



SWEAT

BOUTIQUE DIGITAL RESOURCE PACK

The Bounceback Post COVID-19

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Introduction

Emma Barry

The playbook is being rewritten and we are emerging into a new fitness world. It is our great hope that these resources inspire you to think differently and more deeply about your business, to embrace learnings from adjacent sectors and other parts of the world, and to know what step to take next so we can get back to serving health and happiness to our members.

Many of us need to find and pave new paths to profitability, be open to doing things differently, work more cohesively as a united industry, invite technology to support our workstreams, and inject more fun for our staff and members. With our global health crisis and having been held in place for so long, this has created pent up demand for our products and services. There is new awareness and urgency around the necessity and value of our sector. It's time for us to deliver!

This is just the beginning. The terrain of the fitness landscape is forever changing and it's important, as technology accelerates, that we do too. As fast as this seems now, things will never be this slow again.

As Simon Sinek says in his latest book, The Infinite Game...

"A Chief Executive Officer is actually a Chief Vision Officer, someone who is responsible for setting and articulating and ensuring the organization is heading in one direction and then hiring the people and giving them direction beyond the short term".

So, with curiosity and the undeniable fervour to take action;
let's bring our industry back!



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DESIGN AND INFRA- STRUCTURE

Design and infrastructure

Technogym

Design and infrastructure play a key role in any space and facility, but are integral to any boutique studio as the environment is a key component to the experience.

Having developed many boutique studios and facilities across the UK, Technogym share their insight and perspective on the importance of design and infrastructure.

Creating the right environment design is a mixture of many things – lighting, flooring, construction materials used, equipment layout... but before getting into any of the specifics, building your identity and vision is the key place to start.

1. Define your vision

It may seem remarkably obvious, but starting with a vision helps to define and create your offering. The vision will naturally evolve, but it is the key starting point for shaping your facility as well as crucial for sharing with key stakeholders.

- Interior designer, architects, investors, landlords, staff.
- What is your vision?
- What customer experience are you looking to create?
- What target demographic/s are you looking to attract?
- What will be your differentiator?

2. The experience

Once you start to build a vision you can then start to build how the vision and goals would be brought into an experience.

- What style of training will be offered?
- What style of coaching will be offered?
- How will members track progress?
- How will progress of results be shown during the class?

3. Explore and research

Next research the available offering – the broad range of choice from suppliers like Technogym includes - advanced treadmills, non-motorised treadmills, connected rowers, group cycles, indoor bikes as well as the digital infrastructure to support this equipment.

Explore and research the solutions available, how they could support or even enhance the vision and experience of your facility.

4. Environment and member journey

When the vision and experience are defined, then one can begin to explore the development of the environment and member journey. Naturally, this is a crucial step as this is where the whole experience and vision comes to life, what your members see and interact with as well as the contact points.

- What equipment is required?
- What is the best layout for the vision and experience?
- How will customers move around the studio?
- What digital tracking is required?
- How will members book classes?

5. Design

With all of the above in place, designing an environment that suits your audience becomes clearer and more defined. The design process includes, deciding on the visual effects, temperature, lighting that will be used to create a unique environment for your customers. This also includes the layout – how will members move and how can coaching be best delivered. A design that generates the best member experience is essential.

6. Connected Equipment

Whether it is running classes, rowing classes, cycling classes, functional classes or performance HIIT classes, connected equipment will play a key role to assist your class experience. Consider what metrics and measurements are required for your class, what functionality benefits your vision and coaching experience. Work with partners on existing solutions and see how they fit your desired goals and objectives.

7. Develop your partners

Naturally as you develop your design and infrastructure, partners will become more important, especially within the development phase. Consider partnering with organisations that will support with interior design, layout and equipment selection as this will assist with your organisations progression and development to meet the vision that has been set.

Case study

Clare's space

When Clare Stobart was developing the concept for her boutique health club, she had a strong guiding vision: to provide the best members' experience. The result is CPASE (Clare's Space Boutique Health Club – pronounced 'space') five-star boutique club in the picturesque Cheshire countryside.

Clare set about designing a boutique club that offers a unique mind, body, and lifestyle experience with every detail - from its instructors and interiors to its equipment and fitness class offerings. "I wanted to create a destination where members could escape from reality. That vision of creating a sanctuary has become more important than I could have imagined. In daring to be different we are attracting people willing to commit to a fresh way of approaching health and fitness."

The **Cyclone studio** is an indoor cycling studio featuring Skillbike with tiered flooring and a rotating central podium. The Skillbike stimulates hill climbs by using Real Gear Shifts so members can boost their cycling efficiency. "It features a full-size screen on the wall and bespoke lighting which matches the beat of the music, providing members with **an immersive Skillbike experience**. "We will use this studio to host regular races for our members, so they can compete against each other for prizes and a yellow jersey!" says Clare.

The **Inferno studio** is a specialised bootcamp area that hosts CPASE bespoke classes – designed around four key

pillars of performance Agility, Speed, Stamina, and Power. The studio is kitted out with Technogym Skillrun and Technogym Bench to provide **a unique bootcamp experience**.

"I did plenty of research into the top providers of fitness equipment and visited leading boutique fitness space," says Clare, "but I couldn't find anything that matches the quality and branding of Technogym. Everything about their knowledge, service levels, product capabilities, design support, and training blew me away. In creating such a high-end facility, I had to partner with people who take similar pride in what they do."

Examples from Technogym

Covering **SMART EQUIPMENT, DIGITAL, TRAINING METHODOLOGY, PROGRAMMING, DESIGN** and **MARKETING**.

