help. It's all about motivating people to exercise – that is the fundamental key to successful fitness facility management, and the industry is just becoming aware that group exercise is one of our most effective ways of doing that.



While many members are opting to stop paying £50 a month at their traditional facility in favour of £15-a-month budget clubs, there is another – less well-publicised – trend in which huge numbers are paying £100+ to use micro-gyms, which offer only large and small group exercise classes. In the US and elsewhere, thousands of micro-gyms are opening under brands like Orangetheory, Crossfit, SoulCycle, Kosama, Title Boxing, Pure Yoga, Omni and Fitness Together.

These operators charge up to US\$30 per class or US\$200 a month. Their value proposition is short, high intensity interval training (H.I.I.T.) workouts that get fast results, and a high quality class experience. The fact is that people are prepared to pay for what they truly value, and traditional facility operators need to capitalise on this trend. Les Mills will release its own small group/H.I.I.T. offering later this year, designed to target a distinct audience who are increasingly demanding short, sharp, time-effective, challenging workouts.

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WORLD
FOCUS

BOOM! offers classes such as Disco BOOM!, with pumping music and glitter balls

TRENDING NOW

HILARY GILBERT

MD, BOOM! indoor cycling centre

When asked to comment on what's hot in group exercise, I thought about what everybody in the industry is talking about at the moment: lunchtime workouts, Tempo Pilates, Hot Bikram Yoga, Zumba, and last but not least, indoor cycling. You can now do everything from Disco Cycle to charity marathon cycles, Holistic Cycle and Latin Cycle. Some studios in the US are even doing Mardi Gras Rides, and one studio in New York City offers a Beyonce and Jay Z Ride.

What is it about all these different activities that make them the 'IT'



activities? I believe there are four main themes: convenience, extreme athletics, 'for charity' and enhanced atmosphere – all of which equal added enjoyment.

It's about creating a buzz within a workout. People love the entertainment value of group exercise classes like Zumba, where you dance around shaking your hips for 45 minutes, as well as the all-out party atmosphere of Disco Cycle, which comes complete with glitter balls and tracks like It's Raining Men pumping out across the crowd.

It seems reformer pilates won't do any more either – at least, not when you can get the deluxe group fitness version instructed to hip tunes.

The bottom line is that plain old working out isn't going to cut it – people are smarter, hipper, more focused on what they want than ever before. The 'IT' is what sells right here, right now. ▶

“A QUALITY GROUP
FITNESS OFFERING
CAN TRANSFORM
A FACILITY’S
MEMBER NUMBERS,
RETENTION AND
PRICING”

PHILLIP MILLS



Micro-gyms such as Orangetheory (above left) and SoulCycle (above right) focus on large and small group exercise classes

GREG SELLAR

Partner, GRAVITY UK

It might be easier to talk about what's not hot in group exercise at the moment. Why is it that almost every major health club chain and local authority in the country has deliberately tried to make their programme offering exactly the same as their competitors?



I train in three clubs in central London. All of them have exactly the same classes, and those have been the same for over 10 years. Operators change their showers, café areas, weights, cardio equipment and studio bikes every few years, but are happy to let the programming in the group exercise studio remain the same for over a decade. Why? I believe it's part laziness and part fear, as well as a lack of both respect for proper training and knowledge of the great things on offer.

I think the future is about tapping into smarter programming that develops fitness levels, continually improving them over time. It's no use getting someone to a point of relative fitness and just keeping them there – you want them to keep coming back for further improvements. That's how numbers are not just sustained but grown.

Personal training methodology has developed and is based on scientific research. The future of group exercise needs to be the same. It needs to evolve and change every year within a fitness facility. What's current now won't be current next year, and timetables need to reflect that.

If you're an operator reading this and you're serious about moving on, I would suggest exploring concepts such as Group BOSU, Fitness-fx, CXT Cross



Programming must develop fitness levels

Training, Nike Training Club, Studio H.I.I.T./Tabata, I Move Freely, Freestyle Fitness Yoga, Fitness Pilates, Group X Kettlebells, Ballroom Fitness, Fight Klub, Armageddon, ViPR for group training and Reebok EasyTone Step.

“GROUP EXERCISE NEEDS TO EVOLVE AND
CHANGE EVERY YEAR WITHIN A FACILITY”

GREG SELLAR



The POUND workout sees Crunch members drum along to a hip playlist

DONNA CYRUS

SVP of programming, Crunch

From TV sensations like *Dancing with the Stars*, *Glee* and *Smash* to the highly anticipated movie adaptation of *Rock of Ages*, there's an emerging pattern of TV and movies centred around dance and musical performance. It's no coincidence that the hottest trends in group exercise reflect this.

At Crunch, we aim to consistently add the most inventive and exciting classes to our group fitness schedule each season. Currently we offer POUND, the rock-out workout that requires attendees to drum along to a killer playlist, all while doing a full body workout. We also have Zumba Sentao, the newest craze in Zumba, which is offered exclusively at Crunch and which



sees members grooving to spicier Zumba music, using a chair as the only prop.

The latest and most dynamic addition to Crunch's ever-popular Broadway Dance Series is TRACES. Based on the off-Broadway theatrical performance of the same name, this class combines dance with street performance and circus elements to deliver a workout as unique and thrilling as the show itself.

We're always looking for the latest and greatest in entertainment to incorporate into group fitness classes.



Crunch: Incorporating entertainment

"MORE THAN ANYTHING, GROUP EXERCISE CLASSES THRIVE ON THE SOCIAL ASPECT"

MATT GLEED

MATT GLEED

TRX master trainer, UK

Traditional group exercise classes are being challenged in a big way by smaller, PT-influenced classes that combine the technical coaching and individual attention that you would expect from one-to-one training sessions.



Incorporating equipment such as the TRX Suspension Trainer and Rip Trainer, kettlebells, ViPR, core bags, plyometric platforms and battle ropes into a group training environment will attract members who are currently not using a personal trainer, but may be looking to add variety to their workouts.

It's vital to keep on top of industry developments and trends and make sure you're offering classes that are varied and dynamic. More than anything though, group exercise classes thrive on the social aspect. If they're not fun and engaging, they're not going to appeal to your members.



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BRAIN-BODY CONNECTION

Terry Eckmann, PhD,
explores the impact of
exercise on the ageing brain

Ageing and brain health is a topic of great interest as the older population continues to grow. In 1900, average life expectancy was approximately 47 years, while today's life expectancy is roughly 78. It's estimated that women who now reach the age of 65 will have an average life expectancy of almost 85, while men who make it to 65 can expect to live to 82. Longer life expectancy brings with it the need to maintain a healthy body and brain as the foundation for leading the fullest, most productive life possible.

Neuroscientists are gaining valuable information about the brain-body connection. In fact, we have learned more about the brain in the past 10 years than we did

in the previous century.

Innovative new imaging techniques allow researchers to study the workings of the human brain in action, which has opened a vast frontier of knowledge on cognition, memory and learning throughout life.

What neuroscientists have discovered in the past five years alone paints a riveting picture of the biological relationship between the body and the brain. The message is loud and

clear: what is good for the body is also good for the brain. The 'use it or lose it' principle refers to brain health as well as to muscle and cardiovascular fitness, with exercise now viewed as one of the most important predictors of brain health throughout a person's life span.

Neuroscientists have shown that the brain stays 'plastic', or changeable, in later life. Neurons (nerve cells) should remain alive and be able to maintain and form new connections and networks in response to learning. What this means is that, just as with muscle and cardiovascular health, the brain is able to change in response to exercise and other positive lifestyle choices at the age of nine months or 90 years.

To begin to see how exercise can positively impact brain functioning throughout the ageing process, it helps to have an understanding of the brain and how it works.

ABOUT THE BRAIN

There is no greater or more complex system than the human brain. This amazing connection of neurons weighs approximately 3–4lbs and is responsible for all of our thoughts, emotions and behaviours. About the size of two fists together with knuckles touching, the brain accounts for nearly 2 per cent of the body's weight, yet consumes around 20 per cent of its oxygen and 20 per cent of its glucose. Itself comprised of 78 per cent water, it also needs around eight to 12 glasses of water a day and around 8 gallons of blood an hour for optimal functioning.

The brain has about 100 billion neurons that can connect many times to form synaptic connections. Each neuron has an electrical chemical response, initially fired from the nucleus and then carried down the axon – the long arm of the neuron that carries electricity and chemicals to communicate with another nerve cell.

At the end of the axon, the chemicals jump across a space called the synapse and lock into the neuron's dendritic receptors. Dendrites are the finger-like projections of the neuron.

“We’ve learned more about the brain in the past 10 years than we did in the previous century”



Active minds: Exercise is now seen as one of the most important predictors of brain health through a person's life span

When we learn something new and when we exercise, we grow dendrites and dendritic branches, thereby increasing the brain's ability to store and transmit information.

