



PRESTON LEWIS

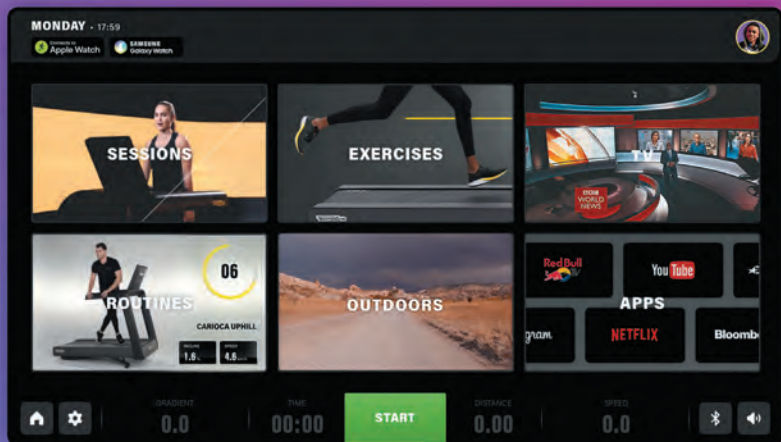
The co-founder of the world's first VR
gym is making fitness addictive



The new Excite line provides all users with an engaging and tailored exercise experience thanks to the Technogym Live platform.

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The background of the advertisement is a photograph of a group of people in a gym setting. In the foreground, a woman on the left is lifting a yellow dumbbell, and a man on the right is holding a purple resistance band. In the background, another man is using a piece of gym equipment. The overall atmosphere is active and inclusive.

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By **MATRIX**

Big (fit) tech

We're entering the age of the wellness mega-corp, with the ultimate goal for investors being to dominate health and wellness markets in every channel. Prepare to expect the unexpected in this convergence of health, fitness and wellness



The fit tech market continues to hurtle along, with major players building out their portfolios. Google's acquisition of Fitbit and Peloton's of Precor being recent, high profile examples.

Although each buy-out, merger or launch varies in scope and sequencing, the intended destination appears to be similar, regardless of the starting point.

Fundamentally, we're seeing investors converging in a battle for the wellness consumer and control of the health agenda. Apple, Google, Peloton, Samsung and others are locked in a race to build out businesses which dominate all parts of the consumer health, fitness and wellness marketplace.

In a recent issue of *Fit Tech* magazine, for example, we talked to Samsung's Sharon Hegarty about how the brand is creating a fully joined-up lifestyle portfolio. "We envisage a world in which somebody's smart home and personal tech can support and react to their fitness regime," said Hegarty. "Be it through suggesting a shopping list for meal planning, setting the lighting for a yoga session or optimising sleep quality."

Samsung is not alone in this kind of wide-ranging ambition, as brands work to create frictionless wellness offerings which deliver for consumers in all areas of life – potentially extending to government and private health contracts eventually.

Although digital is the starting point for many fit tech investors, we all live location-based lives, so there will inevitably come a time when brick and mortar investments of some kind become part of these portfolios.

We ultimately expect to see big fit tech acquiring everything from gym aggregators,



We're entering an era when people will be obsessed with health

We expect to see big fit tech acquiring everything from gym aggregators to gym operators

medical insurance companies and corporate wellness providers, to gym chains, high-street retail and home wellness tech providers.

The way things are shaping up, it's likely many of these big fit tech businesses will end up a similar shape, once the key elements of their growth plans are in place.

Awareness of this trend will shape the way smaller and medium-sized companies invest, as they innovate and position for acquisition to complement the needs of investors who are pushing forward with consolidation.

This eco-system looks set to create fertile ground for development and growth at every level of the fit tech sector, in a world that will be obsessed with health for generations.

Liz Terry, editor, FitTech @elizterry



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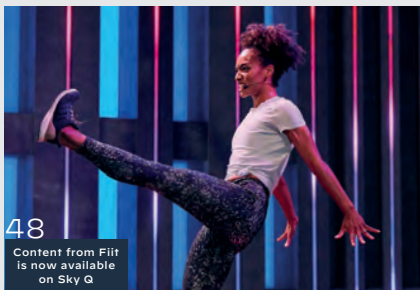
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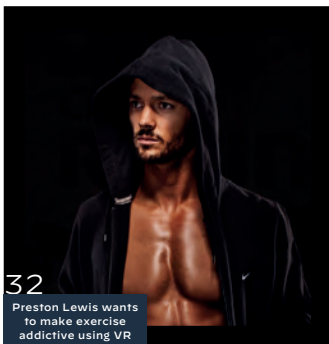
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Content from Fiit is now available on Sky Q



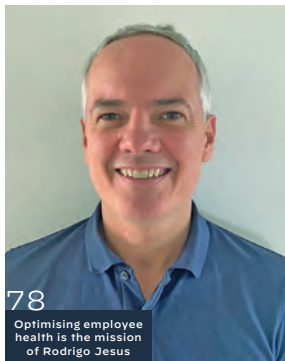
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emPOWER is a visionary project that aims to develop implantable artificial muscles by 2050. Professor Jonathan Rossiter explains

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Les Mills has launched a suite of digital solutions to help clubs expand their reach in the booming online fitness space

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Researchers in China have designed a tiny device that can scavenge wind energy from the breeze you make when you walk or run

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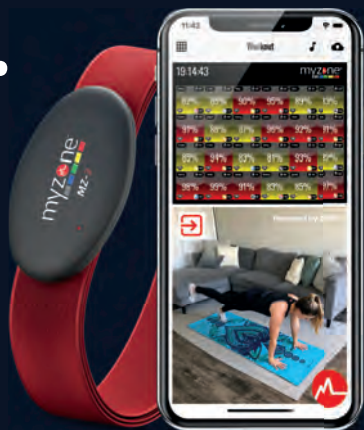


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FitTech PEOPLE



With Facebook paid online events, publishers can charge viewers to attend a video livestream on their Facebook pages or a third party video service

Devi Mahadevia Facebook director of sports and fitness partnerships

Mahadevia says we're in a new era of fitness, which is creating deeper online connections



How can fitness providers use paid online events to their best advantage?

We're excited to provide a menu of products that can help fitness organisations make money, no matter what type of business or business model they have. Many of these products mirror traditional fitness revenue generators, which makes them a natural fit for our partners.

With paid online events, publishers can charge a fee for viewers to attend a video livestream on their Facebook pages or a third party video service (eg. Zoom). Publishers can create the event, set a price, promote the event, collect payment and host the event, all on Facebook. This is just like charging someone to attend your fitness class on a one-time basis. For example, UK-based fitness

instructor Rachel Holmes has used paid online events to earn revenue while broadcasting educational webinars, exercise classes, and other content that would normally have a cost to attend in-person.

Why is Facebook an effective platform for fitness events?

Facebook is a place to build an audience, a community and a



With Facebook paid online events, fitness businesses can reach a global audience

business, making it an incredibly important tool for fitness organisations right now. We're in a new era of fitness, which is in part brought on by COVID-19, but which is also the result of the continued evolution of digital, social and mobile experiences. These experiences are creating deeper online connections and relationships between fitness consumers and businesses.

In this new era, fitness has become democratised and consumer demand is met with accessibility and choice. No matter your fitness level, location, or trainer preferences, you can find the right workout online and, increasingly, find it on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Portal and Oculus.

This democratisation extends to the business side as well. No matter what type of fitness business you manage – whether it's brick and mortar, event-based, influencer-driven or digital-first – you can now reach a global audience and tap into entirely new revenue streams through our products. This underscores how huge the business opportunity is in this new era – one that can be incremental to the historic model, with the potential to grow into entirely new frontiers of financial success.

Does Facebook collect any fees from paid online events?

We don't take any fees today from paid online event purchases, and we do not plan on taking fees while communities remain closed for the pandemic – until at least July 2021. We're committed to providing businesses and creators the tools they need to move their business online and help them maximise their payouts in this uncertain time.

What advice would you give to fitness providers who are considering using Facebook for paid events?

The advice we give all partners is to focus on building an engaged audience. You're far more likely to make money if you have an engaged community of fans than if you're starting from scratch. Across our family of apps, we have a number of products that can help publishers build community and ultimately convert that community into customers. Instagram Stories, Facebook Groups, IGTV and Facebook Watch are just a few tools people and businesses can use to authentically connect with and grow their community.

READY TO GO LIVE?

Devi provides some practical tips for fitness providers who are ready to hold their first paid online event.

Promote your event

Promoting your paid online event can help you increase the number of registered attendees for your event while generating awareness of your event to new audiences.

Start your live stream early

Starting your stream early can help prevent technical difficulties that might occur when starting an event online. It also gives you the opportunity to let your registered attendees know what to expect from your event.

Communicate expectations for your event

Be clear with your guests on what they can expect from your event so that they know what is going to happen. You can post schedules in your event description or in posts on the event itself. If attendees will need special equipment (i.e. a yoga mat) in your live event, you can provide instructions to attendees in advance.

Once you've built an engaged audience, you can experiment with different monetisation products. Your fanbase may gravitate towards paid online events, especially if you can offer them something premium and exclusive. Or you may find that our fan subscriptions product, which enables you to charge a monthly recurring subscription fee, resonates better. There are a number of other monetisation products you can try.

Ultimately, whatever product you choose, we'd advise you to treat your followers like family. In other words, engage with them, listen to their feedback, and adjust your strategy accordingly. If you've built a meaningful relationship with them, meaningful business results will follow. ●



Fitness apps are designed to train clients, without a trainer on the other side. We give coaches a tool for connection

Kevin Dawidowicz President, CoachMePlus

What is CoachMePlus?

CoachMePlus is built around a simple idea, to help coaches and athletes work together to achieve their fitness-related goals. From that idea, highly configurable enterprise software with an app front-end was created. We now have tools that manage fitness, nutrition, wellness and data from other wearables and fitness apps, all in one system, so coaches and trainers have the tools they need to help their athletes. Remote fitness has become the new normal, and we want to help fitness pros stay connected with their clients and athletes.



Dawidowicz is president of CoachMePlus

How did you come up with the concept? Why was it needed?

Back in 2002, the NHL's Buffalo Sabres came to my company with a problem. All of their workouts were once delivered via paper books and out to the athletes. This effort was time-consuming, cumbersome, and not very helpful. We helped the team create a CDROM version of their workouts and nutrition guides, and made it more interactive.

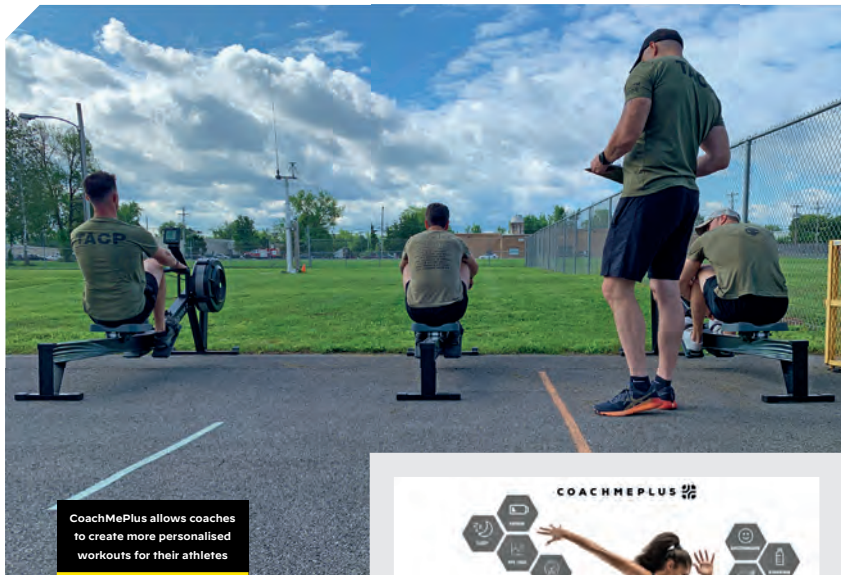
The idea of taking the system to an online platform was only natural, and we built the first prototype in 2010. We also noticed something else. The coach, Doug McKenney, had technology all around the gym. A BodPod, Woodway treadmills, FirstBeat, Tendo, etc. Each of these technologies had their own software and silo. It only seemed natural to integrate with that data and make a comprehensive view of the athlete. Immediately, the coaches became more informed and more efficient. The players loved seeing their progress and getting competitive with their fitness results.

How has the service evolved over time?

As we built the prototype, we noticed that the same problem was playing out across the entire fitness



Packages for trainers start from \$19/month, and \$1500-\$2500 for gyms



CoachMePlus allows coaches to create more personalised workouts for their athletes

industry. Gyms and personal trainers have the same issue as coaches from professional sports teams, colleges, high schools, and human performance facilities. Our app quickly grew in popularity in leading-edge facilities and those looking for those incremental increases in performance. Now, the fitness industry is ready for remote fitness, and our platform is now available for prime-time with trainers and clients.

What are the main benefits of CoachMePlus for coaches?

For gyms and personal trainers, clients walk into their facilities with the competition in their own pockets. Fitness apps are designed to train clients without a coach or trainer on the other side. We give coaches and trainers a tool for connection, retention and compliance for their athletes and clients.

We also provide those coaches with the data from their client's wearable fitness devices such as Apple Watch, Wahoo, Garmin, FitBit,

Whoop, Polar, MyFitnessPal, Loselt, and more to help coaches become more informed and helpful. Using workout planning tools allows them to assign group-specific training and save time while being able to hyper-individualise programming needs.

Messaging and communication tools keep coaches connected, and hydration, nutrition, body weight, and an unlimited amount of goals tracking round out a complete tool for coaches to maintain their client's progress and retain them as they continue their success.



The software brings together data on a multitude of different sources

And for athletes?

For athletes, the most important thing is knowing that someone on the other side helps them reach their goals. Their needs are specific to their situation, and no single fitness app or wearable can provide the guidance they require to get there. Having their coach or trainer provide individualised workouts, nutrition, guidance, and education while being connected to their data pushes athletes to maintain their health, wellness, fitness, and safety.

Athletes are empowered by connecting their own wearable



USAF Airmen view the results of their remote fitness training

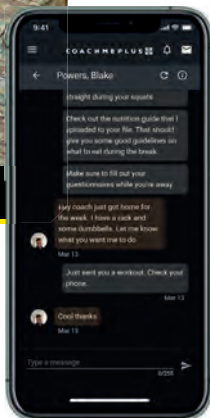
- devices and technology, reviewing their dashboards and progress, and seeing the programmes and guidance that the coaches prescribe them.

To what extent can the system be customised?

The one thing we learned is that no two organisations do things the same way. From single personal trainers to gyms, universities, and up to the United States Air Force and Navy, every coach has a distinct set of needs that have to be addressed. Our system is fully customisable to deal with all of the different roles an organisation may have, such as trainers, exercise physiologists, strength and conditioning coaches, nutritionists, physical therapists, and athletic trainers.

Tell us more about the data that the system makes available

CoachMePlus turns data into action. Sources of data can come from the gym and at-home workouts, nutrition tracking, hydration tracking, and fitness technology. If you take a look at the technology stack from the fitness space, it is ever-growing, continually



evolving, and will only continue. Using a platform like CoachMePlus allows an organisation to future-proof their technology decisions and develop as the market changes.

Data can be taken from heart rates, HRV, body composition, movement assessment, sleep, stress, mood, pain, soreness, GPS, velocity-based training, and more. Once this data becomes centralised, analysed, and displayed, it is turned into actionable insights that coaches can use to make informed decisions.

What technology is used?

The core of the system is what we call the Algorithm Engine. This tool allows any data point in the system to be connected and gives you the power to write unique algorithms to

“

It's a combination of algorithms and a coach providing guidance that creates the best outcome for the athlete

help make decisions. These algorithms can drive results in data visualisation tools and notifications that help a coach make smarter decisions.

Basing the data on trends, recent analysis, goal ranges, and future projections keeps training progress on track. Best-practice sports science-driven algorithms are built into the application, which takes some of the burdens off the coach who's analysing the data. It's a combination of algorithms and a coach providing guidance that creates the best outcome for the athlete.

How has the pandemic affected your business?

After reaching cash-positive in 2019, we approached 2020 with scaling in mind. The last year provided many lessons for us in scaling the packaged product space – while opening a new world of opportunities.