SKILL X

GROUP CYCLE CLASS

BIOCIRCUIT CLASS

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TECHNOGYM – www.technogym.com/gb

CONTACT US:

E-mail: uk_info@technogym.com

Telephone: 01344 300236



THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

The importance of the customer journey

Proinsight

Over the past couple of years, the boutique gym market has seen rapid growth and expansion. The fitness industry, in general (pre COVID-19), was booming and consumers continue to look for the next level of experience from their fitness facilities, and boutique gyms offer exactly that. The whole premise of the market is to provide clientele with a luxurious experience that cannot be replicated by huge national fitness chains, and instead, offering a more bespoke and tailored experience, complemented by the easy access to some of the world's best fitness trainers.

As the value of boutique brands is getting bigger and bigger, this means the market is getting even more competitive. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the facilities will still be in-demand and on the other side more people than ever will be looking forward to progress with their fitness journey once we are out of lockdown. As the market shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon, this means the customer journey is more important than ever.

The collapse of the high street - a catalyst in the online boom of 2020?

2020 was a strange year for all of us, but despite the tough 12 months, I'm sure we all had, we're all ready to take on what life throws at us this time.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic last year on the global market cannot be understated, causing an unpredictable wave of uncertainty across almost every industry imaginable. One aspect of our daily life which certainly not return to normal is the high street. Although you may have seen this as an inevitable end to the classic high street retailers and shops, this rapid decline was fuelled by the pandemic due to the closure of non-essential shops during various lockdowns.

The everyday consumer has instead been turning to online retailers, especially over Christmas, where the Post Office recorded 51.3m customer transactions - a huge surge in online retail sales. The reliance on the online market has only been proven further with the collapse of Sir Philip Green's retail empire Arcadia, which includes Topshop and Topman, and the collapse of huge high street retailer, Debenhams. The brands themselves have since been acquired by Boohoo and ASOS respectively, but not the shops, which just highlights the huge shift in demand for the online market.

It's not just the high street which is shifting to the online world, but also the everyday commuter who has most likely

been working from home for the majority of last year, whilst still continuing to do so. With the return to the office being pushed further back every month for organisations across the country, people are turning to the internet to get their fix for a whole variety of things - including fitness.

Peloton was a huge brand introduced to us last year whilst we were all staying at home, and they continue to swamp the fitness market. Peloton's growth has skyrocketed due to the pandemic, experiencing a 172% spike in sales over the last 12 months alone.

Unfortunately, this 'stay at home' advice does not seem to be going anywhere, so it is important we adapt and learn how the market has changed over the last year. With government borrowing at a 70 year high and us still being in the middle of a long dark tunnel, this is seriously going to affect how the market grows over the next five years, so the adaptation of your customer journey is imperative to your success and survival.

It's time to go from strength to strength

You may be wondering, what exactly is the customer journey? Essentially, it all comes down to understanding your customer base and mapping out their experience while working with you. Your entire premise as a business should be based on ensuring that every client you work with is understood completely, and their experience working with you is nothing less than seamless.

The customer journey is a combination of all the offerings you provide, from the quality of the customer service experience, to the service offering and products themselves and more. It is also important to remember that every customer has a different idea in mind on what that journey should be for them, so you should never overlook anything you may deem as less important - as it's certainly a very subjective experience.

As soon as you have this understanding of the customer journey, from beginning to end, this is where you can start streamlining the experience for both online and offline consumers. Unfortunately, you are going to notice faults in the process, but by honing in on these and adapting your processes accordingly, you can evolve the customer experience further and adapt as a brand - which is a completely natural process to occur, especially in boutique brands such as yourselves. As the market changes, so will the expectations of your customers, so always having this ability to adapt where needed will certainly help you to provide a more dynamic and bespoke customer experience.



How to get your customer journey in shape

As we have already touched upon, the boutique gym market is more competitive than ever. When commuters do eventually return back to offices in city centres, what gym are they going to go to first? You have to make sure it's your facility.

The only way to guarantee this is the case is by ensuring the premium experience you offer is truly reflected in your seamless customer journey, helping you to not only survive, but thrive, and extend your company's customer lifecycle. This involves refining every aspect of your boutique gym offering including: the community, atmosphere, lighting, social media channels, connectivity to instructors, etc - essentially any reason you can think of that would give someone a reason to join your gym. You are there to provide an atmosphere that is unique and makes your participants feel like they are not just another person entering the studio.

But how can you guarantee that you are creating moments of magic each and every class each and every day? You can start measuring its success using a variety of different methods, including, mystery shopping, closed-loop NPS feedback systems and geofencing surveys - just to name a few.

Most large household brands will use one or a variety of these tools, Brands like Apple and First Direct put NPS at the very heart of what they do. Pret A Manger are well renowned for Mystery shopping their coffee shops each week and using it to recognize their superstars. Lidl and many US brands like the supermarket giant Walmart use geofencing apps to trigger surveys to their consumers offering them an incentive for completion. Whatever the tool implemented, the collection of this type of data on the customer experience (CX) is mission critical.

In the meantime, while our gyms are shut and the commuters are still at home, it's time to adapt. How can you ensure that your services and products are still in

everyone's minds? Have you adapted your offering to a hybrid online/offline model? These are all questions that you need to be answering sooner rather than later to improve your chances of winning those customers back in the future.