As early as age 40, however, we start to lose approximately 5 per cent of brain volume every decade of life. Alzheimer's Disease International, based in the UK, estimates that there are 35.6 million people living with dementia worldwide – a brain disorder that seriously affects a person's memory, thinking and reasoning skills, the most common form of which is Alzheimer's disease. Women appear to be more susceptible: in the US, approximately 16 per cent of women aged 71 and older are believed to have Alzheimer's or another form of dementia, compared with 11 per cent of men.

Alzheimer's usually disease begins after the age of 65, but it's not a normal part of ageing. Age is one of the most important risk factors, but genetics and lifestyle choices also play a major role: approximately one-third of brain ageing is down to genetics and the other two-thirds is down to lifestyle. Ageing is a continuous process from birth though. That means Alzheimer's, like heart disease, doesn't start at age 60 or 70, but early in life.

One-third of brain ageing is down to genetics and two-thirds is down to lifestyle factors

Keeping the brain and body active may be among the most important ways to reduce risk and possibly prevent the disease. Indeed, studies suggest that exercise can lower the risk of dementia by 50–60 per cent, and decrease Alzheimer's risk by 60 per cent.

So the best way to guard against neurodegenerative disease is to build a strong brain. Aerobic exercise accomplishes this by strengthening connections between brain cells, creating more synapses, developing neurons and increasing dendritic branches. In 2004, Weuve et al studied 18,766 women aged 70–81 and found that those with the highest energy expenditure had a 20 per cent lower chance of being cognitively impaired in memory and intelligence tests. The research indicated positive results even with modest walking levels of 90 minutes a week, and best results from four hours' running or 12 hours' walking a week.

BRAIN AGEING WITHOUT EXERCISE

However without exercise, the heart, lungs and muscles work less efficiently together. When that happens, the brain gets less of the blood, oxygen and glucose so vital to its functioning. Lack of physical activity is also a risk factor for heart disease, diabetes, cancer, stroke, obesity and high blood pressure, which in turn can also have an effect on brain function.

The mental and physical diseases we face in the ageing process are directly tied to our cardiovascular and metabolic systems. For example, as insulin levels drop throughout the ageing process, glucose has a harder time getting into the body's cells to fuel them, causing blood glucose levels to increase. This raises the risk of diabetes – which in turn increases the risk of dementia by 65 per cent – and creates waste products that damage blood vessels and increase the risk of stroke and Alzheimer's. ▶

Beginning a regular exercise programme at any age can bring benefits to the brain

TABLE 1. THE EFFECTS OF 30 MINUTES OF MODERATE TO VIGOROUS AEROBIC ACTIVITY

Stimulates brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), which helps neurons and dendrites grow and thrive
Causes neurons to fire more efficiently
Increases levels of vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) and insulin-like growth factor (IGF-1), which build and maintain activity within the cell circuitry
Increases the generation of neurons in the hippocampus, an area of the brain which is associated with memory
Balances brain neurotransmitters and hormones, which enhance the body's function
Gets oxygen and glucose to the brain faster by strengthening the cardiovascular system
Strengthens dendritic branching through repetitive gross-motor movement
Reduces obesity (obesity leads to cardiovascular disease, diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure, which are all risk factors for dementia/Alzheimer's)

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▶ Meanwhile high cholesterol increases the risk of dementia by 43 per cent. People who are obese are twice as likely to suffer from dementia, and if we factor in high blood pressure and high cholesterol – conditions that often accompany obesity – the risk may actually be six-fold.

As we age, cells in the body gradually lose their ability to adapt to stress. Neurons in the brain are affected in much the same way. Synapses erode when neurons get worn down from cellular stress, eventually severing the connections between them. With this decreased activity, the dendrites physically shrink and wither. If this decay outpaces the new construction of connections, we begin to see problems with mental function.

Stress also causes our adrenal glands to release a chemical called cortisol. Chronically high levels of cortisol lead to cell death in the hippocampus – the area of the brain that's associated with both long- and short-term memory

and spatial orientation. Chronic stress can also contribute to depression and anxiety disorders, which interfere with normal memory processing, especially as people age. Learning to manage and minimise stress may have a beneficial impact on brain health; exercise can play a key role here.

EXERCISE CHANGES THE BRAIN

A great deal of research supports the positive impact of regular aerobic exercise on the ageing brain. For example, a 2005 study by Kramer et al looked at healthy adults between the ages of 60 and 75 and found that mental tasks involved in executive control – monitoring, scheduling, planning, inhibition and memory – improved in a group doing aerobic exercise, but not in a control group. Longitudinal studies have drawn similar conclusions.

Regular exercise keeps the brain functioning optimally through the ways listed in table 1, but let's look at these points in more detail.

Aerobic exercise increases brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), which is the most prominent in a family of proteins referred to loosely as neurotrophic factors. BDNF has a fertiliser effect on the brain's neurons and dendrites, helping them to grow and flourish. Tellingly, in 1990 there were a dozen papers on BDNF; now there are more than 5,500.

BDNF plays a significant role in neurogenesis, which is the process of stem cells dividing and developing into functional new nerve cells (neurons) in the brain. Studies have confirmed that neurogenesis occurs in the adult human, with the hippocampus being the major area for nerve cell growth: a 1998 study by Eriksson et al indicated that the human hippocampus retains its ability to generate neurons throughout life.

Regular aerobic exercise also increases insulin-like growth factor (IGF-1) and vascular-endothelial growth factor (VEGF), two proteins that serve to build and maintain activity within the cell circuitry (the infrastructure of neuronal connections).

So exercise both spawns neurons and stimulates an environment that enriches their growth and survival.

Aerobic exercise also increases levels of important neurotransmitters – brain chemicals that transmit signals across

Research supports the positive impact of aerobic exercise on the ageing brain



synapses – to traffic our thoughts and emotions. Serotonin is the policeman of the brain, keeping brain activity under control. Norepinephrine amplifies signals that influence attention, perception, motivation and arousal, and dopamine is the learning, reward, attention and movement neurotransmitter. Most of the prescription drugs used to improve mental health target one or more of these three brain chemicals.

In addition, regular aerobic exercise sends lots of oxygen-soaked blood to the brain to deliver glucose and oxygen, while at the same time removing waste products that inhibit the process. Brain volume also grows with regular aerobic exercise due to an increase in capillaries, blood volume, nerve cell growth and dendritic branching.

Finally, aerobic activity improves the ability of both body and brain to use glucose to provide energy. (Remember, the brain uses 20 per cent of the body's energy.) Given that high glucose levels negatively impact the brain by decreasing levels of BDNF, exercise can play a valuable preventative role by keeping glucose at an optimal level.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

If the brain isn't actively growing, it's very likely that it is dying. The good news is that beginning a regular exercise programme at any age can bring benefits to both the brain and the body. The body was designed to move; we know now that the more we move the body, the more we engage the brain. Through this brain-body connection, we can build and maintain a healthy body and brain with exercise – and lay the foundation for the most productive, fullest life possible at any age.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Terry Eckmann, PhD, is a professor at Minot State University (MSU) in North Dakota, and serves on the Advisory Board for the International Council on Active Ageing®. She presents internationally, writes for a variety of publications on topics relating to exercise and ageing, and has been recognised for her work with awards including the MSU Board of Regents Award for Research and Scholarship.

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YEAR OF OPPORTUNITY

Hattrick Marketing MD
Andy Kidd looks at
the challenges and
opportunities facing
health club operators in
2012 – from reduced
budgets and increased
competition to the
Olympic legacy



Q What's the latest news from Hattrick Marketing as we start to move further into 2012?

2012 is an important year for Hattrick Marketing. We have recently appointed two strong and experienced directors to the board and invested in our design studio with the appointment of a very creative head of design. We've also added to the product portfolio with the introduction of our social media offering, and already this year have worked on new and exciting clients in the wider sports and leisure market, such as Marriott Leisure Clubs, Caffè Nero and Manchester United FC.

Q Hattrick has now been established for eight years and continues to grow. How have you seen the marketing of health clubs develop over that period?

The marketing of health clubs has professionalised and improved immensely in the last eight years. It used to be the case that most health club marketing was effectively a sales promotion based on a price offer. But with the advent of budget clubs and increasingly high quality local authority

and leisure trust offerings, branding has, at last, started to become more important to the sector. With margins tight, and cutting prices to win market share less and less viable, we've found that many operators are looking to differentiate their brand.

Increasingly, too, our client contacts are Chartered Institute of Marketing-qualified marketers who are coming to the sector from other industries, bringing plenty of experience and new ideas with them. I believe that can only be good for our sector.

Q What kind of challenges do you find operators now face in marketing their facilities today?

Marketing budgets are currently being squeezed hard, and the constant challenge is to lower the cost per enquiry and cost per member performance indicators. Choosing the correct strategy to achieve this over a prolonged period of time is vital – but there are many different approaches.

Some clients we help by differentiation through a strong brand (as mentioned earlier), others through short-term tactical marketing that is focused on winning market share from

competitors. Others simply need to refresh and improve their communication channels – for instance, by adding social media to the mix.

Q How is Hattrick equipped to help them with these challenges?

As a full service agency, we are able to support our clients from end to end of the marketing process. Alternatively, we can provide specialist expertise in a specific discipline to fit in with the client's existing strengths.