The entire fitness industry has accelerated through an evolution into a blended model of in-person and remote fitness. When the pandemic first hit, we were overwhelmed by the fivefold increase in inbound and interest in our remote fitness offerings. We had to learn to become more efficient with our marketing efforts and lead-to-conversion ratio.

We found a sweet spot that allows us to scale effectively, and we now have a profitable business model that can scale with additional resources. We've added sales and marketing staff to go after the \$1.3 billion market opportunity in front of us.

We expect the shift to continue as gyms and in-person training comes back to life. It is this blend of in-person and remote fitness that is the future. ●

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Rezzil was able to have an injured player learning his new manager's philosophy, positioning and playing style – all from a seated position

Andy Etches Founder and sports director, Rezzil



Etches founded Rezzil with Adam Dickinson and Gareth Thatcher

What is Rezzil?

Rezzil is a market leading VR training and cognitive development tool for elite football and is already installed at world leading football clubs.

We're in daily use by elite players aiming to improve cognitive fitness. We're gradually making the platform more accessible – starting with academies and grassroots clubs then finally ending up on the PlayStation or Oculus Quest in your living room!

What's your background?

I've worked in sport for over 10 years now, doing a wide range of roles related to data, analysis and performance. My career and knowledge took a real boost whilst working with Manchester City FC under Pellegrini's win in 2014. I learned so much about working with teams at that level. After leaving Man City I worked as a consultant at various other teams across the EFL and Premier League, during which time I met my co-founders Adam and Gareth.

How did you develop Rezzil?

Adam and Gareth were working on a piece of VR technology for fan experiences. It was such a cool idea and so well executed, but I saw it had a much wider application in performance rather than just for fans.

Over the years we've worked together to perfect that experience and add meaningful data layers underneath that generate useful information that teams and players can use to improve their performance.



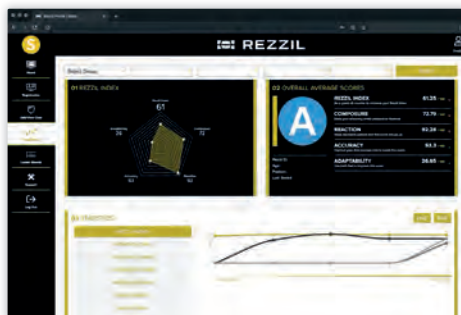
Rezzil offers a variety of VR drills that improve cognition, decision making and resilience in players

“ We’ve worked to perfect the experience and add meaningful data layers underneath that generate useful information for teams

Underneath it all is a data capture system and algorithm that reads physical signs from a player’s performance and computes that information to turn it into something that’s readable for humans. It’s a small step behind AI – another area of development for us – where the machine itself is appraising what you do.

How did you develop the drills?

Any drill is always grounded in solid research. For example, for one of the drills, we looked at papers on subjects such as perceptual and exploratory activity or ‘scanning behaviour and real-time processing’ in game.



The technology can be used to benchmark large groups of players



The system generates a Rezzil Index Score, which shows categories such as composure and reaction time

- We then create a way to test a player's capacity for this without needing to use game-specific events. It might seem an odd approach to remove the game specific element, but we operate in a world where many coaches have differing philosophies, so we want the programme to suit everyone.

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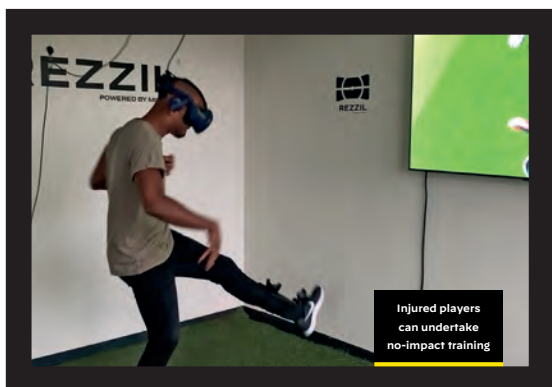
Underneath it all is a data capture system and algorithm that reads physical signs from a player's performance and computes that information to turn it into something that's readable for humans

What data is available to coaches/players after completing the drills?

The system generates a Rezzil Index score instantly, it's broken down into categories such as composure, reaction time, accuracy and so on. You can even drill down and get raw data exports with minute details such as strike points, vision scope, heart rate variation (HRV) and – in the near future – eye tracking too.

How is Rezzil used?

The Elite side is used in the same way as the academy drills in some circumstances, but more for



Injured players can undertake no-impact training



WHAT IS REZZIL?

Rezzil builds resilience in the athlete when it is needed most: during the last minutes of a high-pressure game.

- **Academy** – A unique set of virtual drills to test players' cognitive abilities. Designed to analyse, benchmark, educate and improve any player.
- **Elite** – A suite of post-match analysis tools enabling players to replay a match from any position to improve decision making on the pitch.
- **Recovery** – Analyse and record your team's physical properties, then track recovery against their benchmark and make return-to-play decisions with more confidence.

Rezzil Elite enables players to replay a match from any position on the field

maintenance rather than appraisal. Say you've got a player who's an injury risk or in the late stages of recovery at a crucial point in the season, you might not want them on the field taking full training but you do want them challenged mentally. Rezzil can do that. No-impact challenging experiences that are football specific.

We also work at the very early stages of recovery, where players can connect with a virtual ball months before they are able to touch a real one.

We had a great case recently. One of our teams had a player who suffered a serious injury in the middle of last season. In the first week or so the team manager was replaced, so you've got a player who won't kick a ball for

his new manager for seven months. You want the player to recover well but you shouldn't have to wait until they are at running phase or able to participate in light training before they can learn the new manager's systems. Rezzil was able to have this player learning his manager's philosophy, positioning and playing style all from a seated position.

Can clubs customise the platform?

I mentioned earlier that we are mostly non-specific when it comes to the drills – that's true, but what we don't publicise that much is that we also have a drill creation platform. That means coaches can log in and create position-specific, trigger-specific or possession specific

tests for players. It makes it basically an infinite possibility system that can be completely customised.

Do you have any plans to expand Rezzil to other sports?

Absolutely, there are plenty of sports in the pipeline for the future – I can't say what right now but they're coming!

What else would you like people to know?

Rezzil might seem exclusive at the moment – limited to elite players and clubs. But that's not always going to be the case. Not long from now, you'll be able to use Rezzil to train at home like a pro. We're bringing some of the tools from the Elite package to everyone – it's going to be amazing! ●



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JaxJox raises US\$10m in Series A funding – launches InteractiveStudio in US

Fitness tech firm JaxJox has accelerated the launch of its connected home fitness solution, InteractiveStudio, following a cash injection of US\$10m through Series A funding.

The InteractiveStudio, which is available to consumers for preorder in the US, will be marketed as the first home gym to combine connected, strength-training equipment with live and on-demand content, while enabling users to track their own performance using artificial intelligence – and in real time – during classes.

Fitted with a huge, 43-inch capacitive touchscreen TV, the training station has four smart connected products, with automatic adjustability.

It has been designed to offer the equivalent of six kettlebells and 15 dumbbells, providing a “complete gym” with 145 lbs of adjustable weight, a smart push up device and a digital, vibrating foam roller.

The screen will also have the ability to rotate horizontally and vertically – as well as tilt for floor-based exercises.

Fitness IQ

The equipment also uses a proprietary machine learning algorithm to calculate the user's Fitness IQ score.

The score keeps users informed on overall progress and can also provide personal workout recommendations.

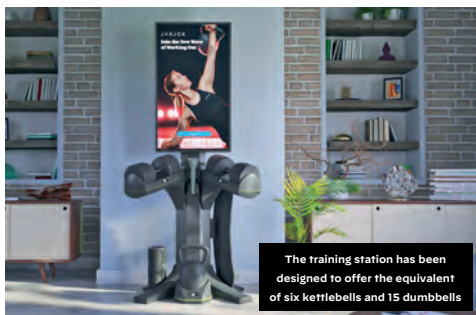
For the calculation, JaxJox uses metrics such as peak and average power, heart rate, workout consistency, steps, body weight, and your chosen fitness level.

The US\$10m funding, which included investments from Dowgate Capital and entrepreneur Nigel Wray, brings the total amount of funding raised to date to US\$17m.

“With so much activity in the connected fitness space, we're both

We believe that tracking power generated while lifting will become as important as tracking your heart rate while running

Stephen Owusu



delighted and excited to be part of JaxJox's movement to bring fitness and health together using data science,” said James Sergeant of Dowgate Capital.

Future of wellness

“This is the future of wellness.”

JaxJox founder and CEO Stephen Owusu said: “When developing the InteractiveStudio it was important for us to think about all the friction points that a user might experience with home gym equipment.

“A few years ago, there were no in-home fitness solutions that fit into every lifestyle. There were in-home solutions for cardio and strength but nothing that combined the two into one compact unit.

“When we created JaxJox we set out to reimagine free-weight equipment like dumbbells and kettlebells and create technology that was built into the products to track a user's performance, giving them the freedom to work out anywhere.

“We believe that, for users, tracking power generated while lifting will become as important as tracking your heart rate while running.”

“With InteractiveStudio, we spent two years creating the ultimate community-centric home fitness solution that combines adjustable free-weight equipment, AI-powered performance tracking, and content for a wide variety of workouts.”

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/t0r1x>

Peloton buys Precor

Peloton – which finished its last financial quarter with US\$2bn cash in the bank – has announced it's purchasing commercial fitness giant, Precor. The deal is worth US\$420m.

Precor will become a division of Peloton, with current Precor president, Rob Barker, becoming CEO of Precor and general manager of Peloton Commercial. He will report directly to William Lynch, president of Peloton.

The market liked the deal, with Peloton's share prices jumping 8 per cent at the news. Peloton's shares have climbed 403 per cent this year, due to record sales during the pandemic, taking it to a market capitalisation around US\$42bn.

This increased demand has led to challenges with supply and so the purpose of the deal is in part to buy Peloton more manufacturing capacity.

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/d2P6m>



John Foley's Peloton has signalled its intention to buy Precor

Peloton's share prices jumped 8 per cent upon news of the Precor deal

Evolution Wellness backs tech

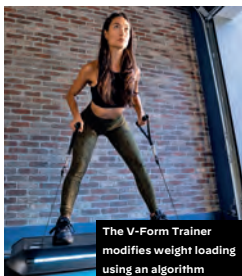
Start-up Vitruvian, based in Perth, Australia, has announced it has raised USD \$2.5m (AUD\$3.42m) in capital from industry-leading investors.

This injection allows Vitruvian to ramp up production of its strength training device, the V-Form Trainer.

The V-Form Trainer promises to dramatically improve the efficiency and accessibility of resistance training. Driven by intelligent algorithmic technology, the device does away with static weight entirely, rather, it modifies weight loading between 7kg and 180kg to match the user's ability.

Evolution Wellness Group, based in South-East Asia with a portfolio of influential fitness and wellness brands, recognised the value in Vitruvian and were quick to lead the round.

Evolution Wellness CEO Simon Flint commented: "Our investment



The V-Form Trainer modifies weight loading using an algorithm

in Vitruvian marks our first major foray into the area of connected fitness and this is another stepping stone in fulfilling our growth ambition in this fast-paced industry."

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/A7g3K>

PopBase grows

PopBase, a start-up tech company, has secured US\$400,000 investment from Welltech, an Israel-based venture capital fund and hub specialising in wellness-related technologies.

Los Angeles-based PopBase – founded by Lisa Wong, Amit Tishler and Richard Weeks is building a gamified, patent-protected technology platform which uses common gaming and social media practices to teach and encourage children to adopt a healthy way of life.

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/m3v0X>

Breath analysis

A new, hand-held, portable device and app has been launched that measures metabolism in real-time by analysing the breath.

Lumen gives insights into how the body metabolises fats and carbohydrates by measuring carbon dioxide levels, indicating the type of fuel being used to produce energy.

Daily reports show users how the way they eat and exercise impacts their metabolism.

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/10I3k>

Smart rings

FormSense has partnered with a team of researchers to help stroke survivors be more physically active.

The team is developing a mobile health system to monitor and encourage movement in the weak upper limb of stroke survivors.

At the heart of the system will be FormSense's smart ring.

Sensors embedded in the smart ring have the capability to provide individually tailored data to encourage the use of the affected limb.

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/W3Q2f>

Apple Fitness+ is uniquely simple and easy to access



The platform will dynamically integrate metrics from Apple Watch

Apple launches its 'game changer' Fitness+ platform

Apple has launched its long-awaited on-demand fitness platform, which will utilise the tech giant's ecosystem of hardware and software to offer a personalised exercise experience.

Called Apple Fitness+, the new service will deliver studio-style workouts to iPhone, iPad, and Apple TV products, while incorporating workout metrics from Apple Watch.

Apple says that by dynamically integrating metrics from Apple

Watches, Fitness+ will be able to offer a more immersive experience – including the possibility to animate users on the screen during key moments in the workout.

At launch, the platform will include more than 200 workouts across 10 popular workout types – from HIIT, strength, yoga and dance to core, cycling and treadmill. There are also “Mindful Ccooldown” sessions, led by a team of specialist trainers.

Cycling, treadmill, and rowing workouts can be done using equipment from any manufacturer.

“We’re excited for Apple Fitness+ to bring together the metrics from Apple Watch, great music, and a diverse and inspiring trainer team – in a uniquely simple, easy-to-access way across Apple devices,” said Jay Blahnik, Apple’s senior director of Fitness Technologies.

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/w2LSL>

Peloton and Beyoncé produce themed workouts

Peloton and Grammy Award-winning singer Beyoncé have signed a broad, multi-year partnership which will result in the launch of new, themed workouts on the interactive fitness platform.

According to Peloton, the partnership will be “rooted in the celebration of music” – a central component of the Peloton experience – and “pro-social initiatives”.

Peloton and I both believe that the power of music can help uplift, motivate and inspire people's fitness journeys

Beyoncé

their fitness journeys,” Beyoncé commented in a statement.

“I’ve been a Peloton member for several years, and I’m excited to partner with a company that helps people, young and old, be the best versions of themselves, in an innovative and adaptable way.”

The special content is accessible on the Peloton app, as well as through the Peloton Bike, Bike+ and Tread+.

Beyoncé will work closely with Peloton on class curation across all workout disciplines, including music, movement, fitness and wellness.

“Beyoncé’s commitment to empowerment and artistic expression is an inspiration to the entire Peloton community,” said Peloton’s Head of Music Gwen Bethel Riley.

“It is a privilege to work closely with her and her extraordinary team to broaden access to our platform and collaborate on incredible offerings.”

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/q2M1i>



SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/ALAMY/ALTONINS

The workouts created with Beyoncé will cover multiple fitness categories

The first set of workouts, created by Beyoncé and Peloton, have now been launched to celebrate the US Homecoming season – an annual autumn celebration for students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

The workouts cover multiple fitness categories, from indoor cycling, running and strength to bootcamp, yoga and meditation.

“Peloton and I both believe that the power of music can help uplift, motivate and inspire people on



SHUTTERSTOCK/VIA PRODUCTIONS

Premier Global NASM to offer pregnant women personalised fitness via app

Personalised health and human performance specialist, Salus Optima, has teamed up with training company, Premier Global NASM, to help new and expectant mothers achieve their personal health and wellness goals.

The partnership will see Salus Optima utilise its parenting platform, Biamother, to provide pregnant women with a personalised fitness journey.

Accessed via an app, Biamother provides holistic support for new and expectant mothers, based around key pillars of health and wellbeing: fitness, nutrition, mindfulness and personalised coaching.

Expert knowledge

Salus Optima will now begin providing its real-time, data-driven insights, direct to Premier Global NASM personal trainers (PTs), enabling them to utilise the platform and help their clients fully prepare for and recover from childbirth.

The offering will provide the PTs with unlimited access to evidence-based, expert knowledge on pregnancy and motherhood, which will help them to attract new clients and retain existing ones.



Biamother will provide our PTs with an opportunity to offer elevated support

Dan Rees

The health and wellness recommendations offered via Biamother will be specifically tailored to each mother's needs and will continuously evolve as she progresses through her journey.