For example, Peloton, who we mentioned earlier, has been working with global hotel chains to provide their guests with a private, safe and design-led space to workout, and Peloton equipment to use on request. The hotel brands are benefiting from this scheme as they have the incentives available to attract health-conscious travellers, whereas Peloton themselves are attracting a different market base which they may not have done otherwise. This is the perfect example of adaptation and preparing for a post-COVID world.

Where do you go from here?

Hopefully, now you will have obtained a clear understanding of why customer experience (CX) is such an important part of your business model and strategy - especially in these uncertain times. If you are potentially looking for a way to measure customer satisfaction in your boutique/independent gym facility, at Proinsight we offer a comprehensive range of mystery shopping services and we will gladly take the time to discuss them, along with their individual benefits, with you in more detail.

We have worked alongside a number of well-known brands, such as Ernest Jones and Carpetright, to help them improve their customer experience and you can trust that you will be in the best hands when you turn to us. Every positive experience that you provide will strengthen customers' relationships with your brand and the stronger these relationships are, the less likely you are to lose your customers to your competitors.

David Hopkins, *Founder & Managing Director, Proinsight*
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DIGITAL OFFERING- CONTENT

Digital offering – content

Les Mills & Myzone

This section highlights how operators can maximise their offering by using organisations like Les Mills and MyZone to improve and expand their digital offering to their membership base and provide greater member value.

What will the fitness industry look like after the pandemic and how can clubs emerge stronger as we enter these crucial stages of recovery?

With COVID-19 restrictions across the UK and Ireland and social distancing guidelines set to continue when clubs re-open, and appetite for digital solutions at an all-time high, a member's fitness journey is no longer confined to four walls of a facility. Evidence indicates clubs that can bridge the gap between the digital and physical world to offer members an integrated fitness experience will be best-placed to thrive in the future.

Why 'blended fitness' will be the norm

Even pre COVID-19, 85% of all gym members were already doing workouts at home. Accelerated by the pandemic, today's fitness consumers are demanding a seamlessly connected experience, which suits their lifestyle and enables them to workout on their terms.

With tech giants like Apple, Amazon and Facebook betting big on fitness solutions, consumers' expectations will continue to evolve. As a result, clubs will need to constantly innovate to remain competitive and relevant to their members.

Recent research from [Alliance Leisure](#) found 96 percent of consumers who tried a digital workout from a club during lockdown said they would use that facility when it reopened. Meanwhile, a [ClubIntel report](#) into the post-COVID fitness landscape concludes that "operators seeking relevance to Gen Z and Millennials need to commit to providing virtual fitness content", as these demographics were the biggest consumers of digital offerings during lockdown and say their ongoing provision will be the most important factor in them returning to their club post-pandemic.

As such, clubs that provide blended fitness solutions will offer greater value for their existing members and unlock significant acquisition opportunities.

A November 2020 survey of 9,000 LES MILLS on Demand users found that 92% of members who subscribe to the platform via their club feel extremely positive (70%) or moderately positive (22%) about their facility for providing this solution. The ability to provide standalone digital offerings can also be a great way for clubs to win new fans online, build brand affinity, and then eventually convert them to becoming full members of the club. By taking the club experience into people's homes, 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. There is clear appetite for such fitness progression among non-gym members using LES MILLS On Demand, with 63% stating they're interested in trying live Les Mills classes in a club (research from November 2020).

Live group exercise will continue to be the pinnacle

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. But it's the combination of this with live workout experiences that gives clubs the edge over digital-only fitness products.

COVID-19 has brought great progress in the range of options for people to stay active at home, but motivation remains the key to regular exercise and this is the very reason clubs exist in the first place. Gym members are [on average 14 times more active than non-members](#) because live workouts in a buzzing club provide the ultimate inspirational fitness experience and the numbers bear this out.

[The Les Mills Groupness Study](#) found that gym attendees experience increased levels of individual enjoyment, exertion and satisfaction as a result of group exercise. It identified the powerful role 'the group effect' plays in positively influencing a club member's overall workout experience – and their intention to return.

Not to mention the power of the Instructor. In an age of automation and digital disruption, inspirational individuals remain a unique selling point in the gym that rivals can't copy. Still chronically undervalued, Instructors may receive the recognition they deserve due to the advent of social and digital fitness – where your brand is truly defined by your people.

The growth of livestreaming – likely to become a permanent feature on timetables – means Instructors will remain pivotal to a club's bottom line. Across live and digital, a single great Instructor can attract and retain hundreds of members to a club over time, while a team of them can transform a club's future.

After months of isolation for much of the world's population, the challenge for clubs is to be the bridge between the digital and the physical fitness space. By fusing the best of digital (innovation, accessibility, and scalability) with the motivation of live fitness experiences – clubs can tap into our primal roots as social animals and meet the yearning for community that we've all experienced during lockdown.

Finding the right solution

With blended solutions now an essential for successful clubs, finding the right solution for you and your members will be the key to success. [A new webinar series](#) launched by Les Mills shares club success stories of those who are winning in this space.

Over the past year, Les Mills has launched a suite of digital solutions to help club's future-proof by expanding their reach in the booming online fitness space in a way that complements their live offerings.

As part of their support, Les Mills helps partners with their overall online-to-offline strategy, implementation and ongoing membership retention and acquisition.

"COVID-19 has posed unprecedented challenges for health clubs. With the changing needs of consumers and ongoing uncertainty, we're evolving rapidly to support integrated in club and at home offerings," says Martin Franklin, CEO of Les Mills Europe.