Thanks to our experienced leisure marketing consultants, we can analyse a client's strategy and plans, improving and diversifying communication channels and campaigns to ensure targets are achieved. Our design team develops creative identities and campaigns; our media planning and buying department can explore all media options in any area, make recommendations and negotiate best prices; and our social media team can increase brand reach and drive interaction with the client's audiences.

Importantly, our experience in the sector also means we can effectively manage the sell-through of the campaigns so that they are delivered effectively by front-line staff.



Campaigns such as 'Aliens' have generated huge coverage, both locally and nationally, for Hattrick clients

Q What opportunities do you see for health clubs and leisure centres over the next 12 months?

With the world's biggest sporting event happening in Britain this year, operators have to seize the opportunity to communicate to the broader public the benefits of regular exercise – and specifically what club operators can offer to help people feel genuinely fitter and healthier.

Personally, I worry that target-driven messages about activity such as '3 x 30', '5 x 30' or, more recently, '150 minutes a week' don't appeal to current non-members in the right way. The messages are logical and make sense, but they are hardly inspiring and motivational.

The opportunity in 2012 is that, with the world's best athletes coming to town, we have a chance to inspire and creatively encourage the 85 per cent of the population who are not members of health and fitness clubs to give us a try. If we can get people to really believe that feeling fitter, healthier, stronger and more alive is within their grasp, then we'll have succeeded in using the Olympics as a catalyst to raise the profile of our industry.

Q The Olympic brand is fiercely protected. How can operators make the most of this opportunity?

While there are a number of restrictions regarding use of the word 'Olympics' and associated terminology and symbols, the industry still has the chance to be involved. Technogym's 'Our Greatest Team' campaign is a good example, and we've been advising clients to register and take part.

It's great that our industry has a campaign that's available to operators, allowing them to display Olympic branding within sites – which in turn will help inspire members. It's such a simple and flexible campaign too, focusing on the legacy of improved health and fitness for the nation by encouraging everyone to make simple and achievable pledges to improve their health and fitness. This is exactly what our industry should be doing, harnessing the excitement and profile of the Games to motivate and inspire people to feel better about themselves by being that little bit fitter.

Q What are your plans for the next 12 months?

Following a 20 per cent growth of the company in 2011, our aim

is to grow by this and more in 2012, by helping more businesses in the health and fitness sector as well as in the wider leisure industry. The last 24 months have shown that, by broadening our client portfolio to the wider leisure market (coffee shops, restaurants, football clubs, spas, hotels, kids' play), we've been able to learn new skills that can translate to the fitness sector for the benefit of our clients, and vice versa.

Q What advice would you give any operator when deciding on their marketing budget?

Have a clear understanding of what objectives you wish to achieve. At Hattrick, we consider ourselves to be a commercially-minded marketing agency. When working with a new client, our first discussions cover questions such as the yield per member, average length of membership, cost per sale and so on. In our view, having clear objectives and measurables is fundamental to effective marketing. Strategy, marketing and design channels all follow on from there.

Email Andy@hattrickmarketing.com or visit www.hattrickmarketing.com to see how Hattrick can help your business.

research round-up

In a new study, Swedish scientists have discovered that just 20 minutes of exercise can help 'turn on' your DNA

cell-ing point

Changing the genetic code you are born with might sound impossible, but a new study suggests otherwise.

Published in the March issue of *Cell Metabolism*¹, scientists from the Karolinska Institute – a medical university in Sweden – have proven that exercise can alter a person's DNA almost immediately.

The alterations are not to the main genetic code itself, but rather to the DNA molecules within the muscle cells.

cell study

For the study, the researchers examined 14 healthy but sedentary men and women aged 24 to 26 years old.

At the start of the programme, a slither of muscle was taken from participants' quadriceps for testing. Participants then undertook a 20-minute exercise session on a stationary bike at either 40 per cent (low intensity) or 80 per cent (high intensity) of their maximum aerobic capacity. Muscle biopsies were taken again immediately after the session, as well as three hours after that.



Researchers found that exercise altered DNA molecules within muscle cells

results explained

In the study, the DNA within skeletal muscle that was taken from people after a burst of exercise bore fewer methyl groups (see information box below) than

it did pre-exercise. The more rigorous the workout, the more these chemical marks changed.

These changes – which take place in stretches of DNA that are involved in 'turning on' genes important for muscles' adaptation to exercise – appear to be early events in the genetic reprogramming of muscle for strength and, ultimately, in the structural and metabolic benefits of exercise.

"Exercise is known to induce changes in muscle, including increased metabolism of sugar and fat," says lead researcher Juleen Zierath. "Our discovery is that the methylation change comes first."

When the researchers made muscles contract in lab dishes, they saw a similar loss of DNA methyl groups. Exposure of isolated muscle to caffeine had the same effect – but it would take 50–100 strong coffees to mimic the effect of exercise.

methy groups

Methyl groups attach themselves to our DNA, affecting the way in which our genes work – their presence causes chemical switches to turn our DNA 'on' or 'off', thereby activating, silencing or cranking up our genes and their actions.

When people exercise, the DNA molecules within the muscle cells gain or lose marks of methyl groups on certain DNA sequences. These changes occur in stretches of DNA that serve as landing sites for enzymes known as

'transcription factors', which in turn are involved in 'turning on' genes that are known to be important in muscles' adaptation to exercise.

The Karolinska Institute researchers therefore liken transcription factors to keys that unlock our genes. With methyl groups firmly in place, transcription factor 'keys' are prevented from entering DNA 'locks'. But when the methyl groups are removed, it allows the keys to turn the locks and boosts the muscles' capacity to work.

¹Zierath, JR et al. Acute Exercise Remodels Promoter Methylation in Human Skeletal Muscle. *Cell Metabolism* 15, pp405-411, March 2012



CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

LONDON • SIX FIGURE PACKAGE

Les Mills International (LMI) creates the world's most popular group exercise programmes that are enjoyed by millions of people every week. Our programmes are taught around the world by 90,000 certified instructors in 14,000 licensed clubs. In the UK our classes have been running in all the main health clubs and fitness chains since 1997 through LMI's appointed distributor.

The company has now acquired the UK distribution agency. As a result of this acquisition, Les Mills Fitness UK is already a substantial business delivering some 5,700 Les Mills programmes every year in 1,700 clubs with 30 employees and a team of 32 contracted trainers.

But that is just the start. Les Mills Fitness UK has ambitious plans and is seeking to appoint its first CEO to develop and deliver its substantial growth strategy for the UK market.

The Role

- To develop the business to deliver significant growth in the UK through existing channels and clients and to identify and develop new channels and revenue streams
- To establish Les Mills Fitness UK as an industry champion of the UK H&F sector
- To promote and advance the Les Mills brand in the UK
- To ensure Les Mills Fitness UK is an integral part of the global LMI success story
- To lead the transition from distributor model to proprietary model

The Candidate

- An experienced, results-focused leader with relevant industry experience
- A senior executive with excellent sales and marketing skills and a track record of commercial success
- Significant experience and understanding of how to penetrate the UK leisure and/or fitness markets at both strategic and tactical levels
- A strong organisational leader, people manager and industry thought-leader
- Proven change management skills and cultural sensitivity

This is a significant appointment and so we are looking for someone who is energetic and passionate about the Les Mills brand to lead the growth of our business in the UK.



For a confidential discussion and to find out more about this unique opportunity, please call our retained advisor Michael Emmerson on 0845 600 9650 or on 07798 898271. Alternatively, email your details to MichaelEmmerson@HR-Support.org.uk or apply online at www.leisureopportunities.co.uk/LesMills

LES MILLS
FOR A FITTER PLANET

preventative healthcare

A groundbreaking programme that aims to prevent the onset of diabetes is being rolled out across the US. Kate Cracknell reports

In the late 1990s, the US federal government invested about US\$200m to study whether a drug or a lifestyle intervention would be more effective in preventing diabetes," says Jonathan Lever, vice president for health strategy and innovation at YMCA of the US. "Led by the National Institutes of Health, that study was known as the landmark Diabetes Prevention Programme trial and it ran for seven years, enrolling close to 4,000 people and with a research network comprising 27 different centres across the US.

"The study was shut down early because the lifestyle intervention was clearly so much more effective than the drug. It wouldn't have been ethical to have continued."

Lever adds: "In that study, the lifestyle intervention was delivered on a

one-to-one basis, with the researchers authorised to give each patient virtually anything they needed to help them change their lifestyle, whether that was a pair of gym shoes or access to a nutritionist. Because the goal wasn't to see if this was an efficient way to do it – it was just to see whether lifestyle was more effective than a drug.

"When the results were published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* in 2002, it generated a lot of interest, but the problem was that this particular intervention was extremely cost-ineffective – it cost around US\$1,400 per person and was simply not scalable.

"One of the original researchers – a professor at Indiana University School of Medicine – felt that there must be a better way to do it, so in 2005 he approached the YMCA of Greater Indianapolis with a view to doing

essentially the same thing, but in a group-based format. He wanted to see if the same results could be achieved as in the national, one-to-one trial – a minimum five per cent weight loss.