Biamother enables PTs to keep their pregnant clients engaged and on track between in-person sessions, by providing access to a wide range of pre and postnatal workouts on

the app, alongside further guidance on nutrition and mindset.

This is supplemented by pregnancy and postnatal content from Biamother's expert team, tailored to the interest and needs of the Premier Global NASM clients, to help them achieve their goals.

Elevated support

"Working with Premier Global NASM is an exciting step forward for us and an important element in our mission to democratise best knowledge in health and wellness to all," said Kris Shuttleworth, director of Health and Human Performance at Salus Optima.

"We look forward to supporting their PTs with Biamother."

Dan Rees, managing director at Premier Global NASM, adds: "Biamother will provide our personal trainers with a welcome opportunity to offer an elevated level of support to new and expectant mums. We already offer a six-week, self-paced, prenatal and postnatal education programme for personal trainers, so this new partnership will strengthen our provision in this area."

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/T4P4p>

Venueserve Fitness offers white-label content streaming

A new, white-label online fitness platform has launched, enabling health club operators, instructors and PTs to offer live streaming, as well as pre-recorded training sessions and group exercise classes, branded as their own.

The platform - Venueserve Fitness – is already being used by more than 45 health clubs across the UK.

It can be set up in just a few hours and includes 50 pre-loaded training sessions. A dashboard allows operators to gather membership data.

The new online platform was developed by Lee Booth, the founder and CEO of Venueserve, a UK company which started out in the ticketing and sports membership

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK



Gym owners and PTs can live-stream classes on a white-label basis

Venueserve Fitness gives operators the tools to offer a branded virtual membership

sector and which is now taking its first steps into the fitness industry.

Booth says: "Venueserve Fitness gives operators the tools to offer a branded virtual membership, whether as a free service for members, an upsell option or a subscription-based online membership."

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/m4J9X>

Presence.Fit combines AI with live trainers

A new mobile fitness platform delivers personal training sessions to people at home by combining live fitness instruction with AI-enabled tracking and two-way audio-video.

Presence.Fit allows trainers to see users remotely, through the front-facing camera of a mobile device, while two-way audio technology provides an interactive, real-time fitness experience where trainers can coach users and respond to questions on the spot.

Using multi-sensor AI technology, the platform is able to track form, pace and vitals in real-time and by using these metrics, trainers can optimise workouts with corrections and motivation. It also supports hardware such as Apple Watch, giving the option for trainers to access heart rate monitoring for better coaching.

Launched in October 2020, Presence.fit will offer a number of exercise options, from HIIT, Strength and Yoga to Barre and Pilates.

Founded by entrepreneurs Dr Masaki Nakada and Robert Jadon, Presence.

Fit has raised US\$1.5m in funding so far, with notable investors including Michael Stoppelman (former SVP of Engineering at Yelp) and Tom McInerney (seed investor in Bird, Segment, Notion).

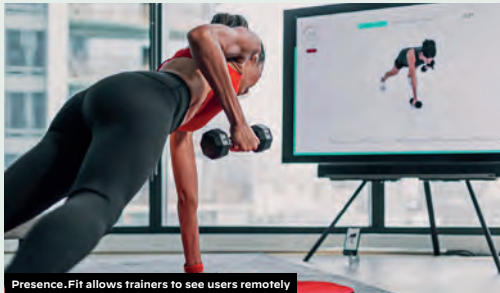
"We're at a unique time, where powerful biomechanical and computer

vision algorithms can be utilised on mobile devices," said Nakada.

"We knew that combining those advances with a great trainer would change the way people worked out.

"Why settle for boring, pre-recorded routines when you can have a live trainer coach your workout?"

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/1A6G9>



Presence.Fit allows trainers to see users remotely

PHOTO: PRESENCE.FIT



Booking is the moment your member journey begins. What next?

#AboutTime

Full suite of club and leisure management tools
Plug and play web, mobile, app
Free switching service
UK support

"Branded online and member booking apps are now part of the Champneys brand experience. We deliver more than 30k bookings a month, so we needed something stable and future proof. Thanks to fibodo, we are in a stronger position to delight our customers than before the pandemic."

Louise Day

Fitness & Wellbeing Director – Champneys


fibodo

www.fibodo.com/hcm





The app uses an algorithm to create a unique fitness class of either HIIT or yoga

LEWIS GARDNER

The Refinery launches avatar PT service

Boutique operator, The Refinery E9, has launched a personal trainer (PT) service with a twist, by offering customers the opportunity to take part in exercise sessions led by an avatar.

Utilising motion capture, 3D and augmented-reality (AR) technology, 'ALFI' is a virtual PT, created in partnership with Unicorn XP and Riverswave Developers.

The Refine with ALFI app has been designed to provide the "most inclusive, visually appealing, and movement-focused PT ever experienced" in the virtual and on demand fitness space.

Unique experience

The ALFI platform consists of two key phone applications, one to run on Apple's iOS and another on Android.

Both applications have a 3D engine embedded within a native app,

which gives the user an experience similar to a top-quality video game.

Using an algorithm, the app then creates a unique fitness class of either HIIT or yoga, also offering a posture clinic for technical perfection.

The class is then presented by ALFI the avatar, using 3D motion clips to create the unique content, complete with synchronised music and voice-overs for a seamless user experience.

Fun and engaging

The app is run on the UNITY platform, using motion capture technology of experienced human coaches and includes 360-degree views of all poses and moves.

To increase engagement, the app has an in-built redeemable token system, allowing the user to give credits to friends, customise their avatar, redeem free classes or donate to charity.

Each ALFI avatar can be customised to suit the user's preferences.

The launch of ALFI is a response to an increasing appetite for AR-based solutions – which overlay digital content onto the physical world.



Zoe Bertali, co-founder

It is estimated that AR-based apps, such as Pokemon Go, will have an estimated 2.5 billion users by 2023.

Zoe Bertali, co-founder of ALFI said: "We wanted to create something fun, accessible and engaging."

"We have created a visually striking, avatar led, algorithmic fitness app which allows us to create bespoke user led classes in seconds."

"Our app is AR-ready, so very soon, life size ALFI will be leading you through classes in your home!"

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/c4r8A>



Very soon, life size ALFI will be leading you through classes in your home!

Adam Zeitsiff takes CEO role at Intelivideo

Digital fitness tech and on-demand platform, Intelivideo, has appointed former Gold's Gym CEO, Adam Zeitsiff, as its new president and CEO.

Zeitsiff will take up the role with immediate effect, as Matt Given, the exiting CEO, moves to take over as chair of the company's board.

Gold's Gym was acquired by Rainer Schaller's RSG Group in July out of Chapter 11 bankruptcy for US\$100m. Zeitsiff left the firm soon afterwards.

Established in 2014, Intelivideo provides video on demand (VOD) and digital technology services for gyms and health clubs.

The platform's end-to-end solution has been designed to help clubs develop hybrid models, by allowing them to build a subscription video on demand (SVOD) business to complement their bricks-and-mortar facilities and services.

"The hybridisation of brick-and-mortar businesses with digital innovation, particularly in the fitness space, is something I've been passionate about and advocating for throughout my entire career," Zeitsiff claimed, commenting on his appointment.

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/B8t2l>



PHOTO: INTELIVIDEO

Zeitsiff joins Intelivideo just weeks after stepping down from his role as CEO and president of franchised fitness giant Gold's Gym

The hybridisation of brick and mortar businesses with digital is something I'm passionate about

Drones disinfect Mercedes Benz stadium

The Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, in the United States, has become one of the first major sports venues to use drones to clean and disinfect the facility as part of its anti-COVID-19 measures.

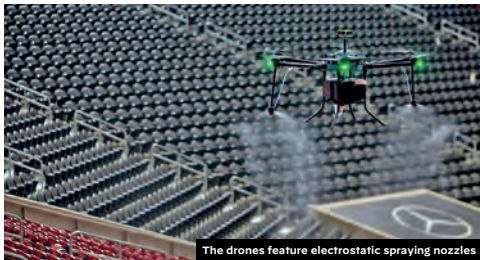
Stadium operator AMB Sports and Entertainment partnered with Lucid Drone Technologies ahead of the Atlanta Falcons' National Football League (NFL) home opener against the Carolina Panthers on 11 October.

AMB used two of Lucid's D1 Disinfecting Drones to sanitise all stadium bowl areas.

The purpose-built D1 drones feature electrostatic spraying nozzles – allowing even distribution – and 2.5-gallon tanks, which can be filled with cleaning or sanitising solutions.

The technology will also be used for post-event disinfecting of the seating bowl, the handrails, and glass partitions at the stadium.

"The process of welcoming fans back involves actively listening and responding to their concerns and we understand that proper cleaning protocols are top of mind in the current environment," said Dietmar Exler, chief operating officer of AMB.



MERCEDES-BENZ STADIUM/AMB SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

The drones feature electrostatic spraying nozzles

As we welcome fans back, these drones allow us to maximise the time between games to sanitise

"We have worked tirelessly to provide a safe environment for not only our associates, players and staff, but especially our fans."

According to Jackie Poulakos, manager of AMB's building operations, the drones allow for a 95 per cent reduction in time spent cleaning the seating bowl and offer the ability to redeploy staff to other areas.

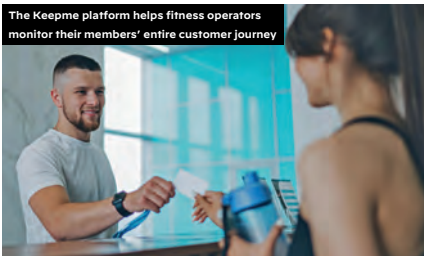
"This stadium is incredibly large and as we begin to slowly welcome fans back, these drones allow us to maximise the time between games and private events to thoroughly sanitise."

"We try to continually innovate and this new technology is the ideal solution to effectively disinfect our stadium in an efficient manner."

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/y4h7H>

The funding will be used to drive the company's growth and product development

The Keepme platform helps fitness operators monitor their members' entire customer journey



SHUTTERSTOCK/AULAB

Keepme secures US\$1.7m in first round of investment

AI-based sales and marketing platform Keepme has secured round one funding, totalling US\$1.7m.

The funding will be used to drive the company's growth and product development and comes weeks after the release of its new V2 platform.

Using AI, the V2 platform has been designed to help fitness operators monitor their members' entire customer journey and tell how and when to engage members who are

in danger of leaving – and even how to engage after they've left.

Announcing the funding, Keepme also revealed three new appointments.

Former UBS and Marriott International executive Dan Tagliere, who has spent the last 15 years at property and investment business Macau Land Developments, has joined the Keepme board.

Joining him is Natasha Foong, co-founder of IncuVest, who has

more than 30 years' experience in business planning, entrepreneurship, venture capital, and management, including being the founder of Valair, Singapore's first budget airline.

Meanwhile, Amanda Hart, who has spent 25 years in business development and management roles at Fitness First, Soho Gym's and The Gym Group, has been named the new director of customer success.

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/227q4>

LG enters fitness market with touchscreen TV

Electronics giant LG has entered the fitness and wellness market with the launch of a new 15-inch touchscreen display created especially for the exercise equipment sector.

The new 15LU766A touchscreen display has been designed specifically for fitness environments by offering higher-than-normal brightness settings and robust protection from

We chose to work with LG because their displays have class-leading picture quality

Nick Schuster, Octane Fitness

According to Tracey Estes, LG's fitness senior account manager, Octane will offer the display as an add-on to select models of its commercial CV machines.

"Octane Fitness and LG worked closely together to develop a customised user experience and interface that provides simple, reliable access to TV programming and offers clients the opportunity to tie the displays into an existing network," Estes explained.

"That makes it a fantastic solution for all types of fitness providers."

Nick Schuster, senior programme manager at Octane Fitness – a wholly-owned subsidiary of equipment giant Nautilus – said: "We chose to work with LG because their displays have class-leading picture quality and include IP (Internet protocol), digital and analog tuners to fit a variety of customer needs."

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/e3M4o>



PHOTO: LG

The display is designed for fitness environments

liquids and dust – as well as allowing viewing from virtually any angle.

A graphical user interface also eliminates the need for channel up and down buttons, allowing exercisers to easily navigate TV programming.

The displays can be customised with branded content and unique user interfaces and LG plans to expand the add-on fitness line with a 22-inch model later this year.

South Korea-based LG has now also signed its first manufacturing fitness partner, Octane Fitness.



The Bump devices were worn by both runners and operative staff during this year's London Marathon

SHUTTERS TOOK/BRAZEN ZONE

London Marathon used robotics to ensure adherence to social distancing

The organisers of the London Marathon recruited the help of one of UK's most advanced robotics companies to ensure social distancing measures were adhered to during this year's race.

The 2020 Virgin Money London Marathon worked with tech firm Tharsus to use its Bump technology system during the elite events – and the build up – on Sunday 4 October.

Risk reduction

All of the 100+ elite athletes wore the Bump devices – as did the 500 members of the event's operational team – to help maintain the biosecure bubble during the event.

Developed in anticipation of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic would have, Bump has been designed to help wearers feel safe, inform effective social-distancing behaviour and thus reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission at events.

It comprises wearable and static devices which use Radio Frequency (RF) technology to create a 'Personal

Tharsus's Bump technology played an important role, giving our athletes and internal teams extra confidence to engage with the event safely

Hugh Brasher

Motion System' that immediately alerts wearers when they are getting too close to another person.

Contact tracing

The Bump devices allowed marathon organisers to accurately monitor how often and for how long athletes and event staff spend within a pre-defined distance of each other.

As well as helping prevent people getting too close to one another during the event, organisers were able to trace interactions back to specific wearers and inform them accordingly, should any Bump wearer

test positive for COVID-19 in the two weeks following the event.

Extra confidence

"This weekend's event was the culmination of months of planning around how to deliver a socially distanced 2020 Virgin Money London Marathon that is safe for all participants and stakeholders," said Hugh Brasher, event director of the Virgin Money London Marathon.

"Tharsus's Bump technology played an important role, giving our athletes and internal teams extra confidence to engage with the event safely.

"We have been working with Tharsus for many months and, when we were still hoping to deliver the mass participation event on its usual route, we were planning to supply all participants with the Bump technology in order to hold a socially distanced mass event.

"It shows how important a role technology can play during the current situation."

■ **MORE:** <http://lei.sr/n2z1Z>

Preston Lewis believes
VR can trick people
into sticking with a
fitness programme

PRESTON LEWIS

Co-founder
Black Box VR



BLACK BOX

LEVEL UP YOUR LIFE

A VIRTUAL REALITY FITNESS EXPERIENCE

Black Box VR
transports users
into another world



Black Box VR is the world's first virtual reality gym, combining HIIT and resistance training with immersive gaming. Co-founder Preston Lewis speaks to Steph Eaves about getting people addicted to fitness through VR

What's your background?

I consider myself a fitness fanatic with a love for creative problem solving. I grew up in a very athletic family and so I've always had a love for sports and fitness. Throughout my childhood, I was always training for one sport or another and ended up earning a full-ride scholarship for pole-vaulting in college, which furthered my love for health, fitness and competition.

On the career side, I started my first business when I was 13, adopting the latest technologies to source products from abroad. I built this into a seven-figure creative agency that I ran throughout college while studying International Business and Finance and then later sold it before joining Bodybuilding.com.

At Bodybuilding.com, I met my co-founder, Ryan DeLuca, who had started the Bodybuilding.com company and together – with an amazing team – we ran the largest and most-visited fitness website in the world.

Our love of innovative new technology combined with our expertise in exercise, sports psychology, nutrition and supplements helped the company grow to nearly US\$500m in annual revenue.

Where did the idea for Black Box VR come from?

We saw an opportunity to make fitness more 'sticky' by combining the modern exercise science of HIIT and resistance training with

the innovative tech of virtual reality and game design mechanics. The majority of people struggle with long-term adherence to their fitness programmes – it's literally hindering billions of people from living the lives of their dreams – and we thought that was a problem worth solving!

Our bodies need to be tricked into sticking to a fitness programme, they literally fight against it and they are programmed to be efficient with calories and to induce pain when we are pushing too hard. On top of that, working out is immediate pain and delayed reward; it lacks the feedback loops that are needed to encourage follow-through. Not to mention the boredom!