With quality content now crucial to a club's success, Les Mills has recently launched LES MILLS Content, which provides a suite of world-class workout videos to help clubs grow their digital presence while saving them the substantial cost and effort of creating bespoke content. The package includes 100+ premium videos, comprising of Les Mills workouts with and without equipment, technique tips and mindfulness videos, with new releases refreshed quarterly.

As part of the LES MILLS Content product, clubs will also be able to build their own video on-demand library of Les Mills workouts featuring their own Instructors. Using royalty-free music, clubs can now build a centralised livestream library with their Instructors teaching the workouts.

Designed to complement the in-club offering, LES MILLS Content enables operators to create meaningful digital AND in-person connection with members. Franklin adds: *"Nothing beats the live in-studio experience with your favourite Instructor, which we all can't wait to get back to. And by providing solutions that allow members to connect easily to their facility and Instructor wherever they are, we aim to help clubs build a sustainable model for the future."* [The full suite of solutions available from LES MILLS are:](#)

- **Live workouts in-club** – offer members the ultimate workout experience with live fitness classes from a certified Les Mills Instructor.
- **Virtual workouts in-club** – allow members to workout in club anytime with cutting-edge virtual fitness, delivered in-studio using your choice of AV.
- **LES MILLS Virtual Bike in-club** – take the best presenters, programs and content, and deliver them on a world-class bike.
- **Livestream workouts** – provide your instructors with the ability to deliver Les Mills workouts to members via your platform of choice.
- **LES MILLS Content** – host the world's best workout content in your branded ecosystem, without the need for Capex and mass content creation. Includes access to LES MILLS Recorded Livestream to build a video on demand library featuring your Instructors.
- **LES MILLS On Demand Affiliate Program** – provide members with over 1,000 home workouts and receive a share of the revenue for each sign-up.

Despite the challenges of lockdown, Franklin's future outlook remains positive. "While times are incredibly tough right now, this shift to blended fitness models alongside the increased awareness on people's health and fitness will be a big opportunity for the industry."

Clubs who adopt the mindset that their club is now always open and every person on the internet is a potential member will be able to thrive in this new landscape. The ultimate winners will be clubs who nail the online-to-offline strategy to ensure they have both bases covered, while adapting quickly to emergent challenges."

Make your community more than physical or digital alone

Connecting members from either side of the digital divide, create an online offering that walks hand-in-hand with the physical space for members.

First came lockdown. Then, upon reopening, we all remember the news when UK government officials announced that for Tier 3 areas, "leisure and sports facilities may continue to stay open, but group exercise classes (including fitness and dance) should not go ahead." The boutique sector has been hit hard throughout restrictions.

Once a "nice to have", a strong digital product is now an essential part of the offering. During lockdown we have been working hard to enhance features to help clubs support their members. The release of MZ-Remote has been a game-changer. The solution brings the club experience to life at home and allows instructors to effectively coach participants through the class with access to real time feedback on every effort.

We know that encouragement and being part of a community drives people. Myzone data alone shows that users with four or more connections exercise 56% more than those with none. With empathy and understanding, operators should harness this ability to support, communicate and reward the effort of their members for every workout.

Digital fitness done right

In times when group exercise isn't possible and an Insta Live workout isn't enough, MZ-Remote is the world's first virtual live group workout where participants can connect and exercise together.

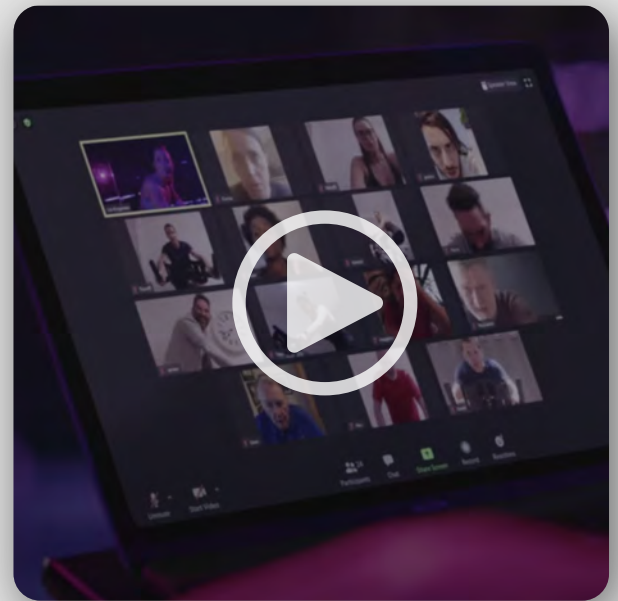
Having a training tool that displays the heart rate feedback of all participants on one screen, no matter where they choose to workout means that you're able to transform your members' homes into virtual class experiences, complete with real-time effort feedback.

Supporting gym operators, members and users, Myzone has also unlocked classes throughout the week, across multiple timezones, to serve its community and to keep the world moving and connected. The schedule includes a cardio club, bringing people together no matter how they want to raise their heart rate; strength sessions, yoga, and even a family workout that prepares body and mind for a day of home schooling. As fitness professionals, you're able to leverage this schedule to your communities until such a time you're able to run your own Remote classes alongside or instead of the timetabled options.

In a recent study by Proinsight on the fitness industry's transformation to online classes, MZ-Remote was selected as the best pivot in business since the lockdown, gaining international acclaim.

As a boutique or independent operator, you can use these digital initiatives to not only motivate and educate members, but bring together a community both in bricks and mortar and online, offering value in increasing social connection in addition to improving body and mind.