"Long story short, the professor's group achieved an average six per cent weight loss, in a programme that was delivered at a quarter of the price of the original intervention."

towards a national programme

Lever continues: "It was at this point that the CDC (the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) approached the YMCA at a national level. They had been involved in the initial national study, and they wanted to see if our Indianapolis results could be replicated in another centre. They gave us the funding to do that and we achieved similar results in the YMCA of

about the diabetes prevention programme

The diabetes prevention programme is a 12-month, group-based programme targeting those at high risk of developing Type 2 diabetes. Risk factors include being overweight and inactive, high blood pressure, family history, and age ('at risk' individuals are generally aged 45 years and over).

The programme consists of 16 hour-long sessions delivered within a maximum of 24 weeks, followed by monthly maintenance meetings. Sessions are led by a trained lifestyle coach who facilitates a small group of people (maximum 15 people).

The group discusses topics such as healthy eating, with a particular focus on cutting fat intake. It also looks at increasing physical activity, reducing stress, problem solving and behaviour change strategies in general, coaching people through the barriers that prevent them from making positive lifestyle changes.

The ultimate goal for all participants is to lose between 5 and 7 per cent body weight, as well as gradually increasing physical activity levels to 150 minutes a week. "But there's a lot of scope to customise within those set goals, working with individuals to determine the exact things they will do to achieve them," explains Dr Ann Albright of the CDC.

"The secret is helping people figure out how they're going to change their own behaviour, assisted by encouragement from the group," says the YMCA's Jonathan Lever. "People generally know what's good and bad for them – they just don't know how to make the necessary adjustments."



The diabetes prevention programme looks at increasing activity and changing behaviour

ALL PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



Louisville, Kentucky, in 2009. At that point, I think the CDC recognised that this was a very potent intervention and it wanted to look at rolling it out faster, to more YMCAs.

"At the same time, however, in order for the intervention to have legitimacy – so that not any organisation could put up a sign and say 'we offer the diabetes prevention programme (DPP)' – the CDC recognised the need for centralised quality control and programme recognition."

Dr Ann Albright of the CDC takes up the story: "The CDC created the National Diabetes Prevention Programme in 2010, which is effectively the umbrella under which all deliverers of approved DPPs are convened and organised. It's called a 'programme', but actually it's more like a foundation that co-ordinates national diabetes prevention efforts – managing, guiding, keeping things organised, as well as overseeing quality assurance and providing some of the start-up funding."

"The secret is helping people figure out how they're going to change their own behaviour," says Lever

She continues: "There are four pillars to the national programme, the first being the delivery sites. The YMCA was the inaugural deliverer of the lifestyle change programme, but we're eager to get more organisations on-board. We also need a number of funding streams going forward, to guarantee the programme's sustainability, and we will continue to operate on a model in which third party payers or insurance companies reimburse or pay for delivery of the DPP."

Lever explains: "Insurance companies began to approach us when they saw the business case for the programme – they realised that it would help their bottom line as it's so much more costly to care for someone with diabetes than it is to prevent it in the first place. United Healthcare was the first insurer that felt the DPP should be part of

its benefits package for some of the people that it insured.

"We've now received start-up funding not only from the CDC but also from private health insurers like United HealthGroup. In certain markets, especially where United is operating, insurers even pay the YMCA for the programme on a performance basis – meaning that the YMCA gets reimbursed at a higher level when certain health outcomes are achieved.

"Importantly though, even in places where we don't have any third party payers, we encourage local YMCAs to offer a sliding scale of prices – from free-of-charge to a couple of hundred dollars – to make sure no-one is denied access."

Albright adds: "This is the first time that insurance companies in the US are reimbursing a community-based organisation for delivery of such a programme. It's a perfect example of what we refer to as a clinical community partnership. There's a real focus in the US now on linking the clinical sector, ▶

► where people get their healthcare, to a community sector where people spend most of their lives – looking at what can we do to push out the walls of the clinical sector, making sure that people who are diagnosed with pre-diabetes are referred to a programme that's genuinely accessible to them."

quality control

Albright continues: "The other three pillars support and feed into the first pillar. Pillar two is our recognition scheme, by which we ensure that DPPs meet the standards we've set and adhere to the approved programme structure (see information box, p54). On our website, we offer an approved curriculum which providers can download.

"Members of the public can also access a list of approved DPPs on our website. The programmes might have different names: there's the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Programme, for example, and the University of Pittsburgh's Group Lifestyle Balance programme. But if they're recognised on our website, they'll all be delivering an approved curriculum – either the one we've made available, or one they've designed that the CDC has approved – and meeting the standards we've set.

"When we see that a provider is offering an approved curriculum, we give them 'pending recognition' status, but it takes two years to achieve full recognition: the programme is a year long and we need to see sufficient outcome data, with a certain percentage of participants achieving a minimum 5 per cent weight loss. During those

international diabetes prevention

"We're in regular contact with the Australian authorities as they move forward with their diabetes prevention programme," says Dr Ann Albright of the CDC. "We've learned from each other – we've used their recognition programme as the basis for our own, for example. And I think one of the things they've learned from us is that you really do need a community infrastructure – you can't just deliver this through the healthcare system.

"We've also been part of the longest-running prevention study in the world: the Daqing study in China. United has gone to China and to India to share our work too. Those countries are very much focused on a medical model though, so the question is whether they'll be able to make the transition and expand into the community.

"There's also a web-based prevention network, organised by a physician named Peter Schwartz and connecting people around the world who are working on diabetes prevention. He's based in Germany and they're interacting particularly with other European countries – the UK, for example.

"I'd say Finland is probably the furthest along though, alongside the US. They have the original Finnish DPP and have been trying to nationalise their intervention programme."

two years, we're on-hand to provide technical assistance, to help with trouble-shooting and so on.

"Another pillar is training: if we're going to roll out a programme like this nationally, we have to expand the workforce – we have 79 million people with pre-diabetes in the US, and not enough healthcare professionals to deliver the programme to all these people. The YMCA has its own amazing training infrastructure, but for other organisations which may not have this, we've worked with Emory University in Atlanta to develop a special DPP training

course. Again, it's about ensuring standards as we roll out nationally."

lack of awareness

Albright concludes: "The final pillar is marketing and communication. Just because you have programmes in communities, doesn't mean people are going to come, and doesn't mean healthcare professionals will refer."

Lever agrees: "I describe it thus: 'If you build it, they may come; if they come, they will stay and they will lose weight; and if they lose weight, they will not convert to diabetes.' So the biggest challenge is getting them there in the first place. We're trying many different strategies around this – employer engagement, insurer engagement, primary care doctor engagement, posters in our facilities – but it's definitely a challenge.

"There are occasionally people who refer themselves onto the programme – maybe they'll see a poster in their YMCA and they know their dad had diabetes, so they decide to see if they're at risk. But pre-diabetes is completely asymptomatic, so people are generally unaware – and even when they're told they have the condition, the red flag fails to go up. They just think: 'I don't have diabetes, so I can carry on doing what I'm doing.' In fact, they should be as concerned as if they were told they had a high risk of developing cancer."



Even the medical community is unsure what to do with pre-diabetes patients



Only seven per cent of the 79 million people in the US with pre-diabetes know they have it

Albright adds: "Of the 79 million people in the US who have pre-diabetes, only 7 per cent know it. At the CDC, we've therefore been conducting focus groups with people who fall along the continuum of risk, to try and understand what the messaging needs to be – what do we need to say to make people realise their risk and take action?"

"Ideally there'd be a national pre-diabetes awareness campaign, targeting consumers and funded by government," says Lever. "Individual programme deliverers will never have that sort of spending power."

persuading the physicians

Lever continues: "However, the huge gap in education is present not only among the general public but among the clinical physician community too – a lack of knowledge regarding what to do with patients who have pre-diabetes. We're doing some work with the American Academy of Family Physicians to figure out what it will take to get doctors to refer people into the programme."

"One lady who attended the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Programme had recently visited her doctor and received her lab results in the post. Her blood glucose level was circled, but there were no comments, nothing, so she ignored it. A couple of weeks later, as a part of her employer's efforts to encourage people to participate in our programme, she

received some information which said that, if you have a blood glucose level in this certain range, you have pre-diabetes, which means you're on a dangerous path to developing diabetes. She pulled out the results from her doctor, realised she was in that range and independently enrolled in the programme. But why didn't her doctor alert her?"

"Ultimately we're still in the infancy of the programme. The YMCAs need to reach out more to their local doctors, winning them over one at a time and generating good old-fashioned word-of-mouth. This is going to take decades, not years, to fully realise its potential."

fast-forward

So where is the YMCA's programme currently available? "At the end of January 2012, it was available in 26 States, through 48 different YMCAs and at over 200 locations; each YMCA will also deliver the programme at other community venues," says Lever. "That number changes almost monthly though, because of the speed at which we're rolling out."