You stand there in the traditional gym, looking in the mirror, doing rep after rep, bored out of your mind. Contrast that with game design – game designers have figured out how to keep people unhealthily addicted to games where they are effectively levelling up their game characters but levelling down their actual lives, as they remain glued to the couch with Cheetos dust on their shirts. If only you could actually be the hero in a game that levelled up your life... Enter virtual reality and our Black Box VR Virtual Sports Training Centers.

After trying virtual reality for the first time, Ryan and I were blown away. We knew that this powerful technology, when elegantly paired with science-backed resistance training principles and the right game mechanics, would be a game-changer for the industry. It was with this



Lewis (L) co-founded
Black Box VR with
Ryan DeLuca



Game designers have figured out how to keep people unhealthily addicted to games. If only you could be the hero in a game that levelled up your life

realisation that we decided to found Black Box VR. We vowed to create a company that would help our customers transform their lives through addictive fitness experiences that harness the power of immersive technologies.

How did you develop this idea into what it is today?

We knew we wanted to have a VR experience that paired with resistance training, but it was pretty obvious that dumbbells weren't going to do the trick. Instead, we decided to develop a special cable resistance machine. The idea for a cable resistance machine came from a machine I had trained with for pole vaulting in college. It was a fairly rudimentary cable resistance machine but it could change weight and reps ranges automatically, tracking each rep as it was completed.

We started to envision how we might be able to build something similar that would work in VR that would be safe and effective for users. We worked with a local engineering company and talented members

of our team to develop four different prototypes to get us to where we are today.

There were months where the machine was interfering with the VR technology and we simply couldn't find a solution – it was driving us nuts! Finally, we discovered a way to use a metallic 'doughnut' to fix the problem. I joked that we should put out a press release titled: "doughnut doughnut saves fitness company!"

What is the Black Box VR experience?

Our patent-pending Dynamic Resistance Machine provides over 220 lbs of resistance and also acts as a controller in the VR workout experience. When players first step into a Black Box VR booth, they see this machine. The two handles move up and down on the machine to allow for different fitness movements to be performed while holding the handles like squats, deadlifts, shoulder press, chest press, back row, lat pulldown and more.

Before players interact with the machine, they put on arm tracking pucks and a VR headset that transports them to our fully



Black Box VR has invested millions of dollars in developing the futuristic system

immersive Black Box VR Battle Arenas. In each epic Arena, they can see the crowd cheering them on and their opponent across the field. Players can see our machine mapped in the virtual experience and when they reach out for the virtual handles, they can feel the real handles on the machine.

After the Workout Battle begins, players can choose different exercises to perform with the machine and the resistance will automatically calibrate to their strength

levels, adapting if the weights are too heavy or too light based on their rep ranges.

Each exercise movement completed with the machine corresponds to an in-game attack. For example, as users push the handles in the air, completing shoulder presses with their customised weights, they are hurling meteors in the virtual world at enemy units and at the opponent's gates. The stronger players get, the more reps and resistance they can handle, giving them a better chance at winning each competitive ►

- virtual sport workout battle and taking home virtual trophies and other status items.

After each epic battle, the artificial intelligence (AI) crunches all the numbers and delivers their performance to our companion mobile app, where players can see their increased strength charts, body measurements, Champion upgrades, leaderboard rankings and other addicting game elements that keep them coming back, getting stronger, burning serious calories and having a ton of fun while doing it.

How did you work around the issues with wearing a bulky VR headset during exercise?

We have been through multiple prototypes in the last five years and have learned a lot along the way. We tested different VR sweatbands, cable management systems, ideal room temperatures, sweat-wicking fabrics and VR headset manufacturers, and this has paid off.

We've put thousands of people through our experience and the VR headset is now an afterthought. Many players come out of the experience forgetting they were even wearing them – it's a trip and a testament to the team's dedication to solving these very issues through incessant iteration.

What other potential issues did you have to think about and solve that are specific to working out with VR?

Because we are pioneers in the VR fitness space, we have had to create a lot of new user interfaces and user experience patterns that just didn't exist before. Even issues that seem simple can take a lot of brainpower to solve. Due to the newness of the technology, it's difficult to do a simple Google search and find your solution.

The industry and VR community is growing rapidly and so it is getting easier to find insight but it's still a lot of trial and error. For example, we didn't want players running into walls in the VR experience so we had to design a platform system. We wanted players to always face the field so we had to create a room-spinning solution that respected VR motion principles. We wanted players to be able to see where an exercise

movement starts and where it ends so we created floating objects mapped to movements.

We have to teach players that they can actually walk around the virtual space, and we've had to create novel training experiences that show users how to grab handles in the virtual world that are mapped to our real-world machine.

Each of these issues pushed us to create new interaction patterns that were sometimes spot on in the first prototype and sometimes way off. It's insanely fun to be able to work with our amazingly smart team members and solve these new and challenging problems on a daily basis. The best reward is seeing a player's face light up when all of the pieces come together.

Tell us more about the game itself

As the player slides the VR headset on, they are transported to the Black Box VR world and they can see their opponent as well as



The Black Box VR team has perfected the design of the headset and box to be so comfortable that players forget they're in VR

BLACK BOX | VIRTUAL REALITY GYM



We've had to create training experiences that show users how to grab handles in the virtual world that are mapped to our real-world machine

Black Box VR currently has two dedicated locations, plus boxes in four E&S Fitness clubs

'Champions' that they can use strategically in the game. The crowd cheers as the countdown clock chimes 5...4...3...2...1...GO!

The player then has the option to complete specific cardio movements – much like shadow-boxing – to build Champions, or they can choose to load up exercises on the Dynamic Resistance Machine.

When the machine is in position, the player can grab the real handles and start completing reps, pushing harder and harder to defeat their opponent's incoming attacks. Each rep the player completes corresponds to an epic in-game attack.

Players destroy opposing Champions and collect elixir to build additional units with cardio movements. This is where the HIIT aspect comes in. The faster you can build Champions with your punching and slicing, the better chance you have at winning. This keeps the heart rate elevated when players aren't using the machine for the resistance movements and provides for an overall killer workout.



It's clear that combining VR gaming with fitness has the potential to decrease pain, increase enjoyment, and allow players to push their bodies further than they would normally, creating real fitness gains over time

► As opponents trade blows, destroy gates and obliterate crystals, they collect points. The player with the most points at the end of 30 minutes wins the game and takes home the trophies and bragging rights!

One of the most exciting parts of the experience comes after the battle, when players open up the mobile app and see all of their stats that were automatically tracked – we track over 50,000 data points per workout – they unlock their rewards and compare themselves with their friends and the overall Black Box VR community on the leaderboards. Then, players start to itch for their next session because they know that with it comes the chance for more prestige, rewards and levelling up, not only their in-game characters, but their lives as well.

How does the system track people's form and also their progress?

We use algorithms that track different points on the body and planes of movement to track each player's form and to alert them when they are outside the thresholds of the correct form.

Who is Black Box aimed at?

We believe that through innovative engagement mechanics, user personalisation, real-time form tracking, coaching AI, game mechanics, deep data analysis and artificial intelligence, we will be able to reach a diverse demographic of people. Our core age group focuses on 25-40 year olds that want to improve their health and fitness, and have an affinity for gaming.

We've seen people that enjoy gaming and competitive sports really fall in love with our

product. They love that it scratches both the itch to compete and have fun in a gaming environment while reaping the health benefits.

Why do you think VR is such a powerful tool in helping people work out?

Virtual reality is the most immersive technology that exists. It has the power to trick the mind into thinking it has been transported to another place. It has the ability to give the viewer an embodied presence that no other technology can. It puts the player at the centre of the journey and empowers them to feel like a superhero.

There are many compelling scientific studies coming out related to VR in the healthcare field. In one study, burn victims that were normally given morphine to manage the pain of routine skin-stretching were instead put in a simulated VR environment without morphine. The study showed that the VR game was just as powerful at pain management as morphine.

Other studies have shown VR's ability to dilate time and make longer, more boring experiences feel short. We think it's clear that combining VR gaming with fitness has the potential to decrease pain, increase enjoyment, and allow players to push their bodies further than they would normally, creating real fitness gains over time.

VR's immersive nature also takes the monotony out of the traditional gym routine and can make a 30-minute workout feel like just 10 minutes. These are only a few things that make VR and fitness a match made in heaven.



Black Box VR has partnered with EoS gyms to offer exclusive access to the system via a membership upgrade

How many VR rooms does each club have?

Typically we have around six booths per location. We have 14 in our San Francisco location.

Has COVID-19 affected your operations?

In terms of privacy and social distancing, many people say we are a perfect fitness option for during COVID-19, because our members are in their own private booths for each workout.

We use a third party technology called CleanBox (not affiliated with Black Box VR) – a technology that uses medical grade UV-C light to sanitise the headsets. And we've increased our overall cleaning procedures based on government recommendations.

Does the game change regularly to keep members coming back?

Absolutely – we have some people on 20-plus week streaks where they haven't missed a single workout! Sometimes we have to tell people to work out less to ensure they can recover!

What are your plans for Black Box VR?

We just announced a partnership with EoS Fitness where we are doing a four-gym pilot. We will have private booths inside their gyms and members can upgrade their memberships to gain access. We're excited to get many more members into the experience in the pilot and then expand across the nation in 2021! ●



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STAYING STICKY



Bob Lawson explains how digital fitness platforms and apps can maximise retention and prevent churn

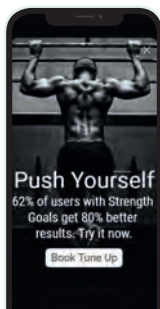
We talk to a lot of mobile app creators in the fitness space. Some of the world's largest and most successful fitness, health and wellness apps are on the Kumulos platform.

Our stats show that fitness apps have found it relatively easy to collect new users – in some cases downloads are up by more than 60 per cent year on year.

The biggest challenge facing mobile fitness tech is keeping users once things return to 'normal'.

Just a 1 per cent reduction in churn can deliver a 10-17 per cent increase in profitability for the app, especially if this is among your high value, highly engaged app user cohort. So getting the retention strategy right is critical to success.

Here are our top five ways to drive up user retention in fitness and health apps.



Sending rich media content messages drives better results than text-only messages

Just a 1 per cent reduction in churn can deliver a 10-17 per cent increase in profitability, especially if this is among your highly engaged user cohort

Fully understanding your app's users and their goals will allow you to keep them engaged

1 Get a holistic view of app users

The most successful fitness app suppliers think of app user data as a three point triangle: user behaviour, user experience and user sentiment. Each is equally important and interlinked.

Most have decent sight over the basic user behaviour analytics – downloads, engagement, retention and the rest. The temptation, because it's easy, is to focus on just this, missing the other two sides of the triangle. The challenge with this is that user behaviour is a rear-view mirror for your app. Often, what users do is the effect of what's happened elsewhere.

If the app becomes unstable then many users will give up on it and leave. Understanding the user experience by tracking trends in app crashes and getting alerts when things run slow means you know when problems are brewing.

Most successful fitness apps build customer sentiment into their KPIs. Poor ratings or bad reviews in app stores can put off new users and new customer acquisition rates fall.

2 Predictive churn

Every app drops users. It's a fact of life. To really improve user retention, you need to be working proactively and catch fitness app users before they even think of churning. World-leading fitness apps use automatic predictive messaging to contact users when a behaviour change could signal churn.

Studying user cadence is important. When user cadence changes, apps should trigger a series of situational messages to engage users and draw them back into the app. This has driven up user retention from between 15-23 per cent in 12 months.

You might want to embed video into your messages to promote new content or to coach users on better techniques. This is good for capturing those users at risk of churn

3 Perfecting situational messaging

For some apps, users might be happy to get four or more messages a day. But from another app, just one message a week might annoy.

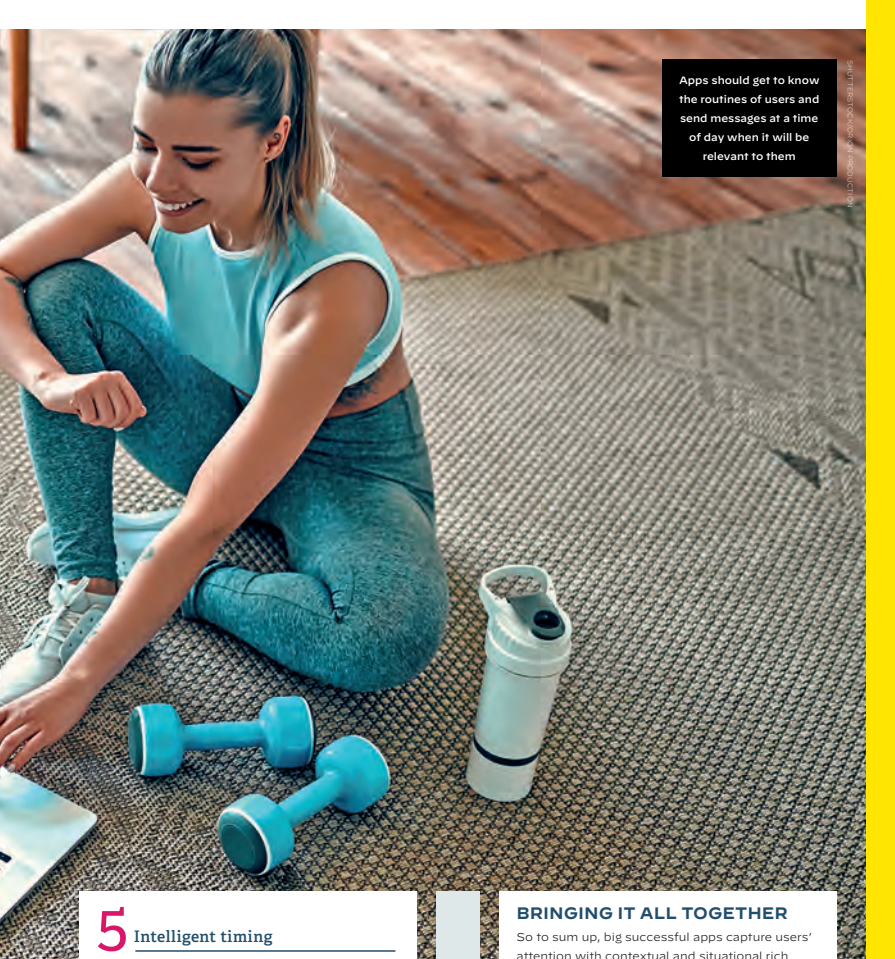
If the message is relevant to my here-and-now, and if it's information I want, then I'm happy to get the message. If not, it's just noise and may actually encourage me to uninstall the app.

Relevance is especially true for fitness apps – the content needs to support my goals (the reason I downloaded the app in the first place) for it to be valuable to me.

4 Content is king

Rich media content messages drive substantially better results. We see up to 43 per cent greater message interaction from rich media messages compared to text only. Fitness apps are perfect for highly visual, rich media messaging.

You might want to embed video to promote new content or to coach technique. Send out a series of messages on technique optimisation to maximise users' results. This is good for your highly engaged "super-users" as well as capturing those at risk of churn.



Apps should get to know the routines of users and send messages at a time of day when it will be relevant to them

5 Intelligent timing

Lastly, time of day matters. Not everyone exercises at the same time of day. So, don't send messages at 8am if a user's routine is to exercise weekday evenings, after work.

Apps that know my routine and send me encouraging prompts at the time of day that I am most receptive, will get my attention. We see interaction rates rise by more than 38 per cent when messages are intelligently delivered at the time of day that fits the individual's exercise patterns.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

So to sum up, big successful apps capture users' attention with contextual and situational rich media messages that keep super-users engaged.

They know when users' cadence has changed, spot the signals of churn early and re-engage users before they have even considered deleting their app. And lastly they understand what each individual user is trying to achieve, and they communicate with them in language that supports their goals.

Bob Lawson is founder of user engagement platform, Kumulos

Digital retention top performers

Three digital fitness platforms tell Fit Tech how they work to achieve higher levels of customer retention

JEAN-MICHEL FOURNIER

CEO, Les Mills Media

It's the biggest challenge all fitness platforms face in pursuit of building a sustainable business model – how do you keep your cost of acquired customers (CAC) low, while boosting the life-time value (LTV) of each user? High churn sends your marketing costs spiralling as you're having to spend more to acquire users, so strong retention really is the holy grail for running a successful digital fitness platform – much like a gym.