For more information visit the MZ-Remote homepage.



Case studies

Underground Gyms: More members, more engaged

"Our gyms have been closed since the beginning of lockdown and when we do re-open, we will have to cut some of the classes we run on site because the distancing measures mean we can't physically host the number of people needed to make them financially viable. That is where MZ-Remote really adds value. It will allow us to have up to 100 people in one session working out from the comfort of their own home, while being coached by an instructor. Going forward it means our members can work out wherever they are, even if they go on holiday or travel with work. They'll never have to interrupt their workouts again." - Sol Gilbert, celebrity personal trainer and founder of Underground Gyms

Nisus Fitness: Business growth, even in lockdown

"Our focus is direction, accountability and motivation. Myzone gives us the opportunity to do all three, whether in the club or online. We are now truly a hybrid training club and this would not have been possible without them. Myzone saved our business during lockdown."

"Within 12 hours of hearing about MZ-Remote we had 50 clients online doing a session. Now MZ-Remote runs across our 15 session online live schedule each week with an average of 30 clients per session."

"Despite closing our doors due to COVID-19, we now have a growing membership and Myzone is key to that. The technology is completely embedded into our culture with over 90% of our members owning a Myzone product."

"I invested in 50 belts and gave them to my first 50 members. It was a calculated risk that meant buying less equipment, but if I wanted something that would glue the community together, I had to compromise. From member 51 onwards they saw this amazing screen of people's effort and wanted to be part of the fun."

"We have 21 Hall of Fame members who have achieved 1300 MEPs every month for at least four years. This proves to me that the initial risk has paid off."

"The business now has an equal amount of club based and online based members. MZ-Remote has given us the opportunity to scale from a small town in the west of Ireland. We can realistically grow in a way that would not have been possible without MZ-Remote and its integration with Quoox."

"MZ-Remote is here to stay and will be essential for the hybrid club experience." - Joe O'Connor, owner of Nisus Fitness in County Kerry, Ireland.

"MyZone saved our business during lockdown."

Joe O'Connor, owner of Nisus Fitness in County Kerry, Ireland.

"MZ Remote means our members can work out wherever they are, even if they go on holiday or travel with work. They'll never have to interrupt their workouts again."

Sol Gilbert, celebrity personal trainer and founder of Underground Gyms.

DIGITAL INFRAST- RUCTURE

Digital infrastructure

Mindbody & Keepme.ai

This section highlights two important elements that make up the concept of digital infrastructure. The first part, written by [Mindbody](#), focuses on what operators need to be aware of when it comes down to business management software. The second part of the section, written by [Keepme](#), reveals the transformative power of AI and the opportunity it presents for operators.

What do operators need to be aware of when it comes down to business management software?

1. Ensure that your business management software can cope with virtual content

Believe it or not, it's been almost a year since fitness businesses across the globe ventured into virtual fitness for the first time due to COVID-19. Since then, it's been a wild ride of testing cameras and microphones, figuring out lighting, and learning how to teach your customers when you can't be with them.

While some businesses were lucky and had a strategy ready for online fitness, most didn't. And now that it's become clear that virtual classes will forever be a part of the wellness industry, it's essential to choose business management software that can cope with virtual content too.

So don't let live streaming cause you an admin headache. For popular classes, you could end up wasting hours every month on manually emailing Zoom links to clients, and filling in attendance reports. Ensure that you choose business management software that has fully integrated live streaming and video on demand functionality, so that your business is set up for long-term success with virtual.

2. Equip your studio with a Branded Mobile App

A unique branded mobile app is the perfect way to stay connected with your members—both current and new—wherever they are. A branded app will also help increase brand awareness and build loyalty within your fitness business.

With a branded app, your members can book, pay for, and keep track of classes all on their mobile devices. Plus, your team can send push notifications to highlight deals and events as well as automatic “we miss you” messages and class cancellation notices.

If you have got a video on-demand library for your members, make sure you choose a branded mobile app that is integrated with your video content, allowing clients to access your on-demand workouts wherever they are.

3. Retain your new customers

Choose software with an automated marketing solution to ensure you retain new customers with ease. Automated marketing allows you to create smart lists that will automatically reach out to customers to convert them, keep them engaged, or win them back, based on whatever criteria you choose. You'll be able to seamlessly, and personally, engage clients—without ongoing effort on your part.

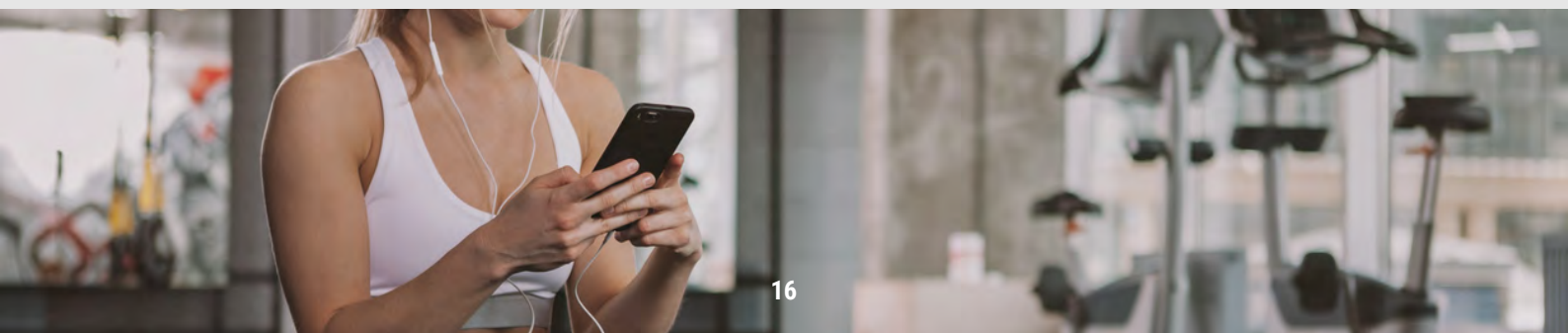
Worried some customers will drop-off a few months after joining? No problem. Simply remind clients to book again by sending personalised text messages and emails, taking away all barriers to re-book. You can also use your automated marketing solution to upsell packages and memberships.