Albright adds: "The recognition programme – pillar two of our programme – went live in February 2012, and within the first couple of weeks we had another 33 sites with pending recognition. We do consider this to be a national programme, even though we're not in every State yet."

"We've already had more than 4,000 people go through the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Programme, and our dream is that every YMCA in the country will have it on its schedule," says Lever. "It's going to take us a while to get there, because this programme puts us in a slightly different space. We're now being considered an adjunct healthcare provider, which is new territory for most YMCAs and invokes other issues around privacy protection and so on. We need to take on-board new learnings, adopt new policies. We can't flick a switch and immediately offer the programme at every YMCA in the US."

"It's also a matter of resources – predominantly funding but also human resources. There's a lot more training we need to do, people we need to hire, skillsets we need to develop."

"However, I believe that if the YMCA, with 58 per cent of the US population within three miles of a facility; the CDC, the leading public health agency around prevention; and United Healthcare, one of the largest health insurers in the country, as well as other insurers coming on board – if we can't figure this out, there's no hope for this model of prevention. With that set of players, you have everything you need to pull this off. If it doesn't work here, it never will."

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ARE YOU BEING SERVED?

Results from the latest leisure industry customer service survey don't make good reading. The NPS (Net Promoter Score®) survey, used by global brands like Apple and Amazon to measure loyalty, reveals that the sector has a long way to go to create a loyal fan base, as Donna Gregory reports

“NPS is probably the most powerful single indicator of your customers' view of your business. It's a proven indicator of customer satisfaction, loyalty and commitment,” says Mike Hill, MD of Leisure-net Solutions, which along with The Retention People (TRP) brought NPS to the UK leisure and fitness sector.

The survey is measured using just one question, branded the 'ultimate question' by its developers Fred Reichheld, Bain & Company, and Satmetrix. That question is: “How likely is it that you would recommend our company to a friend or colleague?” Customers give their answer on a 0–10 rating scale, and on

the basis of this are categorised into one of three groups: Promoters (9–10 rating), who are loyal enthusiasts who stay longer, spend more and fuel growth; Passives (7–8 rating) who are satisfied but unenthusiastic, and vulnerable to leaving/competitor offerings; and Detractors (0–6 rating) – unhappy customers who can damage your brand and impede growth through negative word of mouth.

The percentage of Detractors is subtracted from the percentage of Promoters to obtain a Net Promoter Score. A score of 75 per cent or above is considered high – these are the scores achieved by brand leaders such as Amazon and Apple. However, as Hill

explains: “NPS is a tough matrix which tends to 'stretch the scores' – scores can theoretically go from minus 100 per cent to plus 100 per cent.”

fitness industry survey

Almost twice as many operators took part in November 2011's NPS survey, compared with the inaugural survey in March 2011: 57 companies, with 511 clubs, generated over 32,000 responses.

The overall industry Net Promoter Score worked out at 21 per cent – the same as in the first survey. “In many ways it is not surprising that the scores from this year's survey haven't changed. Scores will only move if the operators within the sector change the way they

About the Net Promoter Score

Research has shown that NPS is linked to sustainable growth. Companies that achieve long-term profitable growth have Net Promoter Scores twice that of the average company, while NPS leaders outgrow their competitors in most industries by an average of 250 per cent. In addition, a 12-point increase in NPS has been shown to lead to a doubling in company growth rate.

One of the key messages from NPS is that a satisfied customer doesn't necessarily mean a loyal customer. When Bain and Satmetrix were carrying out the research that led to the development of NPS, they tracked customers who stated they were 'satisfied' with their product/service to see how many of them left

that service within a 12-month period. They discovered that on average 80 per cent of defectors claim to be satisfied.

So how do we move the score? The only way this happens is by putting in place a systematic and manageable procedure to create a service culture that hits the heart and mind. A typical customer service approach in the fitness industry aims at deliverables such as value for money, best features and best price. These will deliver customer satisfaction, but won't create promoters. To do this, you need to create an experience that delivers on 'heart' questions, such as, 'do they value me?' and 'do they treat me as an individual?' Research shows that this creates long-term promoters.

◀ Gyms need a radical rethink on how they deliver customer experience, says Rollins

Private single sites scored highest with an average of 55 per cent (the inaugural survey scores ranged from 32–50 per cent). These were followed by the local authorities scoring 28 per cent (up from 27 per cent), the trusts at 23 per cent (up from 12 per cent) and the private multi-sites at minus 4 per cent (up from minus 16 per cent). It's important to note that sector scores can improve without the overall industry NPS going up, as the latter is derived from all individual member scores – it is not an average of the sector scores.

"The low score of the private multi-sites could partly be put down to senior management not being involved in the day-to-day running of a centre as they are managing more than one site, and therefore decisions are being made centrally. This could mean that site managers have less autonomy to manage their own members. However, there is no real reason why any sector should outperform another, as it's all down to the service culture they develop and the training they give their staff," says Hill.

Rollins adds: "Implementing processes to drive the culture of creating Promoters and to empower staff has seen significant benefits in lots of organisations outside of our industry – including large, multi-branch private companies. These processes include root cause analysis to identify trends in Detractor feedback, rapid follow-up on Detractors and systems to monitor this contact, and a resulting follow-up contact with an update of how their issue has been dealt with.

"Systems to monitor and reward management on converting Detractors into Promoters helps to create an environment in which all employees are focused on this single customer-centric

aim, and have had great success in improving NPS.

"TRP has already worked with several operators to implement these proven processes in the health club business model. I believe that the private multi-sites in our industry can do the same, and therefore equal and exceed the scores of other sectors."

million dollar question

So how do the leisure scores compare to those in other UK industries?

Hill explains: "Our best performers are up there with the NPS high-flyers like Amazon and Apple, but our worst performers are getting scores much lower than other sectors. Perhaps this is because of the high level of interaction in our service, giving the opportunity to really get things wrong, but also due to the 'community' basis of our centres and clubs, where recommendation and referrals are an essential part of our marketing and communications mix."

DC Leisure has been using NPS for a couple of years and has recently had some interesting results. Steve Philpott, DC Leisure's CEO, explains: "We did a recent analysis comparing NPS scores of our larger sites to their Quest scores, and it suggested that there was a good correlation between a higher than average NPS score and a higher than average Quest score. Further research needs to be done about which causes the other, but it seems common sense that a site with good systems and procedures, combined with excellent management and staff delivery, will lead to an improved NPS score."



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do things, whether this be cultural changes or operational improvements to service delivery. At the moment, improvements in service delivery have stagnated, and without a radical rethink on how we train and deliver customer service, the customer experience will remain mediocre at best," says Alister Rollins, founder of TRP.

However, the breakdown leading to the industry average 21 per cent net promoter score has shown small changes: November's survey uncovered 42 per cent Promoters (up from 38 per cent in March 2011), but also a 4 per cent rise in Detractors to counterbalance this (up from 17 per cent in March to 21 per cent in November).

Perhaps more concerning still is the staggering gap between the best and worst performers, with the best club scoring 76 per cent and the worst scoring well below zero. This is very similar to the March 2011 results, where the worse sites scored well below zero, but there's been a fall at the top end of the scale – in the inaugural survey, the best performing site scored in the 80s.

CONFRONTING ADVERSITY

DAVID MINTON REPORTS ON THE SITUATION IN JAPAN ONE YEAR ON FROM THE TSUNAMI

The most iconic and famous wood-block print by Hokusai, the renowned Japanese artist, is *The Great Wave, or Under the Wave off Kanagawa* as it was properly titled. Now around 200 years old, the image shows the sea's huge swell engulfing the fishermen's skiff.

At 3.41pm on 11 March 2011, Hokusai's image took on a whole new meaning and immediate symbolism. A 40-foot wave, triggered by the 9.0 magnitude earthquake just under an hour earlier, started to come ashore along the north-east coast of Japan. Eyewitnesses recorded events as they happened, and the world watched in horror the scale of devastation caused by the tsunami. The death toll would surpass 16,000 and over 170,000 people were to be evacuated. Around 100,000 of these people remain unsure when or if they can return home.

INDUSTRY RESPONSE

In a bid to help to fellow citizens, sports- and fitness-related organisations launched a swift response to the events that unfurled on that fateful weekend. Mr Fujiwara, chair of the Fitness Industry Association Japan (FIAJ) – who is also president of The Bigsports Co, one of the top eight brands affected – helped raise over 10 million Yen (£81,500) immediately. These funds were boosted by member collections at clubs all over Japan, as well as other fundraising activities which are still ongoing. Money raised in this way has been used as a temporary relief fund so freelance instructors, part-time employees and freelance personal trainers, without buildings to work in, could



The tsunami hit north-east Japan and killed over 16,000 people

support those stoically trying to keep their lives together while at the same time queuing for basic necessities.

Other organisations were also quick to respond: Professor Yoshiyuki Mano from Waseda University established a new organisation to help channel support and offers of help from both professional and amateur sports people who wanted to work with displaced people within the disaster area. The well-established Sasakawa Sports Foundation also dispatched colleagues to the disaster area to join volunteers from across Japan, all united in the relief effort, to help rebuild the devastated towns and lives.