Building great retention for your app requires several key pillars – providing world-class content and a frictionless user experience is absolutely essential. You augment this by creating a robust community around your app so that it becomes

a self-sustaining ecosystem where everyone gives energy to each other – our LMOD Squad Facebook group has 125k members and the level of engagement in there is insane. And when it comes to keeping people coming back for more, gamification and challenges to motivate and incentivise users are incredibly powerful.

Equally important is the mindset and culture that underpin your approach. In today's business environment, where things are changing constantly, speed of execution is a lot more important than perfect execution. Make your solutions "good enough," ship them, improve them based on market feedback, rinse and repeat. This approach brings solutions much faster, and the snowball effect of iterative learning means your product will constantly improve.

Create a robust
community around
your app so that it
becomes a self-
sustaining ecosystem

Fournier says gamification and challenges are excellent ways to motivate and engage users





Hallbauer (L) and Kaellman (R) agree that keeping existing customers happy is key

VICKY HALLBAUER

Head of marketing, Freeletics

There's now more digital fitness content available than ever before, and a myriad of different apps are available at the tap of a screen.

Retention comes with trust and results. We promise personal development beyond physical transformation. For some, we are a lifestyle, a discipline or even a sport. For others, Freeletics is a philosophy on how to navigate the world. And for all those who believe in us, Freeletics is a community of like-minded athletes.

We listen very closely to the needs of our users and we continuously adapt user feedback into our app. By implementing new features and offering ongoing, helpful content, we are able to support our community of users throughout their fitness journey.

To grow and expand, we need to truly know our audience down to a personal level. What are they looking for? What support do they need? Which triggers or tone of voice will help them to take the steps necessary to move forwards towards their goal?

To learn about this we not only analyse anonymised data from our millions of users, but also run surveys to better understand their needs. We also run all kinds of testing in the app, which assures we offer exactly what our users demand. In this industry, being able to adapt and change perspectives to continuously fit your audience is a huge asset.

KARIN KAEMLMAN

CEO, Barrecore

When it comes to our Barrecore app, and really our overall business, we operate along the lines of the classic 80/20 rule. That's an 80 per cent focus on retention and 20 per cent on new acquisition. Actually, it's possibly even 90/10.

When it comes to fitness apps, you are inevitably going to have natural churn. So there's a constant need to top up your audience in order to maintain a certain number of clients, and to also grow.

But there's no point spending money and/or effort identifying and converting new clients if they don't stay with you. You'll just be constantly chasing your tail.

On the contrary, happy clients allow you to grow your business in a sustainable way. In addition, happy clients create high levels of word-of-mouth referrals, effectively allowing you to outsource much of your new client acquisition to your existing clients – for free!

So the majority of our focus goes towards making sure that our online workouts and general service is the very best it can be. Our Barrecore app is really just a pure press and play solution at this point in time – no high tech functionality or retention tools as far as the eye can see (yet). Still, we have incredibly high retention thanks to the quick and sustainable results that our clients see and feel from our unique method. This ensures that they stick around for years.

Sky x Fiit

Fiit has secured a deal with TV giant Sky, to make its virtual workout platform available through the subscription-based Sky Q service. With 20 per cent of Fiit users now accessing the app through Sky, *Fit Tech* speaks to Fraser Stirling and Daniel Shellard to find out more



FRASER STIRLING

Group chief product officer, Sky

How did the partnership with Fiit come about?

Personal fitness services have continued to grow over the past few years and more people want to train at home, track their progress and tailor their workouts to get the best results. We knew there was an opportunity to add more fitness to Sky Q.

Partnering with Fiit to build a bespoke experience for Sky Q customers means we're able to offer something for everyone: HIIT, yoga or combat training! The trainers and content are really engaging and motivating, which is exactly what people need when exercising from home.

How much did the pandemic influence this decision?

We were already looking at how we could bring fitness experiences to Sky Q, and it's clear this has become more important than ever to our customers. We're pleased to have been able to work with Fiit and get their experience onto Sky Q, at a time our customers really need and want it.

Why is Sky a perfect platform for fitness content?

We know our customers are big fans of fitness activity already, as they use their Sky Q boxes to stream workout sessions from many of the



Stirling says Sky Q customers were already using the platform to stream fitness classes





Twenty per cent of all Fit
users are now accessing
the app through Sky

The TV app will soon be able to sync with the data from a range of wearables

features on the platform. The launch of Fiit means we can offer a more professional, tailored, immersive workout experience – all on the big screen, in a very integrated and easy way.

Sky Q is at the heart of our customers' homes, with a huge variety of TV, entertainment, music, games and more; adding fitness to its roll call of features means our customers can do more of what they love in the comfort of their home.

What is it about Fiit that appealed to Sky? Why do you think it will suit Sky users?

Fiit is constantly innovating to make exercising more fun, rewarding and personalised. It's a high quality and rich experience that we're confident our Sky Q customers will love.

The wide variety of fitness classes that Fiit offers makes it a great fit for Sky Q, because it really is providing something for everyone.

It's also compatible with many of the other devices that our customers already own, from smart watches to smartphones, and the TV app will soon be able to synchronise with the data from these devices, allowing it to show a customer's real time statistics and Fiit points on their TV as they work out.



Are you planning or open to partnering with any other fitness or wellness content providers?

We want to keep offering our customers more of what they love, from TV to music, to education, games and fitness. Fiit covers so much of the fitness space, but we would like to add more specialist fitness and wellbeing areas to our service – so watch this space.

Has the Sky platform had to be adapted in any way to facilitate fitness streaming?

The Sky Q platform is designed so that we can add apps to it very quickly – we've already added Netflix, Spotify, Disney+, iPlayer, ROXi, Playworks and more.

We know our customers value everything being in one place, and the ease of the Sky Q experience

A host of new features is planned for the Fiit app on Sky Q, including training plans and a Fiit Club



We worked closely with Fiit to create a new bespoke, made-for-TV version of their app. This involved building in things like voice search capability, so that Sky Q customers can say “fitness” into their voice remote to get to our new fitness destination.

Will Sky be promoting the Fiit workouts on its platform?

Yes, we want Sky Q customers to be able to easily discover Fiit and everything that it has to offer. If customers say “fitness” into their Sky Q voice remote, they’ll get to a new fitness destination featuring content from Fiit, Sky, Spotify and YouTube, and including Sky One’s Fit in 5 and Dance Fit.

There’s currently a ‘Try Fiit today’ option, giving customers access to 24 free Fiit classes, as well as a special 30-day free trial period for Sky VIP customers.

What insights did you use when establishing the Fiit offer?

We know our customers enjoy fitness classes and working out at home. More importantly we know they value everything being all in one place, and the ease of the Sky Q experience.

We’re always looking to bring our customers more of what they love, so we used insights from our existing fitness content, such as YouTube and Fit in 5, to understand what was most popular with Sky Q customers. These insights enable us to make sure we offer what our customers need, both in terms of experience and the variety of workouts and content.

What are your future aims for this partnership?

The new service has been well received by Sky Q customers and we want to keep innovating and developing with Fiit. Over the next year, we’re excited to see a greater integration of the app onto the Sky Q platform and a host of new features including training plans, Fiit club and more. ▶

FIIT ACCESS THROUGH SKY

Sky Q customers have the option to pay to upgrade to the full Fiit service on one of the company’s standard price plans – monthly £20, quarterly £45 and yearly £120.

Existing Fiit members will be able to sign into their account on Sky Q.

The pandemic has made consumers more open to working out at home



DANIEL SHELLARD

CEO, Fiit

Tell us a bit about Fiit – what exactly do you offer and how does it work?

Fiit is the UK's highest-rated digital fitness experience. We combine hardware and software to deliver an immersive, social and gamified fitness experience all led by the UK's top trainers. We have a wide variety of classes ranging from cardio, strength, yoga and pilates.

How did the partnership with Sky come about?

Sky was looking at fitness offerings to bring to their Sky Q platform and given we were the highest-rated mobile fitness app with many of our customers already using cables and casting to get us onto the big screen, the partnership made sense from both sides.

What impact has the pandemic had on Fiit? How do you think it will change the fitness industry and the way people work out?

The pandemic has allowed people to experience the new wave of connected home workout experiences. Many at-home sceptics have now been converted as they realise that they can get an incredible workout with friends in real time, compete in leader boards, and easily track their progression. At-home is now a legitimate part of people's fitness toolkit.



The founders of Fiit made it their mission to make exercise a habit for everyone

Why is Sky a good platform for Fiit?

Sky is an innovator when it comes to delivering media in the home and the Sky Q platform curates the best in TV applications.

Does Fiit completely replace the gym?

No. Clearly during the pandemic with reduced access to the gyms, more people are using our solution at home but our long term thesis has always been that fitness will follow a similar pattern to retail where customers will adopt a multi-channel approach – working out at home, in the gym and outdoors. We have already begun executing our in-gym vision with our digital studios in partnership with The Gym Group.

What are your goals for this partnership?

Our goal is aligned with our mission – we aim to make exercise a habit for everyone. With Sky's market-leading platform and reach this allows us to take a big step closer to achieving that. ●

A close-up portrait of a woman with short, wavy grey hair, smiling broadly at the camera. She is wearing a light blue t-shirt. Her hands are raised in front of her chest, with her fingers interlaced to form a heart shape. The background is a soft, out-of-focus outdoor setting with a clear sky.

E G Y M

Strength Is Immunity

Overcome challenges in a post-COVID-19 fitness industry with the EGYM Immunity Plus Solution.



Fit Tech leadership



Fit tech is a growing, competitive sector. Executive search firm, Stronger Talent, recently analysed the backgrounds of more than 300 fit tech executives to provide insights into recruiting strategies, as Pete Leibman explains



SHUTTERSTOCK/DAVID V. BUSINESS IMAGES

The executives analysed were employed by more than 50 of the world's top fit tech companies

For the *Fitness Tech Leadership Report* we analysed the backgrounds of fit tech CEOs, other C-suite executives (i.e. CFO, COO, CTO, CMO, CHRO, etc.), senior vice presidents, vice presidents, senior directors and directors. The leaders in our study represent a variety of functions, including sales, marketing, strategy, business development, product management, technology, finance, operations and human resources.

Our study focused exclusively on executives based in the US, although a small percentage of the executives in our study work for companies that are headquartered outside the US.

At the time of our study, the executives that we analysed were employed by more than 50 of the world's top fit tech companies, across the fit tech sub-categories of fitness wearables, connected fitness, streaming fitness and fitness apps. This group of companies includes:

- Fit tech start-ups of various sizes and stages
- Fit tech companies that are more mature and/or publicly-traded
- Fit tech business units inside of larger organisations

The top four fit tech hubs in the US

Our research indicates that there are four primary hubs in the US where the large majority of fit tech companies and executives are based. Over 75 per cent of the executives in our study were based in one of these four areas. In addition, over 68 per cent of the companies in our study have their global headquarters or US headquarters in one of these areas:

1. New York Metro Area
2. San Francisco Bay Area
3. Greater Los Angeles Area
4. Greater Boston Area

Fewer than 25 per cent of executives analysed (in total) were based in all other US cities combined. ▶

Figure 1. The top four fit tech hubs in the US



► Men greatly outnumber women in fit tech

Our research indicates that men greatly outnumber women in fit tech, especially as you move up in many companies. Over 68 per cent of all executives identified in our study were men.

Women only made up about 40 per cent of the directors, senior directors and vice presidents. In addition, less than 25 per cent of C-Suite and SVP positions were occupied by women, and less than 16 per cent of CEO positions were occupied by women.

Our findings on gender diversity are pretty consistent with McKinsey's *Women in the Workplace 2019*, the most comprehensive, annual study of the state of women in corporate America.

Most fit tech executives don't come from fitness or sports

Our research indicates that the large majority of fit tech executives had no prior full-time work experience in the fitness or sports industries before joining their current fit tech company.

Over 88 per cent of the CEOs in our study (most of whom are also founders) had no prior full-time work experience in fitness or sports.

As for the other (non-CEO) executives in our study, over 80 per cent had no prior full-time work experience in fitness or sports.

“ Make diversity a bigger priority. A more diverse workforce correlates with greater profitability ”

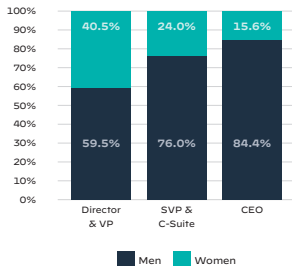


Figure 2. Gender diversity at different levels of leadership in fit tech

Where do executives usually work before fitness tech?

We analysed which companies and industries the executives in our study had worked in during the last ten years (including their current employer).

Our study found that fit tech executives come from a wide variety of industries. However, two industries definitely stand out as the most common:

1. Consumer internet: This includes e-commerce businesses, mobile apps (including fitness apps), and social media platforms.

2. Consumer electronics: This includes companies that make devices used for communications, recreation, and entertainment. Companies that make fitness hardware (i.e. fitness trackers and connected fitness products) also fit into the broader category of consumer electronics.

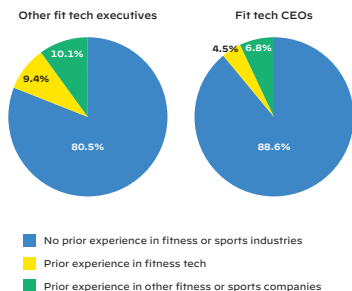
There was a significant drop-off in the frequency of industry experience after these two industries. The next five most common industries were media and entertainment, healthcare, enterprise software, consulting and advisory services, and financial services and private equity.

Only about five per cent of executives had recent full-time work experience in health clubs or boutique fitness and only about five per cent had recent full-time work experience in sporting goods or fitness equipment. Other industries that showed up but were not common include retail and apparel, consumer packaged goods (CPG), and hospitality and leisure (HL).



Women, such as Samsung's Sharon Hegarty, are in the minority of fit tech executives

Figure 3. Percentage of fit tech executives with prior full-time work experience in fitness/sports

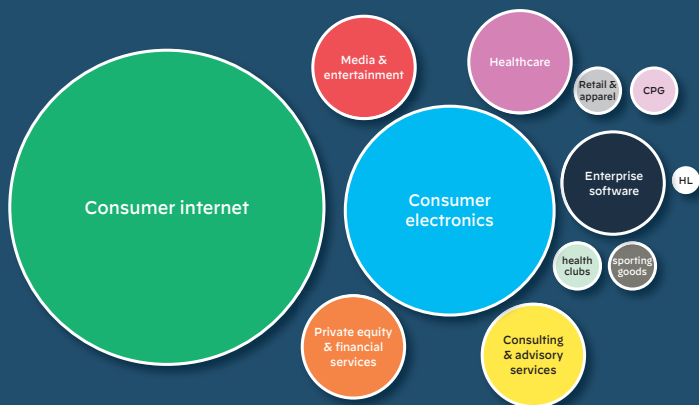


In addition to local recruiting, target top performers in regions other than your HQ

Recommendations

Fit tech is poised for significant growth and competition in the years to come, especially as tech giants such as Google, Apple and Amazon increase their participation in the market. Companies that are able to attract and retain the best people will be well-positioned for future success, while companies that fail to do so will struggle to survive. While our full report provides much more extensive recommendations, here are three quick tips, based on our research and experience:

Figure 4. Recent industry experience before executives work in fit tech. The larger the circle, the more common the experience is.



► RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Make diversity a bigger priority

Diversity is not only a social and moral cause. Research has shown that a more diverse workforce is also correlated with higher employee engagement scores, along with greater profitability.

2. Expand your recruiting geography

The shutdown has made many people more comfortable with remote work. In addition to local recruiting, target top performers in regions where your company does not have any physical office locations. If your company presents a compelling value proposition, you might attract some great people.