4. Optimise your online scheduling

The easier it is for your clients to book their classes, the more likely they are to stick to their resolution of getting fit. By choosing software with Branded Web widgets, you can utilise your Facebook page and website to embed your class and event schedule. New and loyal clients alike can use this feature to register for classes directly from Facebook or without even leaving your site.

About Mindbody

Mindbody is a leading software provider for the wellness industry. With [Mindbody's Virtual Wellness Platform](#), there's no need to manage multiple systems for live streaming or video. It's all integrated with your software, so your clients can easily login as usual, book from your schedule, and enjoy your online fitness classes from their living rooms





Right here, right now – the transformative power of AI

Artificial intelligence isn't a tool of the future. It is here now, and it presents fitness operators with a unique opportunity to turbo-charge everything from retention to revenues. Ian Mullane, founder and CEO of AI specialist Keepme, reports.

Do you imagine it to be something futuristic: technology that will one day power world-dominating robots, self-driving cars and so on?

You certainly wouldn't be alone in this view, but to pigeonhole AI as something for the future is to miss out on the very real opportunities it presents to health club operators today.

AI is, after all, a significant force in our lives already: from deciding what we need to see in our news feed, to suggesting an artist we may want to play, to giving us to-the-minute arrival times in navigation apps, it touches us in myriad different ways every day. Its role and reach will continue to grow, but we are – all of us – already reaping its benefits in the shape of enhanced, more personalised experiences throughout our daily lives.

So, what does this mean in a fitness context?

When you look at the new entrants to our sector, whether they be existing tech players like Apple or the likes of Peloton, you can be assured of this: AI is at the heart of their product development, customer experience and business operations.

It can, and should, be at the heart of yours too.

Let AI do the heavy lifting

The starting point is data, but please don't allow this statement to set alarm bells ringing. You may have been told that AI isn't something our sector will be able to take advantage of due to shortcomings in operators' data. Please know this is fundamentally untrue.

Admittedly, clubs' data capture may not always be purposeful or intentional, done mainly through necessity and not always comprehensively. Nevertheless, I can assure you the data already exists in your business to improve and refine your offering in a multitude of ways.

Indeed, from my conversations with more than 100 club operators around the world in the last 18 months, without exception the data they needed to transform their businesses – from personalisation of the member journey, to increased secondary spend, to better targeted products and services – was already there.

You would be amazed at what can be done with incomplete datasets, too: it's now entirely possible to clean and enhance them, filling gaps and making them fit for purpose.

By then applying today's powerful AI and machine learning tools to this customer data, you'll unveil a level of insight that, in many cases, makes it blindingly obvious where improvements can be made and opportunities taken. The insights are right there in the data. They always have been, in truth, but with AI now come of age, it no longer requires a staff of data scientists or business intelligence folk to get to them. The tools simply request you feed them data, tell them what you want to know, then leave them to do the rest.

Let's take a look at some specific examples of how this – the application of AI to your customer data – can be used to transform your business.

Personalise the member journey

With the availability of AI and machine learning, we have the capability to understand exactly where the customer is in their journey, as well as what engagement is most likely to be well received at that particular time.

Let's start by looking at the customer's probability of continuing with the club at the next opportunity they have to make that choice – i.e. member retention. How can an operator gain an understanding of a customer's current mindset? And, crucially, how can this insight be secured in a timeframe that allows the operator to change the outcome?

Feed a basic set of standard member data into an AI model and it will generate huge volumes of additional items that we call 'features'. With a basic member dataset of 45 items – items that might include the member's age, gender, join date, lead source, membership type and attendance data, for example, depending on what data the club has access to – a machine learning model can generate 8.8 million decision trees to predict many outcomes. No single decision tree is statistically significant, but when combined, you're presented with a highly accurate prediction of likely member behaviour.

In turn, this real-time indicator of retention probability – accurate at any point of the customer relationship, whether they're in week three of a 12-month contract or on day 23 of a monthly pay-as-you-go agreement – means a user journey can be crafted appropriately, with personalised engagement.

Benefits of this AI-enhanced approach include:

- Member engagement in a time window where you can still change the outcome.
- Confidence you are not waking sleeping members.
- The ability to customise an offer to minimise attrition risk, including harnessing dynamic pricing.
- An enhanced understanding of:
- Your demographic strengths and weaknesses: member-level data allows you to identify where age and gender are playing apart in attrition.
- Human factors in attrition: site-level data can highlight discrepancies between clubs offering exactly the same class, for example, but achieving very different levels of attrition.
- Confidence around who to approach with opportunities for non-dues spend.

Even better, it can all be automated. Welcomes, attendance prompts, birthdays, milestone achievements... Every stage and every action can be set to happen based on simple criteria. Each engagement is customised to the communication preferences of the member (including GDPR) and, where there are options, optimised to the required outcome.