One year on, the scale of support and aid the wider sports and fitness industry has provided to survivors – many of whom are refugees in their own country – is a tribute to Japan's spirit. Over 300 fitness clubs suffered some initial damage, although around half of these re-opened within a few weeks or months. Many of the remaining clubs were found to have some structural damage and were forced to undertake a combination of rebuilding, refurbishment and re-stocking, which has taken most of the year to complete.

STATUS REPORT

From the top eight fitness brands in Japan, which collectively have a membership of more than double the top eight brands in the UK, only three clubs have been completely



Japan's sport and fitness industry has helped refugees to keep exercising, even without club facilities





Japan's community has rallied to help those left homeless, while re-opened clubs have offered victims free use of fitness facilities

lost. One was in the exclusion zone established around the stricken power plant at Fukushima, where the Japanese government has admitted that dismantling the reactors could take up to 40 years. Others were washed away in the graphic images that were broadcast around the globe.

However, not all sports and fitness clubs are members of the local industry bodies; information on non-FIAJ member sites, venues and clubs will be more difficult to obtain. One such club was the independently-owned Giallozz Sports and Fitness Club in the Tochigi Prefecture, where the owner simply could not bear the expense of waiting until the recovery plan was put in place. His business, home and immediate livelihood were literally washed away and now he is stuck in legal limbo. We will probably never know the exact number of independent clubs lost in the tsunami.

Meanwhile the Fukushima Prefectural Golf Association has reported that some courses have had to close, along with their attached fitness and 'onsen' (spa). The Sunfield Nihonmatsu Golf Club and Onsen Spa has been closed since the tsunami due to the level of radioactive materials such as caesium. Fairways and greens have not been tended and are overgrown. The 15 part-time workers, caddies and full-time staff have now been made redundant as the club doesn't know when, or if, it can re-open.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Tens of thousands of Japanese refugees who have faced the triple horror of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis – and who are still being housed in temporary accommodation, including public sports halls and temporary cabins – have nevertheless been able to use sports and fitness clubs. Clubs have been very supportive, allowing use of pools and, more importantly, shower and changing facilities free of charge.



The very popular morning and afternoon aqua-walking classes have taken on an extended social bonding role among those in the worst affected areas. A legacy from the Olympic Games in 1964 means that Japan has a very high number of swimming pools per head of population; each one can often have over 500 users in just a morning. Fitness and sports clubs that have opened these facilities up to refugees are not only helping survivors with mixed emotions, caught between an unknown future and a broken past, but are also helping with the distressing psychological factor while helping people keep active.

In an effort to keep the community emotionally strong, sports and fitness clubs have also organised for personal trainers to provide basic stretch and group classes, while some clubs with outside space have invited refugees to share a free barbecue. In this destructive situation, physical activity is helping to restore the Japanese spirit and pride by bringing people together.



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MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

RETENTION IS KEY TO THE SUCCESS OF
ANY LEISURE FACILITY AND CAN BE A
CONSTANT BATTLE. KIRSTYN
MACRANDAL LOOKS AT NEW
TECHNOLOGY THAT CAN HELP
OPERATORS IMPROVE
THEIR CUSTOMER RETENTION

Today a number of retention software solutions exist, working in different ways to decrease the rate of membership drop-out and in turn grow the membership base. From targeted emails to personalised training programmes, these systems work to provide every member with a unique experience.

"Connecting with every customer on a personal level and tailoring your offering specifically for them is essential to creating a loyalty between the company and member," says Alex Bennett, UK network manager for Technogym. We explore six case studies that have used technology to boost retention in their business.

LA FITNESS, UK & IRELAND

Supplier: Technogym
Date of project:
Since December 2011

With 80 sites throughout the UK and Ireland, LA Fitness attracts a diverse client base, both in terms of demographics and length of membership. It believes that trying to personalise the customer experience for a heterogeneous audience, with differing fitness goals, is one of the key challenges when trying to increase retention rates.

In December 2011, LA Fitness implemented its 'my LA Memberzone', a digital hub and support tool for members which includes Technogym's Club 2.0 retention software. Technogym's 2.0 profiling tool is used to identify an individual's aspiration and goals – whether that's to lose weight, boost self-confidence or improve sport performance – through a web-based member survey and programme development tool.

From this data, LA Fitness can analyse member usage, understand individual members' goals and tailor its product and services more effectively. COO Arthur McColl explains: "Since we've implemented Club 2.0, we've doubled customer interactions and been able to tailor our communications. This has given us the opportunity to target members with more appropriate marketing – previously a challenge due to our broad user demographic."

To date, over 5,000 members have completed the web-based Club 2.0 survey, and usage levels among new and existing members continues to grow.

LIFE LEISURE HAZEL GROVE LEISURE CENTRE, STOCKPORT, UK

Supplier: MYZONE
Date of project: Since December 2011

MYZONE installed its activity monitoring solution into Life Leisure's Hazel Grove Leisure Centre in December 2011 – a new and innovative tool designed to attract new prospects and enhance engagement with existing members.

MYZONE uses telemetry heart rate technology – in conjunction with a unique points-based system centred around the effort members put into their workouts – to track and record all physical activity of members, whether exercising inside the centre or outside.

The cloud-based system, which uses heart rate belts that store data until each download, allows Life Leisure to constantly track its members, promoting an all-round active lifestyle. In this way, the data collated provides accurate member profiles on which personalised interaction can be based to further drive their motivation.



83 per cent of MYZONE users have increased their activity levels



MYZONE uses a points-based system centred around users' effort levels

To date, 100 Life Leisure members have invested in a physical activity belt. Initial Life Leisure data has shown that 83 per cent of these MYZONE members have increased their physical activity levels since adopting the system. There has been a 200 per cent increase in total usage of the gym among MYZONE members, while average effort of the MYZONE user has increased by 5 per cent since installation in December 2011.

Malcolm McPhail, MD of Life Leisure, says: "In terms of retention, if you wait until you have a problem you are too late. Tools like MYZONE keep you at the forefront of membership sales and retention. It's not just about units sold but about the progression of your business and exposing members to new technologies and opportunities." ▶

Industry Leaders Choose Retention Management



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retention
software



A 24 per cent rise in new members is being linked to the user-friendly software

CRAVEN SWIMMING POOL AND FITNESS CENTRE, NORTH YORKSHIRE, UK

Supplier: Pulse SmartCentre
Date of project: Since September 2011

Craven Swimming Pool and Fitness Centre, a local authority facility, explored many different software and training providers before choosing Pulse SmartCentre. Installed in September 2011, SmartCentre has been readily adopted by members. Management are delighted by how quickly the membership – with its strong over-50s bias – has learnt to use the simple interface technology, as well as by the impact it has had on usage across the gym floor, in particular with resistance equipment.

SmartCentre's ability to support, guide and engage the user on safe and maximum exercise performance, along with instant feedback and results, is breaking down the barriers when it comes to equipment that some users have previously been intimidated by.



In addition to the gym, there is now a kiosk in the main reception

Following the initial success, the council was keen to extend the technology outside the gym environment and installed a second kiosk in the main reception hub, enabling swimmers and fitness class participants to record, track and monitor their results via the inbuilt activities feature in Pulse SmartCentre.

The software's greatest impact on the business has been the 24 per cent increase in new membership and 6 per cent decrease in attrition over a five-month period. At the time of installation there were 1,200 members, with a projected membership base of 1,500 by September 2012. However, this target was exceeded in less than six months.

Craven Swimming Pool and Fitness is now being viewed as a blueprint of best practice for other local authorities in the UK; if it continues to improve at the current pace, the facility will achieve cost-neutral status by 2013.



**SmartCentre gives gym users
instant feedback and results**



The Connect system provides instructors with valuable member information

HORIZON LEISURE CENTRES, HAVANT, UK

Supplier: Aquaterra Leisure
Date of project: Since January 2011

The problem of retention became apparent to Horizon Leisure Centres when its gym membership base remained static for two years, despite hitting sales targets with increasing ease. The number of members joining the centre was being equalled by the number of cancellations.

With the support of Aquaterra Leisure, and in partnership with The Retention People, Horizon Leisure Centres installed Connect. The system was easy to use and provided gym instructors with valuable information on each member. This in turn contributed to creating a more personal experience for every member with each visit. Additionally, the Connect system identified higher risk, non-regular members who are thought more likely to cancel membership.

"Our gym teams have really embraced the system and set themselves challenges to make sure no high-risk members train in the gym without having some form of contact to improve their experience – and hopefully make them come back



Membership has risen 19.5 per cent since January 2011

sooner," says Will Jones, sales and marketing manager for Horizon Leisure.