3. Pursue candidates from new talent pools

Many fitness tech companies recruit primarily from talent pools that are fairly narrow. However, there is tremendous value in expanding your efforts. Identify some additional industries, categories and companies where your company will begin searching for talent as well. ●

Identify some additional industries, categories and companies where you can begin to search for talent

DOWNLOAD THE REPORT

You can download the full 30-page Fitness Tech Leadership Report for free at this link:
<https://www.strongertalent.com/fitness-tech-report/>



About the author:

Pete Leibman is the founder of Stronger Talent, a boutique executive search firm that serves innovative companies in the fitness, sports and wellness industries.



www.hcmmag.com/signup


Sharad Mohan

Co-founder and CEO
Trainerize

Since the pandemic began causing lockdowns and gym closures across the world, there's been unprecedented interest in services that digitally connect trainers and gyms with their clients. Trainerize was ready and primed to help. Co-founder and CEO Sharad Mohan explains how



100k workouts
are tracked by
the Trainerize
app every day



Mohan co-founded
Trainerize after
experiencing
boredom in
physiotherapy

PHOTO: TRAINERIZE



What was your background before co-founding Trainerize?

I started my career in the world of customer support. In university, I worked in retail – at The Gap, MEC, and Future Shop – and loved every element of customer service. Then, after my degree in computer science, I entered the industry as a tech support agent and leaned into that focus for my career.

The concept shifted from customer support to customer success, and I worked my way through the ranks, eventually joining the executive team at Hootsuite, running the customer success team there and later, at Vend. The idea of customer service is still a huge focus for us at Trainerize.

How did the idea for Trainerize come about?

Trainerize was inspired by my experience of going through physiotherapy in the early 2000s. Between sessions, I would forget how to do my exercises, I'd lack motivation, and the whole experience felt really mundane. I just knew there had to be a better way to do it.

When smartphones came onto the scene, The other two co-founders – Trevor Chong, our product director, and Ricky Ying, our director of engineering – and I decided to do something about it.

Trainerize plans start from
US\$5.00 per month,
up to \$300 per month
for unlimited clients

What is Trainerize?

Trainerize helps trainers reach new clients, build stronger relationships with their existing ones, and promote a healthy lifestyle for everyone.

The platform allows trainers and fitness clubs to deliver on-demand and video

workouts for between US\$5 and US\$300 a month, depending on volume. PTs can take their members online with workouts, on-demand classes, in-app messaging, progress tracking and group training, engaging a community with virtual access to their studio.

- We made the business a reality by keeping our day jobs but dedicating almost every other spare minute we had to Trainerize. We expanded our founding team and were joined by our COO, Farhad Gulamhusein, and our quality assurance director, John La, and together we crammed into one of our apartments and worked on the app every night. We weren't focused on revenue, we were focused on creating solutions.

Tell us about Trainerize – who is for and what does it do?

At its core Trainerize is here to make fitness accessible. We want to leverage technology to personalise the fitness experience, both online and in person, by connecting clients to real, live coaches. Though trainers and gyms are our customers, the ultimate

customer is the end user or 'the client', and our priority is to drive motivation for them.

Interestingly, we actually originally built a consumer fitness app, but we realised that if we were going to live up to our mission we were missing a critical component: the personal trainer. We shut down that company, pivoted our focus, and launched Trainerize as we know it today.

What are some of the different options you offer for customers?

Our value proposition at Trainerize is client engagement through a mobile app. We support fitness, nutrition and habit coaching for the fitness consumer – all guided by a qualified professional. Trainerize gives the ability for any fitness business to have a custom branded mobile app on their clients' smartphones.



{ My trainer can message me at any time,
and I can join virtual groups to motivate
me and give out high-fives }

If I'm a client of a trainer, their custom branded app will tell me what to do for the day. It could be a workout, but it could also be choices and habits: am I going to walk instead of drive? Am I going to drink eight glasses of water today? I have the ability to finish a workout, check off my habits, and track my meals.

There's also the element of communication: my trainer can message me at any time, I can do the same, and I can join virtual groups to motivate me and give out high-fives.

What's the process for PTs or clubs to get set up on Trainerize?

At Trainerize, we take great pride in how easy it is for users to set up the product themselves. Creating an account and building training programmes is simple, but we know that the product is only as effective as the overall strategy it fits into. That's why our onboarding process for new sign-ups includes a lot of education – and not just about product features! Education is our not-so-secret ingredient in the onboarding phase of new users.

We encourage our trainers to think hard about their online training strategy. Are they offering hybrid training, with a mix of in-person and online sessions? Are they focusing on online

only? Do they have additional training packages available as add-ons? How are they marketing their services and reaching potential clients?

Anyone can sign up at trainerize.com for a free 30-day trial and get up and running in that time. For gyms who want their own custom branded app, our studio team will get them going within 4-6 weeks.

How is Trainerize different to competitor platforms?

In a couple of ways – starting with how we impact the world. Sure, everyone talks about revenue and number of users, but we talk about the impact our trainers have on peoples' lives.

We're really proud of the 100,000 workouts tracked in our app per day. Close to a million meals are tracked every day, and anywhere from 20-40 thousand habits are tracked per day. If we didn't exist, those 100,000 people may not have been motivated to make those healthy choices. We take pride in how our customers use our product.

Second, we started our app as a way for people to get motivated and invested in their health. People on Trainerize work out an average of three times per week. We know what it takes to get consumers working out. ▶

Trainerize acquired by ABC

On 15 September 2020, Trainerize was acquired by ABC Financial (ABC), a leading provider of technology and related services for the fitness industry.

"The addition of 'Trainerize powered by ABC' allows us to create a total fitness experience," said Bill Davis, CEO of ABC Financial. "In a total fitness experience, the gym plays a central role as it provides all the equipment, guidance and community that many people thrive on. And now with Trainerize, ABC can extend the health club beyond the walls of the gym to include all the aspects of fitness in a personalised and seamless solution that promotes healthier lives by helping clubs put their members first, wherever they are."

"Our mission is to make fitness accessible," said Sharad Mohan, who will join ABC Financial as managing director. "Together with the ABC team, we have the opportunity to positively influence the lives of over 25 million members and expand the solution for the 150,000 trainers who use this product."

"As people discover new ways to access health and fitness content, we are enabling trainers and fitness operators to bring together exercise, nutrition and health to create the total fitness experience, personalised and powered by technology, wearable data and app integrations. It's an exciting time for the industry and I am thrilled that Trainerize and ABC are shaping what's to come," Mohan said.

ABC Financial will be adding the entire staff of Trainerize to its team. ABC clients can purchase 'Trainerize powered by ABC' as an add-on module, and Trainerize will continue to be available as a stand-alone solution that can be used with other club management solutions.

The announcement came a month after ABC acquired GymSales, a leading international provider of fitness sales management tools.



Trainerize
pivoted to online
training in 2012

We have an eight-year
headstart in online training
and we're widening
that gap every day



PHOTO: TRAINERIZE



► How do you stay creative and innovative?

We believe there are creative solutions to every problem. We're growth-minded; we encourage our team to get comfortable being uncomfortable. To us, being uncomfortable means we are all growing, trying new things, and are more likely to succeed in this fast-growing industry of fitness technology.

This value manifests itself in our product. A lot of what we are building did not exist before. We pivoted to online training in 2012 and were the leader – we have an eight-year head start – and we're widening that gap every single day.

We look ahead too. Right now, we see our users focusing in on wearables, so we're leaning that way too. We're always looking at what technology will exist soon and what trends are emerging and are working to connect the dots to the fitness and technology landscapes.

How has Trainerize grown since you began?

It's been a bit explosive during COVID-19! But our focus has been strong, consistent growth since our pivot to online training. We've consistently grown 50 per cent year over year, not just in users but also in usage.

Beyond the business metrics, the company has grown too. We're now a team of more than 50 people all working on the same

mission to make fitness accessible. Most of us are located in Vancouver, Canada but we have team members all around the world.

How many businesses use Trainerize?

We have 19,000 fitness businesses on the app, and within that, we have 150,000 coaches around the world using Trainerize. Our key markets are in the US, the UK, Canada and Australia, but if you point to a country on a map, we probably have trainers there using the app. We recently took a peek and discovered we have trainers using us in Laos, Mauritius, Rwanda, Gibraltar, Latvia – we really are everywhere.

What are your future goals for Trainerize?

We never stop looking for the next big way we can empower our trainers to motivate and engage their clients. We are always observing the fitness landscape. We see a boom in connected devices right now. We love the growth of tech with Peloton, Mirror and Apple Watches. We want to keep observing what the digital fitness consumer is interested in.

I also see nutrition in our future – it's lacking in the industry but our customers love that focus. How can we help people make better food choices? I see us going deep there in the future. ●

Robotic muscles

Loss of strength and muscle wastage affect millions of people and have a significant impact on health and quality of life. emPOWER is a visionary project that aims to develop implantable artificial muscles by 2050. Project leader Professor Jonathan Rossiter explains how it will work

Tell us about emPOWER? What is it and how did it come about?

emPOWER is a five-year, £6 million research project, funded by the UK Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. It aims to develop implantable artificial muscles to address muscle ageing and disabilities that affect movement.

The project is part of a major new UK research focus on long-term healthcare research, targeting clinical and societal impact by 2050. This 30-year horizon is unprecedented and enables researchers to plan deep-and-wide research programmes that would not have been possible in the conventional short-to-medium timescales.

The emPOWER project brings together leaders in soft robotics, surgery, biomaterials, tissue engineering, metamaterials, and functional chemistry with a large team of clinical, patient and industrial partners. Together we identified the need to step beyond current wearable and regenerative medicine approaches to muscle weakness and mobility restoration, and move instead to placing robotic artificial muscles exactly where they are needed: inside the body.

Who could benefit from artificial muscles?

There are over 10.8 million people living with disability in the UK today. Nearly 6.5 million have mobility impairments, with the largest causes being age-related frailty and stroke – there are over 1.2 million stroke survivors in the UK. As we age, we lose muscle mass and strength. This condition is called sarcopenia. This means we walk more slowly, cannot move around so easily and ultimately, have to move into supported care.

emPOWER aims to implant artificial muscles to overcome sarcopenia. We believe that by boosting remaining muscle functions by only ten percent we can restore mobility and independence to sufferers of muscle weakness.

Another important group in need of emPOWER muscles are those who suffer from the after-effects of strokes and trauma. emPOWER muscles have the potential to work with the remaining neurological signals and remaining muscles to restore the mobility in affected limbs.

Many other disorders are also set to benefit from emPOWER muscles, including urinary and faecal incontinence, facial palsy, and venous insufficiency.



Professor Rossiter leads the emPOWER project, a five-year, £6 million research project



We identified the need to step beyond the current approaches to muscle weakness, and move instead to placing robotic muscles exactly where they're needed – inside the body

What work has been done into artificial muscles to date?

Artificial muscle technologies have developed significantly over the last decade. The latest muscles are able to deliver power densities – that's the amount of muscle power per cubic centimetre – of the order of human skeletal muscles. These have been demonstrated in laboratory settings under controlled conditions.

They employ a variety of technologies including electroactive polymers, which are materials that contract like muscles when electrically stimulated. Electroactive polymers use electrical power, which can be stored in high density batteries and easily controlled using embedded control circuits.

Why are exoskeletons not enough?

Exoskeletons have an important place in therapy and as a short-term aid to mobility. Rigid exoskeletons can even help a paralysed person walk. However, they are big, heavy, expensive and take a long time to put on or get into.

Recently, soft exoskeletons have been the focus of many research groups, including





emPOWER muscles must be biocompatible so they don't elicit an immune response and mechanically compatible so they don't overstress the skeletal system

► ourselves in the Right Trousers project. These soft exosuits would be much easier to put on and less bulky than their rigid counterparts, and could be worn discreetly under clothing.

Unfortunately, all exoskeletons and exosuits suffer from a fundamental problem: they must transfer significant forces through the skin into the human skeleton. This can cause damage and ulceration to the skin and discomfort to the wearer. emPOWER muscles completely side-step this problem by interfacing with the skeleton directly, under the skin, exactly where the natural muscles are located. Their ends will fuse with bone and thereby muscle forces will be transferred to the skeleton with no loss or danger of damage.

How will you make this vision a reality?

There are several questions we will initially be addressing. Firstly, how can we interface

artificial muscles with natural bone so that the interface is mechanically strong while being fully biologically compatible? Secondly, how can we make our emPOWER artificial muscles as strong, when implanted, as their natural counterparts, and lastly, how can we get energy into, and out of, the muscles fast enough to assist with walking?

Each one of these will be addressed through its own set of technology developments – for example, bone interfacing will include novel metamaterials with chemical functionalisation so that the bone-artificial muscle interface is both strong and biologically inert.

We won't be implanting muscles into people until we have demonstrated all the crucial technologies separately and then in combination. This first five-year project will focus on demonstration of emPOWER muscles and biointerfacing. We will then, in follow-on projects, seek to implant the muscles, first in animals and then in humans.

Why is this project unique?

The 2050 target of these Transformative Healthcare Technologies projects gives us the unique flexibility to plan a development route over 20-30 years, instead of the typical five years. This means we can explore new technologies and scientific phenomena that others would not have the freedom to do.

In addition to building on the current state-of-the-art technologies, we will explore new and disruptive ideas that are at the very earliest stage of conception and development.

How would artificial muscles be controlled?

Control is very important for the implantable emPOWER muscles. We will explore how neural signals from the nervous system and from the brain, through a process called electrocorticography, can enable natural muscle control. We aim to develop an artificial



SHUTTERSTOCK/AN-CHUDAOV

emPOWER aims to create muscles that feel natural, unlike bulky exoskeletons



Empower is aiming
to develop beyond
exoskeletons and suits

motor neuron, providing bidirectional control and sensing of the emPOWER muscles.

What features are required to enable implantable artificial muscles to function safely, comfortably and effectively?

emPOWER muscles must have a new level of compatibility with the body. They must be biocompatible so that they do not elicit an immune response, they must be mechanically compatible so that they do not overstress the skeletal system and they must be compatible with the natural neurological control systems.

Each of these factors must be proven to be safe and effective separately, and then in combination, before we can consider implantation. Just as important is patient comfort and acceptance and patient input and guidance forms an important continual strand within the emPOWER project.

Can you really achieve your goal by 2050?

Yes, we are confident that we can make implantable muscles a reality by that target!

Looking further into the future, in what other ways could this technology be used?

Artificial muscles are needed in many different sectors, from wearable power assistance in factories to environmental robots that can clean up pollution. Our industrial partners need new artificial muscle technologies to keep workers safe, to reduce fatigue, and to improve productivity.

We have built into the emPOWER project a programme of accelerated impact in these fields. Industry has a shorter development timescale than healthcare, so we expect to see non-implanted emPOWER artificial muscles in products and industries long before 2050. ●

Blurring the lines

Les Mills has launched a suite of digital solutions to help gyms future-proof by expanding their reach in the booming online fitness space, while complementing their live offerings. Steph Eaves talks to Les Mills International's CMO Anna Henwood to find out more

Tell us about the development of Les Mills' digital solutions

We've worked closely with our partners to develop a suite of digital solutions to help future-proof clubs by expanding their reach in the booming online fitness space, while complementing their live in-club offerings. Leveraging 52 years of group fitness expertise, we've created a range of LES MILLS™ On Demand (LMOD) and livestream products designed to support clubs in driving new revenue and meeting growing consumer demand for a 'blended' fitness offering. This combines the best of digital and live fitness to produce a connected member experience enabling members to work out however they choose – whether in-club or at-home.



How do you envision these solutions will help clubs to recover post-COVID and also stay relevant in the coming years?

There's no getting away from the fact that Big Tech – Apple, Google, Amazon and Facebook – are sizing up the fitness industry and represent a major threat for clubs. COVID-19 has changed the game forever, making digital fitness a core expectation of every club member in the world in just a few months – and that's precisely why Big Tech is preparing to strike.

Clubs may not have the financial might or brand power of major tech firms, but they have assets that Big Tech can't yet match: highly-engaged communities centered around authentic, live experiences. For those willing to be bold, the digital fitness boom can fast-track club growth and help operators thrive in the new age of fitness by enabling them to combine the best of live workouts with the scalability and convenience of digital – a compelling proposition for consumers.

How will these solutions help clubs who don't yet have a digital offering?

First and foremost, it will help them to stay relevant. Since lockdown, the phrase 'Innovate or die' has shifted from being a fitness conference catchphrase to the harsh reality of operating a club in 2020. Digital fitness is becoming a basic expectation among consumers, so clubs that fail to provide a solution will struggle to compete.