Personalisation – in the form of personal preferences, gender- and age-specific images – is automatically built in. Such automation will become a central part of every operator's strategy; the often-heard "it's too impersonal" is a hugely outdated understanding of what's now possible.

Grow non-dues revenue

Your AI will also be capable of looking at your membership base and optimising your non-dues spend.

Say you offer personal training for purchase as individual sessions, or in packs of five or ten. Your AI can first identify the customers who will purchase from you. It can then segment them further into members most likely to purchase each of the particular packs. This ensures not only that you drive revenue from your membership, but that you do so without leaving revenue on the table.

Andrew would buy a five-pack, but he's just as likely to purchase a ten-pack, so serve him that offer. Kate, meanwhile, is highly unlikely to want anything but a single session, so don't scare her off with a five-pack offer. Bank the one-session sale.

Add the previously discussed automation and you have AI working 24 hours a day, seven days a week to find members who want an offer, before serving them with the correct one in a piece of communication that at the very least is relevant to their age and gender, and delivered in the optimal engagement format for them. All with no human intervention.

The potential is massive – one customer adopting this approach increased non-dues revenue by 43 per cent in six months – and the use case highly flexible to encompass many different areas.

Harness dynamic pricing

I previously mentioned that AI provides operators with the ability to customise an offer to minimise attrition risk, including harnessing dynamic pricing. Here's how this can work.

Say I'm an operator providing a multi-activity facility: alongside fitness facilities, I also offer an outdoor pool and racquet sports. These outdoor activities are somewhat seasonal and, in the late spring and summer months, I duly see a surge in membership joiners. I then see a rise in terminations as autumn draws in.

Introduce AI + automation, however, and I can now offer memberships that suit customer requirements. My AI will predict for me which of my newly-signed members will prove themselves to be summer-only, and which are likely to extend past that.

For the summer-only members, an offer is dynamically served to them at the optimal time to propose another tier of membership – one that reflects the reduced facilities in the winter months. Then, as winter passes and spring commences, the automation will serve the revised Summer Upgrade membership, seamlessly and without the need for staff intervention.

Gyms already offer a number of different membership plans that incorporate entitlements around facilities and times of day when members can access the premises. With AI + automation, each member could be provided with a dynamic membership price – each quarter, say – that best reflects their use of the facilities.

Adoption of this approach would move us away from the binary member/non-member relationship and provide a more customer-centric approach – one that will drive lower attrition and build longer-term relationships as members see the commercial part of the relationship centred around their specific requirements.

And again, this is possible right now: one of our US customers introduced precisely this style of dynamic pricing to its business in 2020. We look forward to evaluating the impact once clubs are fully up and running again post-COVID.

There are many more ways in which AI can optimise pricing, too: it is completely plausible that gyms might manage pricing dynamically taking into account site locations, facilities and the competitive environment around them.

Indeed, pricing is an area with so many variables – the majority of which will materially affect the outcome – that allowing an AI model to monitor them all, looking for the optimal outcome, makes far more sense than relying on gut instinct or market experience.

Tailor the product for retention

Neither should the impact of AI on operations be underestimated. Consider this as a deliverable example:

- Your AI sees member and class attendance and the schedules you have in place.
- It also understands the drivers behind your member retention performance in quite literally a million different ways.
- You ask your AI to optimise your class timetable for member retention.
- Your AI will take into account every variable and generate new timetables.
- With each variation, it will provide you with the expected retention improvement from implementation, allowing you to optimise the schedules for member satisfaction.

In many ways, even the above examples are pedestrian when you consider the extent of the technological capabilities available today. The possibilities to streamline and add value to a health club business are almost unlimited, with AI leveraging a club's data to unlock new insights and opportunities to boost member engagement and satisfaction, as well as to attract and recruit the right members in the first place – individuals who, matching your optimal member profile, are more likely to stay with you and drive a higher lifetime value.

A time for action

If any of the scenarios I've outlined in this article sound futuristic, or at least not immediately attainable, let me finish with this: every aspect of what I've outlined is deliverable today – in part or wholly depending on your requirements – using commercially available products and expertise.

And the evidence is already there, from our early adopters in particular; our launch date as a business means 80 per cent of clients came on-board between November 2019 and lockdown in March 2020, so we will have to wait a little longer for robust data from these organisations.

However, what we can already state with confidence is that every single operator implementing AI has improved retention within a few months, with one Australian operation boosting it by 9 per cent in the first six months.

Another Australian operation took just 30 days to see a difference in cancellation rates, thanks to the fact that – drawing on 13 years of data – AI was able to risk stratify its entire member base immediately, with the club then able to turn this into targeted strategies.

Meanwhile, one US customer reported its highest ever member engagement rate with its digital campaigns – newsletters, renewal offers, NPS participation and so on – once AI was harnessed to ensure the right content was sent in the right format at the right time: average open rates rose from 47 per cent to 72 per cent. Another US customer logged a 52 per cent increase in NPS completion by members following AI assistance.

One last example comes from an Australian operator that, by running a non-dues revenue campaign underpinned by AI, recorded its best ever result: an impressive A\$35,000 upsell in just two weeks. All of this by targeting members – selected by AI and based on habits, frequency, likes, age profile and so on – with a tailored offer that made them feel the club genuinely knew them and what they wanted. All of these opportunities exist, now. It all comes down to what action you choose to take.

Personalise the member journey

The conditions of pre COVID-19 will never return.