Since the system was implemented a year ago, Horizon Leisure has seen a great improvement in both membership base and client interaction. In January 2012, Horizon Leisure interacted with 4,527 customers, compared to 285 in January 2011. Membership rose by 19.5 per cent, while the risk rating of high-risk members dropped by 30 per cent. ▶



software for *Life*

LIVINGWELL HEALTH CLUBS, UK

Supplier: Retention Management
Date of project: Since 2009

Retention Management began working with LivingWell at its club in Leicester over three years ago, and continues to do so today. In order to enhance retention, LivingWell wanted to ensure consistent touchpoints between the club and the members – without having to rely on staff. Strategies had been put in place previously that relied on staff interactions, but these often lacked consistency.

Retention Management's fully automated new member integration programme communicates regularly with LivingWell members, with personalised interaction based on individual attendance patterns. The service involves a wide range of facilities, from automated email services – such as personalised 'recovery programmes' for low attendees, as well as helpful health information – to tailored marketing emails to drive referrals and increase sales at LivingWell.

To calculate the impact of the service, the club recorded retention using a method devised by Dr Paul Bedford on behalf of LivingWell and recommended by the FIA. In the first year of the programme being implemented, the club saw an improvement in retention of 6 per cent more than in any previous years that rates had been measured. The service has now been rolled out to many of the LivingWell clubs across the UK.



Retention Management's system automatically sends personalised emails



PHOTO: CAMERON PAGES / WWW.HILLSTOCK.COM

High-risk members receiving four or more interactions stay 18 months longer

DONCASTER CULTURE & LEISURE TRUST

Supplier: The Retention People
Date of project: Since 2008

Doncaster Culture and Leisure Trust (DCLT) has been working with The Retention People (TRP) for over four years, using a variety of initiatives to improve retention. Projects range from identification of high risk drop-out members, and interaction strategies to re-energise and motivate these members, through to new induction processes and intelligent targeted email and SMS systems.

Each year, DCLT has seen marked improvements in retention, with data demonstrating that high-risk members receiving four or more interactions stay for at least 18 months longer than those not receiving an interaction.

The most recent retention project that DCLT has adopted with TRP is Net Promoter Score (NPS – see also p58). This is both a loyalty metric and a discipline for using customer feedback to fuel profitable growth within your business. The process involves asking

members one key question – How likely are you to recommend this club to a friend or family member?

This survey is very powerful as its simplicity leads to a great response rate, but the true power comes from the scoring (0–10), which allows TRP to identify 'detractors' (members actively bad-mouthing the business), 'passives' (fence-sitters) and 'promoters' (raving fans). TRP has developed a process designed to turn detractors into promoters, by addressing their concerns and monitoring the impact in a 'closed loop' system. It's simple, low-resource intensive and a key benefit is creating a culture of customer-focused service.

DCLT has improved its retention rate from 42 per cent in January 2011 to 54 per cent in January 2012. The average length of stay across all members has increased by 1.9 months.

 **kirstyn macrandal**
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ONE, TWO, THREE TESTING

Is fitness testing being fully utilised as a way of recruiting and maintaining members? Kath Hudson looks at the opportunities the latest technology offers

Before embarking on an exercise or diet regime, it makes sense to have a fitness test. Not only does it give an accurate assessment of the individual's overall health and body composition, which will inform the correct training programme, but regular testing is a motivating factor. Everyone works that little bit harder when they've got a test coming up, and the results show members the fruits of their efforts, as well as highlighting if tweaks need to be made to the workout.

Not only that but, if a member is becoming disenchanted because they haven't dropped a couple of dress sizes after six weeks of regular visits, a fitness test can prove that physiological changes have taken place as a result of their working out, thereby demonstrating the value of continued attendance.

But how many gyms are using this potential retention tool – this opportunity to connect with members? With new technology making it easier than ever to conduct fitness tests, and equipment such as the Wattbike even incorporating it into its inbuilt software, there aren't really any excuses for not offering a test. It could be offered as part of the membership, or as an add-on to be offered by personal trainers.

Not only that, but the more the health club industry starts to monitor the health and fitness of its members, with outcome data made available, the more credibility it will gain in the eyes of healthcare professionals – all of which creates a compelling case to get testing.

inbuilt monitoring

Wattbike enables the rider to train using a combination of heart rate, power and cadence, ensuring a high quality workout at an optimal level for the individual's fitness. It measures 39 performance parameters, 100 times a second, and offers a wide range of benchmarking fitness tests, including the three-minute

The Wattbike incorporates a number of fitness tests, including a three-minute aerobic test



The ultimate benefit is increased motivation for the end user and efficient training for the PT

Fitness tests can boost retention by showing members their progress and potential to improve



aerobic test. The results can be used to calculate a member's heart rate and power training zones, which can then form the foundation of a structured training programme.

According to Wattbike's sports scientist, Eddie Fletcher, the Wattbike can be used by clubs and PTs to fine-tune a member's structured training programme and to track their progress. "By conducting regular progress checks, the club/PT can provide the member with clear and accurate data to show fitness gains, which is incredibly valuable when it comes to member retention," he says. "Regular progress checks also allow the club/PT to adjust the member's heart rate and power training zones to ensure the fitness gains do

not plateau – it's important to make sure the structured training continues to provide motivation and challenges to the member."

London-based Ignite PT is a keen user of Wattbike for fitness testing. "We use the Wattbike for structured, power-related sessions, as well as conducting scientific fitness tests. Our clients range from novice riders training for charity rides and sports to national track and road racing champions," says David Skinner, cycling strength and conditioning coach at Ignite PT. "The Wattbike produces extremely detailed test results which allow the coach to set, measure and help the rider achieve their goals – a key tool in member retention."

Meanwhile, Danish indoor cycling brand BODY BIKE recently launched BODY BIKE Connect, a watt cycle with an integrated sensor and onboard computer. The sensor measures your power output as you cycle, giving the user instant feedback on their efforts, while the computer offers a 'watt test' which calculates relative VO_2 max, giving exercisers a clear marker by which to monitor their progress.

HR monitors

Polar's latest heart rate monitor, the Polar FT40, offers two specific features to measure fitness: the Polar Fitness



Polar's new monitor indicates the main training effect: fat burning or improved aerobic fitness

Test and the Energy Pointer. Ideal to perform at an induction, the Polar Fitness test accurately predicts maximum oxygen uptake (VO_2 max) and is based on the heart rate and heart rate variability at rest, as well as the user's personal information. It measures CV fitness by assessing the VO_2 max and uses personal information stored on the monitor to determine a personal VO_2 score. A graph shows fitness levels at the time of each test, allowing improvements to be easily tracked.

Meanwhile EnergyPointer – an instant feedback feature – calculates the point at which the main effect of training moves from fat burning to



Tanita's body composition data can be linked into the MYZONE system



Measurements are sent from Tanita's monitors to a wrist-top device

► fitness improvement, using personal information to ensure accuracy. It also shows the user which of these they are achieving at any point during a training session, by visually indicating the centre point between these two training effects: when the user is below that point, they are improving fat burning, and above that point they are improving aerobic fitness. This assists personal trainers in changing the way people train, focusing on training at the right intensity to achieve goals and helping users to get maximum benefit most efficiently.

This is a great asset for PTs and clubs, according to Polar's UK performance and training manager Liz Shenton.

"With accurate feedback, the PT knows exactly how much their client has trained and how this has affected fitness levels," she says. "The PT can easily adjust the training programme to ensure their client stays on-track and realises their goals. The ultimate benefit is increased motivation for the end user and efficient training for the PT."

Fitness expert David Marshall has used the Polar heart rate monitor for years, including with celebrities such as Sophie Dahl and Lily Allen. "Polar heart rate monitors allow me to guide my clients and help them train at the right level to achieve their goals. I can also tell them what their heart rate should be when they are exercising outside of

their personal training session, so they can train effectively on their own too."

analytical software

Fitech's system monitors a range of 45 physical measurements – such as BMI, body composition, stamina and strength – as well as questionnaire-based lifestyle, nutrition and exercise components for a complete picture of your client's health status. All tests are taken independently and then entered into the system.

The latest version, Fitech V5, is a software-based analysing system. Data from a fitness test for example – such as the Chester Step Test, which is used to determine fitness/VO₂/stamina – is entered into the system and assessed in relation to other factors such as gender, age, height and weight to produce a fitness score. These results are stored and collated into an end user report.

"Our research has shown that members who undergo regular fitness assessments are more likely to stay with their club/PT," says Rowland Kendall, Fitech's leisure development manager. "The start point for self-improvement is a full appreciation of the current fitness level. Fitech tools have been developed to support, not replace, the fitness professional: Fitech V5 is accessed by the fitness professional, not the member. Members/clients need the personable interaction of one-on-one sessions."

body composition

Tanita now uses bio-electrical impedance (BIA) to measure body composition. This is similar to a traditional bathroom scale, but electrodes scan the body

FITNESS TESTING APPS

A selection of fitness tests are also available for download by smartphones, but as yet these applications don't come close to rivaling the accuracy of an in-club test.

Apple's two most popular apps are The Fitness Test by the Tappy App Co. Ltd and the Instant Heart Rate by Azumio. The former is based on the beep test, often used by coaches and trainers, where individuals run between 20m markers when a beep sounds, until they can no longer keep up with the beep. However, this is a hard test and is only intended for use by people who know they are fit and healthy.