And with health and fitness now a top-tier priority for people of all ages, there are big opportunities for



Anna Henwood says digital fitness has quickly become a core expectation of every gym member in the world



Les Mills Body Pump on-demand and live virtual classes can now be offered to members directly via a club's own app

- clubs to grow their business by offering a connected member experience encompassing both live and digital solutions. Digital tools help clubs to reach more potential members and a connected member experience ensures that they keep them for longer.

How does Les Mills work with clubs to tailor a solution to their needs, and then help implement it?

Technology has understandably dominated the fitness industry discourse in recent months, but technology isn't the answer to our challenges; our people are. Technology is still just a tool to help us deliver motivation to members beyond the club. It's our people – the faces our members know and love – who remain at the heart of these solutions, and that's the approach we take when supporting our club partners. How can we use technology to enhance their existing strengths and support their goals?

Whether it's LMOD Affiliate (where clubs can upsell LMOD to their members and receive a share of the revenue), Les Mills workouts clubs can embed into their existing app, Virtual, Immersive Fitness, livestream or live, we have a host of solutions to support clubs, and a wealth of experience in how to implement them. As operators of a successful chain of clubs in New Zealand, we understand the problems that operators face and we only bring our products to market once they've proven to be a success in our own clubs.

Do you think Les Mills' digital solutions can act as a gateway to getting more members coming in for in-club workouts?

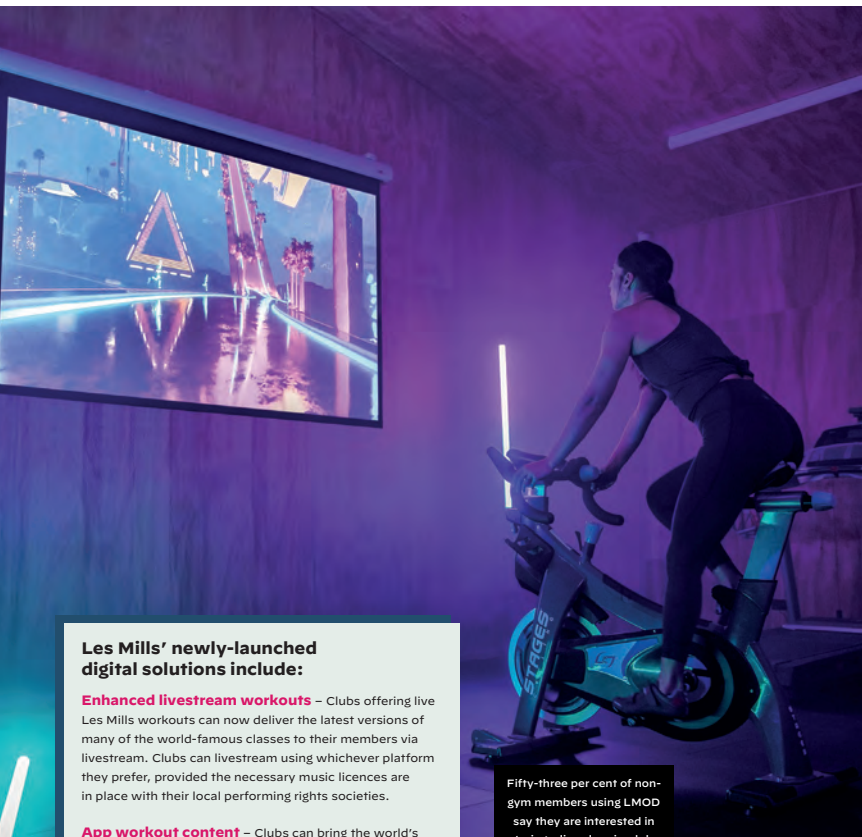
Digital offers huge opportunities for clubs to reach beyond their traditional local catchment.

Now, anyone with an internet connection is a potential target for digital memberships. By taking the club experience into people's homes through digital solutions, operators have the chance to reach huge swathes of the population who wouldn't typically visit a club and help them start their fitness journey. We can support people to build their fitness skills and confidence at home, so they can then graduate into clubs.

There's clear appetite for such fitness progression among non-gym members using LMOD, with 53 per cent stating they're interested in trying live Les Mills classes in a club (research from May 2020). Providing digital stepping stones will be key to gyms driving up the penetration rate and reaching mass adoption.

How can clubs integrate their digital offerings with their physical offerings, ensuring one complements and supports the other?

I've mentioned it already, but offering a connected member experience really is key – and a big component of that is consistency. Are you offering digital versions of the workouts that members love doing in your club? And conversely, are you offering better live versions of the workouts on your digital channels, so that users are enticed to come to the club more?



Les Mills' newly-launched digital solutions include:

Enhanced livestream workouts – Clubs offering live Les Mills workouts can now deliver the latest versions of many of the world-famous classes to their members via livestream. Clubs can livestream using whichever platform they prefer, provided the necessary music licences are in place with their local performing rights societies.

App workout content – Clubs can bring the world's best workouts into their own member app without the need for CapEx and mass content creation. Spanning 12 Les Mills programmes, clubs host the content via their own branded ecosystem and set the price members pay them for access.

LES MILLS On Demand Affiliate Programme

– Clubs can support their members' entire fitness journey by providing home workouts via LES MILLS On Demand and receiving a share of the revenue for each sign-up. Members have access to the full LMOD ecosystem, including Les Mills workouts, training programmes and community support.

Online training – Les Mills Instructor training and Group Fitness Management (GFM) training have now been digitised, making it easier than ever for clubs to upskill their teams and improve their business with world-class training.

Fifty-three per cent of non-gym members using LMOD say they are interested in trying a live class in-club





Les Mills has recently introduced daily workouts led by rockstar trainers

- The marketer in me is going to insist on a slick customer experience and journey that takes an omnichannel approach – using the club as a promotional channel for digital and vice versa. How are you demonstrating the value of your total membership package (with digital included) and pricing it attractively to encourage the upsell? Does the digital user experience match the standards you set when people visit your club? Is your app/website consistently branded and easy to navigate? Is it bug-proof? These are the basic elements that need to be executed well for the offering to be considered a total package that the member sees value in.

How do you plan to keep LMOD fresh and exciting moving forward?

We're constantly working on ways to enhance LMOD and raise the bar. We added our 1,000th workout to the platform in June and our audience has never



Henwood says the digital customer experience must be well executed for members to appreciate its value



had a greater choice of world-class programmes than they do today. These are the workouts you'll find in clubs around the world and we're working hard on new features to encourage more LMOD users to go out and experience live classes at their local club.

We've recently introduced daily workouts led by rockstar Les Mills Trainers – these are proving really popular as they're short, sharp workouts that have never been seen before. We've also ramped up our range of challenges and workout plans designed to support specific user goals and we're starting to include more diet and nutrition advice to support this. Personalisation is becoming ever more important – both for us and the industry as a whole.

What are your predictions for how the fitness industry will change over the next few years?

The growth of digital workouts isn't a sudden shift in consumer behavior sparked by COVID-19, it's actually the acceleration of a trend that's been taking hold for some time. The *2019 Global Consumer Fitness Survey* showed that 85 per cent of gym members also exercised at home

Personalisation is becoming more and more important to keeping customers

– and that was before COVID-19 – so this is a longstanding trend which I fully expect to continue.

That said, live workouts in a pumping club studio will always be the most motivating fitness experience because we're pack animals, so working out in groups is in our DNA. Our research has shown that group workouts produce increased levels of individual enjoyment, exertion and satisfaction – we call this the group effect.

After months of isolation for much of the world's population, people are craving connection more than ever, so the opportunity for clubs is to be the bridge between the digital and the physical fitness space by taking an omnichannel approach. Fusing the best of digital (innovation, accessibility and scalability) with the motivation of live fitness experiences will be the key to stealing a march on Silicon Valley and setting up clubs for long-term success. ●

Rodrigo Jesus

CEO at Salus Optima

McLaren Racing recently announced a technical collaboration with Salus Optima, a data-driven software company that aims to empower its users to reach their health and wellbeing potential. The Salus Optima CEO explains how it works



Rodrigo Jesus says Salus Optima was founded to help solve everyday lifestyle issues

What's your background?

I have 25 years' experience in technology, running mainly software companies. Mostly in enterprise software where complex integrations and scalability were critical topics for our clients. Throughout my career I worked with large software groups such as IBM, SAP and other major players.

Tell us about Salus Optima – what has its story been so far?

Salus Optima was founded to help solve everyday lifestyle issues through a novel approach. The issues are inactivity, poor nutrition and mental health. The novel approach is to use a highly sophisticated technology framework underpinned by human performance, science and methodologies to help people achieve their goals at their own pace.

As a society we're facing a daunting challenge with health care costs spiralling out of control. This is mainly due to poor lifestyle choices and a broken system that does not prioritise prevention. At Salus Optima we've been building technology to combat these issues through changing and incorporating positive habits that will empower our users and improve their own health outcomes.

The collaboration with McLaren will see Salus Optima provide health coaching to the travelling race team



How does Salus Optima use technology and data to offer personalised health guidance?

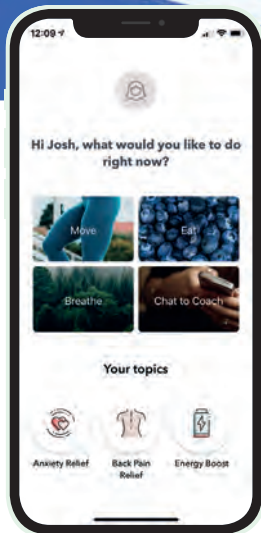
Personalisation is at the heart of everything we do. We consider ourselves as part of a new wave of innovation that brings personalisation to the level of the individual. We firmly believe that the one-size-fits-all approach is no longer applicable. Our users demand more and through personalisation we can be relevant for them.

We see data as a way to understand individual circumstances that are unique and deliver personalised recommendations, support and encouragement so it becomes relevant.


Tell us about your collaboration with McLaren

We have a strategic technical collaboration with McLaren. This collaboration will see us deploy our technology with the F1 travelling race team to provide them with a unique, digital coaching experience that helps optimise their own health, wellbeing and performance whilst travelling the world.

We have embarked on a large design piece to understand the pain points of the race team and the challenges they face. Reflecting and understanding is the best approach to improve ►



The Salus Optima app is highly personalised to the individual user



In addition to use of the app, the McLaren race team will take part in in-person tests

The result is a powerful, holistic data-driven, outcome-focused, highly personalised application that helps people to achieve their goals and deal with the natural day-to-day problems

► and address these issues through our Human Performance framework, which is centred around four pillars – movement, nutrition, mindset and recovery, including sleep.

This is all supported by behavioural change and delivered via a highly engaging application. It is crucial in any organisation that the employees are performing at their peak and optimum level and this is what we will provide.

What sort of issues are the individuals within the race team dealing with?

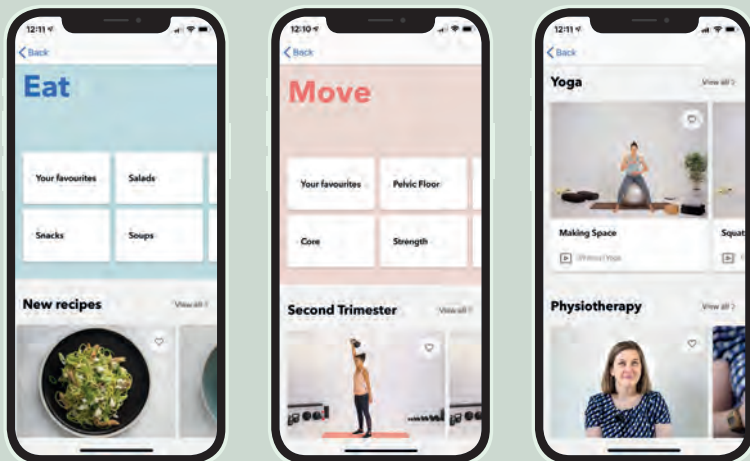
This is a diverse cohort, very representative of society in general. We're talking about mechanics, pit crew, engineers, logistics, etc. It's very exciting to be tackling issues that are prevalent in the wider society – these are issues that you and I face every day.

Each person in the team will get different and personalised insights for better lifestyle choices that will help them to overcome personal wellness issues to ensure they are fit, healthy and happy from one season to the next.

Tell us more about your proprietary technology – how does it work?

We're a tech group that has been investing in our technology stack for years now. The integration of the many modules makes it a unique platform. We're combining our proprietary human performance framework, supported by the four pillars, with behavioural change and an AI-assisted coaching platform.

The result is a powerful holistic, data-driven, outcome focused, highly personalised application that helps people to achieve their goals and deal



Salus Optima's Human Performance Framework centres around movement, nutrition, mindset and recovery

with the problems that life naturally throws at us. We understand that life gets in the way and we need to be able to adapt to our users' needs, such as lack of time, motivation, physical and mental limitations, and this is quite unique.

How do you on-board a user?

The process is entirely digital and we try to keep it as low-burden as possible, asking only for information that we can act upon. We then supplement this initial onboarding with an ongoing data capture from usage of the app, wearables where relevant, and a series of optional, more detailed questionnaires on topics such as nutrition, should the user wish to learn more and increase personalisation.

In a specific project such as McLaren, we have a fantastic opportunity to also perform in-person tests and combine that data with what we've learned through the digital solution. This is an extra layer of specificity and not necessarily required if it isn't available.

How is virtual human coaching used?

We use a blend of human and AI coaches. Our backend systems run AI models for

We recognise that we can digitise most of the coaching experience, but we also recognise that the human in the loop is irreplaceable

prediction, but we couple that with human coaches as well. The reason for that is to provide not only the human touch, which is very important, but also the ability for our users to talk to people rather than a robot.

We recognise we can digitise most of the coaching experience, but we also recognise that the human in the loop is irreplaceable. Studies show that this is the right approach to create accountability and engagement, which are key for our B2B partners.

Will your work with McLaren result in any new developments that will benefit future clients?

Absolutely. The work we're doing with McLaren will be fit for purpose for all our business partners. The problems faced by the race team ▶



Each person in the McLaren team will get different insights for better lifestyle choices

Everything we do is evidence based and scientifically proven. Our technology is grounded in science and we have dozens of scientists and experts who collaborate with us in human performance

- are also prevalent in society as a whole and our systems and technology will help our partners to improve wellness and wellbeing levels.

Have you done any studies to show the scientific, measurable effect of your services?

Everything we do is evidence-based and scientifically proven. Our technology is grounded in science and we have dozens of scientists and experts who collaborate with us in the four pillars of human performance.

Just for our women's health platform we utilised more than 200 international scientific studies. We also rely on our partners to

provide science to our solutions. There will be a very exciting announcement soon on a major clinical trial, but I will have to tell you more about that at a later stage.

What are the future plans for Salus Optima?

Despite the current backdrop with the pandemic, we have seen robust growth and expansion of our partnerships across multiple markets. We also have a strong roadmap for our products that entails what we call 'end-to-end solutions' in which we deliver off the shelf products to our partners or more bespoke projects where our partners utilise our 'Enterprise solution' to solve the complex issues they have.

Also, given the strong uptake of our technology and interest of our partners, we are planning our overseas expansion – we have some territories lined up for major deployments of our technology. This is very exciting news for our collaborators and partners. We see a number of opportunities to innovate in traditional industries and are certain that our solutions can provide innovation, customer loyalty, revenue opportunities and engagement to our business partners. ●

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Virtual wellbeing check

Feelings of pressure, isolation and performance anxiety are commonly experienced by athletes, however it isn't always easy for clubs to identify those who are struggling. Richard Lucas, founder of GoVox, explains how technology can help

What's your background?

Professionally, I have 27 years of leadership experience in a FTSE100 company. Personally, I have a very keen interest and social involvement in Rugby Union, which I've played from a very young age and has always been part of my social circle. As I got older I took on various roles in community rugby, taking over as Chairman of Hitchin Rugby Club in the UK in 2015.

I'm also the father to two young adults, who are 18 and 21 years old.

Where did the idea for GoVox come from?

In late 2018, we very sadly lost a number of players at grassroots rugby level to suicide.

At the same time, I had a number of 'near miss' incidents linked to teams at work. My involvement in mental health and wellbeing before this had been very light touch; looking back now, pretty embarrassingly so.

We got together with a number of leaders across sports and industry, along with representatives from MIND and other mental health service providers. Initially we wanted to check if these were isolated cases, but unfortunately we quickly found out that they weren't, and the cases had a couple of things in common.

Predominantly – but not always – they were male, but in every case we looked at the key thing that stood out

is they were not the people who you would have suspected were struggling – in many cases they were the life and soul of the party and had no obvious issues they were dealing with.

We did a pretty deep review of the advice and support available, and it was pretty good. The 'gap' we identified was related to those who have responsibility for a group of people, such as a manager, leader, coach or pastoral care. They are all very busy and needed help to:

- Stay connected with their teams
- Quickly identify who needs their support
- Measure the impact on a team and individuals when situational factors change, because everyone has a different level of resilience.



Richard Lucas was moved to create GoVox after several suicides occurred in grassroots rugby



Shane Nunn/Getty

This is where the GoVox Wellbeing Check In was created, as a tool to help ‘Prioritise the Conversations that Matter’.

The Check is quick, easy and non-intrusive. It has hit on the culture of people being very open and honest with their phone screens and happy to share on social media, etc.

How does GoVox work?

A club signs up its members; a really simple process. At the same time they identify which people in their organisation are best placed to be the first line of support for their members.

GoVox then runs a fully managed service, with a regular check-in process. This is normally a monthly process but some clubs have opted for more often, particularly during times of change and disruption.

The users are invited to ‘check-in’ and answer a series of wellbeing linked questions. These are non-intrusive but are designed to draw out any key reasons for concern. Users

are also asked if they would like to catch up with someone and, finally, they can leave a comment. It takes about 30 seconds to check in, and there’s no log-in required.


The results are presented via a live Online Wellbeing Dashboard to the key support people in the club. The process isn’t anonymous, so if someone requires support then they know exactly who it is.

The insights include ‘red flags’, to draw attention to specific areas of concern. Each user also has their ‘Happiness Score’ calculated, so you can track over time and see at a glance how people are tracking.

What are the common risks to athlete mental health?

GoVox has been adopted at both elite level and grassroots level across a range of sports. Athletes are at risk from the same challenges as anyone in life and this will change over time, due to their specific circumstances.

Richard Lucas
(Centre) in action
for Hitchin RFC



Swim England uses GoVox to check in with its athletes across the country

GoVox's clients include:

Huddersfield Town
Crystal Palace Foundation
Bristol Rovers
Welwyn Rugby Club
Bishop's Stortford Rugby Club
Thame Swim Club
Stevenage Football Club
Swim England

- We do, however, see an increased issue with athletes around:

- Isolation and lack of connection
- Anxiety, specifically a fear of performance and worthiness
- Depression, particularly during poor performance times and towards the end of an athlete's career.

A competitive environment and personality can also lead athletes to compare themselves more regularly to others and can lead to a range of eating and control disorders.

How are the wellbeing questions formulated?

We have a growing set of base questions, which have been developed by experts and shaped and improved through use via GoVox.

We share these with each new organisation, but tweak and amend them so they are a perfect fit to their communication style and cultural communications delivery style.

How much detail is provided about wellbeing?

We have a wide range of data that maps 'Happiness' as a key indicator, driven across a range of questions. We have seen this move up and down based on internal and external factors.

Interestingly we can map how anxiety, and any movement there, can impact sleep and positivity.

What difference does GoVox make to sports clubs?

Higher engagement
Helps to prevent personal crisis moments
Improves club culture
Retains talent
Specific support during COVID-19 and lockdown
Enables leaders to lead and support

We're also able to map and measure the impact of any actions taken to mitigate a particular issue – without directly asking about the area of concern.

Do you use any AI technology?

We are currently exploring some software that can highlight concerns based on key words from users. We expect this to be particularly helpful in analysing the comments users write during check in, especially considering we have completed over 250k check-ins this year.

Do you offer any assistance to clubs on how to support struggling members, once they have been identified?

Yes, we teamed up with our local MIND – they saw the value in our service and we now do check-ins with their teams.

We arrange for mental health training for clubs via MIND; in fact we have just completed a pilot for the Rugby Football Union in Hertfordshire, UK. ●

CASE STUDIES

Swim England

Swim England utilises the GoVox platform to monitor and support the wellbeing of two different squads: the Performance squad, comprising elite athletes, some of whom compete in the Commonwealth games, and the England International Junior squad, predominantly composed of athletes who are under 18. As well as mental health and wellbeing, Swim England is able to sense check training and performance through the platform.

Most athletes are scattered across the country, making it difficult to support the squad members' wellbeing. GoVox is a very easy way of identifying any individuals that may require some support, and in what key areas.

COVID-19 SUPPORT

The team currently uses the check-ins on a monthly basis to support athletes through the COVID-19 pandemic; typically Swim England prefers to check in once every two months, but during these uncertain and difficult times, an increased frequency is a much better way of providing proactive, effective wellbeing support.

Diane Elliot, sport science and sport medicine manager at Swim England says: "We have found GoVox really valuable in being able to monitor people that we don't see every day. It's a really helpful platform for picking out people that may benefit from a chat and is a very useful tool in terms of managing and supporting wellbeing."

Adam Howard, Hitchin Rugby Club

Like all of us, 28 year old Adam has had his routine completely disrupted over the past few months. Having experienced mental health struggles in the past, Adam reflects on how the lockdown has been affecting him.

"I think of myself as a positive person, I'm always out and about and my lifestyle is really active. Being cut off from being able to coach and play rugby, as well as not being able to go to work; I really struggled feeling isolated from people and my mental wellbeing started to become affected."

Adam plays, and coaches, for Hitchin Rugby Club. As a busy, active and outgoing person, Adam had acknowledged the friendly online check-ins in the past, and responded positively without much afterthought, but it wasn't until lockdown began that he came to realise the full benefits of the reach outs.

OPEN CONVERSATION

Within the first two weeks of lockdown, Adam received a check-in from the GoVox platform. "It was really casual," he says, "but it made all the difference



GoVox is supporting employees at Crystal Palace FC

Crystal Palace FC's Palace for Life Foundation

"Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of employees at the Foundation has always been a priority for us, but with the onset of lockdown, we identified an increased need for more regular check-ins with staff. We'd been looking at tools that could help us support our staff members through isolation, and identify any issues that hadn't been picked up in one-to-ones with line managers," says Duncan Robinson, head of HR and business support.

"GoVox was the ideal platform for us as it offers regular check-ins, with clear sight of any developing trends, alongside identifying specific areas in which staff may benefit from support. It can be customised and adapted to the needs of our organisation, as well as having a wide bank of recommended questions that others in the football arena are utilising."

because it gave me a tool to express my feelings. It was the open conversation I needed during a time where communication had been so drastically changed."

"I responded to the check-in – it was almost a bit of a rant to get things off my chest – and just by actively putting my thoughts down in one place, I felt better. The next day I got a call from someone at the rugby club, and that chat made the world of difference. From then I carried on using the platform to log my feelings for the next few weeks, and now I'm feeling so much more positive."

NO BARRIERS

Having previously struggled with mental wellbeing, Adam knows that having open conversations like this can't be underestimated. He believes that being able to express his feelings, and be heard, has made all the difference to being able to tackle lockdown and the challenges it has brought.

"The great thing about GoVox is that you don't have to specifically ask for help, which can be a huge barrier. You know that you're going to be heard by the right people – it really is a weight off your shoulders."

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A brand new app



Home workouts are one of the options in the Funxtion app

FunXtion and GoodLife Fitness are collaborating to help Canadians stay fit in the gym and at home

GoodLife Fitness, Canada's largest fitness company, which has over 235 clubs, has formed a strategic partnership with FunXtion, experts in interactive digital fitness, in order to introduce innovative digital solutions including a custom branded app with branded virtual classes and training programmes. The partnership between GoodLife and FunXtion also extends to ongoing planning with the team around digital innovation, strategy and connectivity moving forwards.

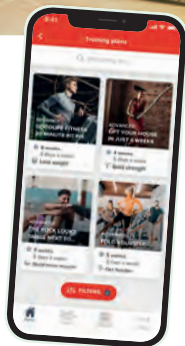
GoodLife and FunXtion had been working together to launch the new app but when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the teams quickly pivoted their efforts to ensure members could have access to a robust selection of digital content. GoodLife also created GoodLifeAtHome, to provide members and everyone in Canada with access to a one-stop resource for physical and mental health, which included a number of digital workouts and training plans from FunXtion.

"Now that many of our clubs across Canada are open, our work with the FunXtion team is focused on providing

the best combined live and digital experience possible for our members, whether they are working out in our clubs or at home," said Sander van den Born, chief marketing and technology officer, GoodLife Fitness. "Whilst many of our members have returned to our clubs, some are still unable or unwilling to return to a physical venue. This investment in a digital extension of our in-club offer is helping us maintain a connection with this part of our membership."

The app also enables seamless on-boarding of new members, class booking, workout and training plans, and touchless club access. Future iterations will include in-app payments and day pass purchase. In addition, members are able to track performance and activity progress, connect with their personal trainer or the club at any time and engage via the club's activity social wall. The branded in-club enhancements also provide a workout creator and content library, business analytics and a class scheduler.

"We wanted to develop a flexible solution, embedding digital channels



in everything we do in order to communicate a clear and consistent message, improve business efficiency and ultimately improve member experience," continued van den Born.

To create a premium solution, FunXtion integrated with Exerp, the existing club management system, to deliver a truly streamlined and scalable option which includes a custom branded app and branded in-club digital innovations including virtual classes.

Ernst De Neef, CEO of FunXtion adds: "Our flexible, white labelled packages allow clubs to tailor the content that suits them. Our branded virtual classes give clubs the option to choose from an ever-growing library of classes and the branded app and white-label solutions provide a way to boost brand loyalty."

To find out more, visit:
www.funxtion.com or
www.goodlifefitness.com

“Our new app enables seamless onboarding of new members, class booking, workout and training plans

Sander van den Born, GoodLife





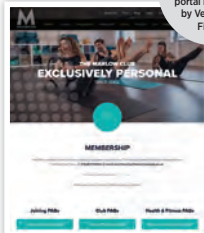
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Memberships are evolving. People may not train at the gym or in your class; some may never physically come to your club, but they still want to be part of your community.

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The Marlow Club's branded online membership portal is provided by Venueserve Fitness



Why is Venueserve Fitness a good fit for your customer?

- ▶ Authentic live streamed classes with the instructors they know and love
- ▶ Access to a huge bank of pre-recorded virtual classes
- ▶ Branded content that looks and feels like your club
- ▶ Maintain relationships and customer engagement at a safe distance
- ▶ A secure platform to give your customers and instructors digital peace of mind
- ▶ A live streamed alternative when classes are full

Why is Venueserve Fitness good for your business?

The rise of streaming is an opportunity, not a threat to your revenue. Venueserve Fitness allows you to capture these new incomes from a new type of customer, adding value to your overall offer.

- ▶ Simple, affordable and adaptable - simply plug and play
- ▶ Protect your existing income by offering current members a blended membership, including online and in-person training
- ▶ Convert leavers to a digital-only membership to protect revenue
- ▶ Tempt new members with a 'try before you' buy digital taster
- ▶ Generate valuable customer insights



The River Bourne club is creating online sessions for different demographics



Clubs without walls

Venueserve Fitness is working with the Health Club Collection to drive its digital customer engagement

The Health Club Collection, a group of boutique health clubs operating in and around London since the early 1990s, has collaborated with Venueserve Fitness to develop its live streamed and pre-recorded online content to fulfil its long-term strategy of delivering clubs without walls.

The Health Club Collection includes the Bankside Fit Hub, the River Bourne Club and Rize. Each club has its own unique brand and client base, but all have benefited from using the white-label digital workout platform provided by Venueserve Fitness.

Heidi Blackburn, operations director at The Health Club Collection says: "We introduced the online platform as a way to connect with our members during lockdown. However, we always had the belief that online wellness was something we wanted to provide; it was inevitable for the leisure sector.

FAST TO MARKET

"The pandemic simply sped up our implementation of this strategy. We needed to be fast to market with our virtual offer, and the content had to be authentic, meaningful and ensure our instructors had online security built in. We wanted to be able to offer our members a round-the-clock 'lifestyle' experience, and Venueserve Fitness helped us to fulfil our desire."

The Health Club Collection's River Bourne Club in Chertsey has a suburban demographic, and is now creating bespoke training schedules for some of its niche markets, as Blackburn explains: "We have a lot of members who are retired. We can provide comprehensive, bespoke training plans for this group online; something that's costly in person. For our prime-time customers aged 65+, our inspirational instructor Dee, who is 70 years old herself, has created some fantastic low impact, age-specific sessions.

CREATING CONTENT

"At first we wondered if this age group would engage with the online technology, and we filmed some short 'How to' instructional videos, but they've tuned-in and turned up. Now we're creating more content for other demographics, including post and pre-natal.

"The fantastic thing about virtual wellness is we can provide a wide range of content cost-effectively. We're also considering online teenage/youth sessions, prehab and rehab sessions, weight loss with nutrition programmes and long-Covid recovery support."

The platform creates an opportunity to grow the business, according to the Health Club Collection's group sales and marketing manager, Ian Hassett,



We wanted to be able to offer our members a round-the-clock 'lifestyle' experience, and Venueserve Fitness helped us to fulfil our desire

**Heidi Blackburn,
The Health Club Collection**

who says: "Virtual provision naturally creates flexibility and extends our membership offer. As the Venueserve Fitness platform is white-label, we can customise it to look and feel like our own brands, so our customers feel connected to our clubs.

CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

"Brand loyalty is important for customer retention. Members can use the online platforms should they be working from home, away with business, on holiday or too busy to get to the club itself. The reports created by the platform show both pre-recorded and live streamed sessions are popular. What we've learned is that choice and convenience is important to customers."

To find out more visit
<https://fitness.venueserve.com>

Collect wind power as you move



SHUTTERSTOCK/ANOSHO

Researchers in China have designed a tiny device that can scavenge wind energy from the breeze you make when you walk or run

Most of the wind available on land is too gentle to push commercial wind turbine blades, but now researchers in China have designed a kind of “tiny wind turbine” that can scavenge wind energy from breezes as little as those created by a brisk walk. The method, presented in the journal *Cell Reports Physical Science*, is a low-cost and efficient way of collecting light breezes as a micro-energy source.

The new device is not technically a turbine. It is a nanogenerator made of two plastic strips in a tube that flutter or clap together when there is airflow. Like rubbing a balloon to your hair, the two plastics become electrically charged after being separated from contact, a phenomenon called the triboelectric effect. But instead of making your hair stand up like Einstein's, the electricity generated by the two plastic strips is captured and stored.

“You can collect all the breeze in your everyday life,” says senior author Ya Yang of Beijing Institute of Nanoenergy and Nanosystems, Chinese Academy of Sciences. “We once placed our nanogenerator on a person's arm, and a swinging arm's airflow was enough to generate power.”

Allows sweat to evaporate

A breeze as gentle as 1.6 m/s (3.6 mph) was enough to power the triboelectric nanogenerator designed by Yang and his colleagues. The nanogenerator performs at its best when wind velocity is between

4 to 8 m/s (8.9 to 17.9 mph), a speed that allows the two plastic strips to flutter in sync. The device also has a high wind-to-energy conversion efficiency of 3.23 per cent, a value that exceeds previously reported performances on wind energy scavenging. Currently, the research team's device can power up 100 LED lights and temperature sensors.

“Our intention isn't to replace existing wind power generation technology. Our goal is to solve the issues that the traditional wind turbines can't solve,” says Yang. “Unlike wind turbines that use coils and magnets, where the costs are fixed, we can pick and choose low-cost materials for our device. Our device can also be safely applied to nature reserves or cities because it doesn't have the rotating structures.”

Big goal, small device

In the past, Yang and his colleagues have designed a nanogenerator as small as a coin, but he wants to make it even tinier and more compact with higher efficiency. In the future, Yang and his colleagues would like to combine the device to small electronic devices such as phones, to provide sustainable electric power.

For more research using triboelectric nanogenerator technology, see *Fit Tech Issue 2 2020 p80: Create your own energy*



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