The Instant Heart Rate uses the camera of an iPhone 4/4S to detect the user's pulse, and then displays the heart rate, which beeps with the pulse. A real time chart shows the heart beat.

to collect data such as body fat and muscle mass. Tanita's latest device, the Tanita BC-1000 Body Composition Monitor, can even send measurements wirelessly to a Garmin Fitness Watch, which allows users to monitor how their training is affecting their body.

A recent model, the Tanita Pro Pack, is aimed at professional trainers. It uses the BIA technology to measure body fat, hydration levels, muscle mass and visceral fat, and provides essential progress indicators such as physique rating, daily calorie intake and metabolic age. Data can be stored to provide trend analysis, health risk assessments and set targets.

Tanita bio-impedance scales are now also integrated into the MYZONE system and online profile, with extensive health assessment data able to be transmitted direct to a member's personal online MYZONE account in a matter of seconds. A trainer can repeat the test every four to six weeks, with the differences in scores easily viewed and tracked online.

MYZONE CEO Dave Wright believes this is an invaluable tool for clubs, because members like to have regular feedback to see their progress. He also believes the information can be used by PTs to interact more with clients. "The PT's skill-set is his/her knowledge, experience and understanding of the metrics," says Wright. "This test means the PT doesn't have to spend so much time taking down and recording readings, so they can focus more on the human interaction – talking about the readings and the results."



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"The start point for any self-improvement is a full appreciation of the current fitness level"



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Studio equipment



IHRSA launch for Les Mills' SMARTBAR

Unveiled at IHRSA 2012, the Les Mills SMARTBAR is a new twist on barbell design. Holding up to three 22lb (10kg) weight plates at each end, a patented 'gator' fastening mechanism allows speedy weight transitions. Off the bar, ergonomic handles on the plates allow users to work their target muscles harder and for longer before their wrist and finger muscles fatigue.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
escape



Jordan keeping equipment caged up

New from Jordan Fitness is the Jordan Storage Cage. It's an ideal solution for keeping smaller items of studio training equipment – such as boxing kit, dumbbells and balls – out of the way, but has wire mesh sides so that users can see what's available. Fitted with wheels and a lockable lid, the cage comes in a silver-textured paint finish to make it more wear-resistant and measures 780mm x 1350mm x 650mm (H/L/D).

fitness-kit.net KEYWORDS
jordan fitness

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Keeping control of spending with D2F

Everyone Active has recently signed up to D2F's new approach to studio purchasing. D2F's quotation tool enables operators to gain control of spending on small, top-up purchases of studio kit, keeping track of and authorising every penny that's spent by every site across an operator's estate.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
d2f



fitness-kit.net KEYWORDS
concept fitness

The full studio kit Concept from TKO

Concept Fitness' range of studio kit from US company TKO includes cardio pump sets and rack; anti-burst fitballs and rack; yoga mats; exercise mats which go with CF's mat rack; and a full selection of boxing and MMA products. Also available are items such as dumbbells, kettlebells, medicine balls, discs and bars.

Gymstick combines resistance, balance and CV

Gymstick is a padded bar containing two resistance bands that loop over the feet. Twisting or unwinding the bar increases the resistance so the user can alternate between exercises without any weight changes.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
gymstick



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WE TAKE A LOOK AT RECENT PROJECTS FROM
STAR TRAC AND PULSE FITNESS



MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS

Client: Beaumonts Health Club, Furzeffeld Centre

Supplier: Star Trac

Potters Bar residents (Hertfordshire, UK) had every reason to embrace the traditional New Year resolution to get in shape this year, with the re-opening of Beaumonts Health Club in January after a £250,000 refurbishment.

The gym, located in the Furzeffeld Centre, is managed by Hertsmere Leisure. The fitness centre has been refurbished and the décor refreshed, as well as investment in new equipment from Star Trac.

To keep current members informed of progress, as well as to attract new members during the refurbishment, Hertsmere Leisure invested in local newspaper and bus advertising as well as a direct mail campaign, which has resulted in more than 200 new members signing up.

The club's 1,700 members can now work out in style in the new gym, using cardiovascular equipment from Star Trac's popular E-series range, featuring the Star Trac Coach on the treadmills and customised Spinning classes on the eSpinners. In addition to the selectorised Inspiration Strength area, Hertsmere Leisure has also introduced a functional / circuit training area featuring the cable-based HumanSport range, which has proved extremely popular.

To ensure members get the most from their workout, Beaumonts Health Club also offers a nutritional advice service, which it says has helped improve both secondary spend and member retention.

Ian Pluck, operations director for Hertsmere Leisure, says: "Star Trac provided Hertsmere Leisure with a partner with whom it could develop a sustained and meaningful relationship. This has created new training opportunities for members,

supported our charitable objectives to drive new users to commit to a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, and assisted staff in engaging with customers to achieve these goals."

Hertsmere Leisure also invested in FitLinxx, a system that tracks daily activity, exercise and critical health indicators such as weight and blood pressure. Members can monitor their progress and celebrate their achievements, while the data it provides helps trainers to tailor personalised workout programmes.

Beaumonts Health Club complements the range of other leisure and fitness options available at the Furzeffeld Centre, which include fitness and dance studios, badminton and squash courts, an all-weather astro turf pitch and a swimming pool. Those looking to relax and unwind after a busy day or gruelling session at the gym can also use the spa and beauty facilities.

The refurbishment of the club has been driven by the core values of Hertsmere Leisure: to provide well-equipped, friendly and affordable health and fitness facilities, accessible to all members of the community.

Staff report that, since the club's re-opening in January this year, they have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from council partners as well as new and existing members. Footfall has increased, membership continues to grow and there has been a significant drop in cancellations.

As the combination has proved a winning formula for Beaumonts Health Club at the Furzeffeld Centre, Hertsmere Leisure has plans to continue its refurbishment programme. This will include another three sites over the next five years, working in partnership with Star Trac to provide a first-class fitness experience for the local community.

For more information: www.startrac.com

MAXIMISING SPACE

Client: Sentinel Leisure Trust on behalf of Waveney District Council

Supplier: Pulse



The facility now offers a light and welcoming hotel-style reception area

Pulse was appointed as strategic leisure partner for Waveney District Council (WDC) in November 2010, with the first project being the redevelopment of the 40-year-old Waterlane Leisure Centre. The brief was to provide a future-proof, modern, high quality and family-friendly facility – offering more health, fitness, leisure and social activities and a wider appeal to the local community. Pulse's role was to design and build, provide capital funding, project manage and equip the new centre, as well as providing sales and marketing support for the duration of the contract.

Over the space of 52 weeks, and at a cost of £8m – funded by Pulse, WDC via Sport England and Lowestoft 6th Form Centre – the public sector leisure centre was transformed to meet the diverse demands of the local community.

By maximising the existing space, as well as by adding a further 914sq m to the ground floor and an additional first floor measuring 831sq m, the new leisure centre now offers:

- A two-storey, 110-station Pulse fitness suite
- Dance studio
- Martial arts studio
- Dedicated group cycling studio
- Squash courts

- 25m x 12.5m swimming pool
- 12m x 7m teaching pool featuring a moveable floor and a viewing gallery
- New facilities for the disabled
- Thermal spa including steamroom, ice station, sauna, experience shower, heated loungers, foot spa and a relaxation zone
- Six treatment rooms offering a full range of body and beauty treatments/experiences
- High quality wet and dry changing facilities
- Soft play and party zone
- Conference facilities and function suite
- The Source grill restaurant

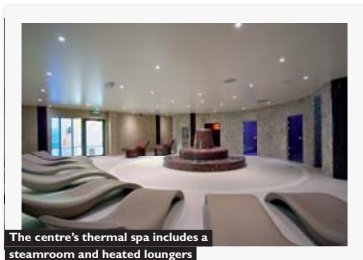
Pulse has designed an attractive and functional facility where the attention to detail on finishes, décor, materials and build can be seen the whole way through. From the welcoming hotel-style reception to the spacious glazed atrium, and from the luxurious thermal spa to the state of the art, environmentally-efficient 110-station Pulse fitness suite, Waterlane Leisure Centre provides exclusive facilities on an inclusive basis.

As part of the contract, Pulse rebranded the facility with a refreshed logo alongside supporting sub-brands and modern creative illustrations. The brand values can be seen throughout the facility in areas such as interior design, signage, focal points and, most importantly, in all external marketing communications.

Driving greater participation by providing affordable memberships was key, and Pulse and the key stakeholders developed a unique 'create your own membership' concept. This allows users to structure their membership around their individual interests and lifestyle. Core membership – which covers swimming only – starts at only £15 a month (concessionary rate), or £25 standard rate. Other activities are then available as add-ons: activities such as spa, classes, gym. There are also saver cards and 'pay as you go' options across all activities to cater for visitors and tourists to the area.

Pulse will continue to provide sales and marketing support and lifecycle investment as part of its partnership with WDC to help ensure the project's sustainability.

For more information: www.pulsefitness.com



The centre's thermal spa includes a steamroom and heated loungers



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