Willingness to accept this fact, and move with it, will be key to the survival of your fitness business. Embracing change isn't a choice. It's life and death.

That's because COVID wasn't ever the cause of change: it accelerated things that were happening anyway. We might have arrived at this position less battered and bruised had COVID not unleashed itself on the world, but make no mistake: we would have found ourselves in the same position with or without it.

Digitisation, 5G, at-home offerings, evolved working patterns... the fitness industry has never faced so many new factors to evaluate. That much has been talked about extensively.

But here's the bit that hasn't really been acknowledged yet: as a result of this snowstorm of new factors, the industry has found itself blinded. Uncertain not only about how to stand up to the competition, but about who its competitors even are.

One thing is for sure: the relationship customers seek with a fitness business is changing, and there are very real opportunities for operators who are prepared to adapt, accepting the new reality and repositioning themselves for the inevitable. But how do you go about this business-critical repositioning?

In fact, there's a huge amount that can be done right now – and *The Fitness Future: Rules of Engagement* maps this out in six clear rules that will help your fitness business not only survive but thrive in the new world order.

Download your free copy of the white paper [here](#)

About Keepme

Keepme blends artificial intelligence, operational tools and a unique automations engine to streamline the efforts of fitness operators to attract, retain and re-engage members and ultimately increase revenue. With three core features covering the entire member lifecycle, Keepme Sales, Keepme Membership and Keepme Connect, Keepme evaluates millions of lead and member data points to identify risks and opportunities that are key to driving a business strategy forward.

For further information, please visit www.keepme.ai

“The Fitness Future: Rules of Engagement is an industry call-to-arms. Lean in, apply the six rules, defend your ‘club is hub’ and unleash the latent data in your business. Your future depends on it.”

Emma Barry – Global Fitness Authority & Chief Creative Soul, Good Soul Hunting

“This white paper includes some very important thoughts and ideas that should challenge us all. As such, it makes a valuable contribution to the debate around our sector’s evolution and will, I hope, stimulate progressive discussion.”

Humphrey Cobbold – CEO, PureGym



MAXIMIS- ING YOUR APP



Maximising your app

TA6 & The Refinery

A successful app can help you engage with your customers, promote your facilities and activities, and map customer preferences and behavioural patterns. Whether you're launching a new app or your existing app needs a boost here's some top tips from [TA6](#) to ensure your app is as successful as possible.

1. Choose the Right App

There are lots of app providers out there but choosing the right one is determined by your objectives.

A leisure-wide app that focuses on bookings, events, lead generation, communication, live & on-demand workouts, e.g. [myfitapp](#)

A coaching app allowing you to train members both in-club and at home, as well as offer bookings and some membership management, e.g. [virtuagym](#)

An App that is focused on personal training services, e.g. [myphub](#)

Equipment-specific app linked to your fitness equipment, e.g. [technogym](#) or [lifefitness](#)

2. Utilise Online Advertising

Facebook and Google Ads both offer advertising options that target very specific audiences and directs 'clicks' on your adverts to your app download page in the app stores. Consider assigning a small budget to launch your app through these channels.

3. Create 'How To' Guides

A video is worth a million words. Record a video of your team explaining to your members how to download the app, how to set up their profile, how to book a class, how to turn notifications on, etc.

4. Promote Offline

Get your staff to talk to customers in the club about your app. Ask instructors to announce an app promotion at the end of each class for a week. Put up QR posters at 'hot spots' around the club where members will see them.

5. Create an Incentive

Whilst your app content may be amazing members might need a little nudge to make them take notice. Why not create a prize draw to reward members for downloading the app? Or offer some free guest passes as a thank you for becoming part of your app community.

Download the full TA6 guide to *Maximising Your App* [HERE](#)

App Innovation (Case Study)

Refine with ALFI was born from a passion for health, fitness and wellbeing and as an extension of The Refinery E9 Studio brand in London. The fundamental objective of ALFI is to inspire and motivate individuals to create a healthy fitness routine that makes them feel better from the inside out in a totally unique way.

When the Refinery can't welcome customers to their studio in person ALFI allows them to workout from home. Their bricks and mortar clientele typically come from a 3-mile radius, but ALFI allows them to take classes nationwide or even globally.

The Refinery have future proofed their business model through technology and have already planned phase 2.

Considering the proposition

With the explosion of on demand and individual instructors taking their offerings online, it is so important to have a strong brand proposition in order to stand out.

The Refinery wanted to create something inclusive, fun, accessible and engaging. So many fitness apps have the same format, which can make the choice overwhelming and sometimes discouraging. It is difficult to break through the noise, or to choose which instructor will serve your needs best. The Refinery have created a visually striking, avatar led, algorithmic fitness app. The heart of the app is human and all regimes are created using motion capture - so the avatar moves like a human, but is run by a gaming engine.

Building the Tech

The Refinery wanted to offer on demand flexibility with the app. They wanted to be able to create bespoke user led classes in seconds, compared to scrolling through hundreds of videos.

The organisation had to consider where the strengths lay in the disciplines they wanted to offer on the app. They

started with experts in Yoga and HIIT. Then began to work with additional instructors and software developers to create a complex algorithm that would be used to build the classes intelligently from a minimum of 10 minutes up to 90 minutes. For yoga the challenges came when they had to think about all the potential transitions between each posture and sequence. This took much longer than anticipated and caused delays in production.

The application uses 3D motion clips to create a unique class of either HIIT or Yoga, complete with synchronised music and voice overs for a seamless user experience like a top of the range video game.

Selling ALFI to members

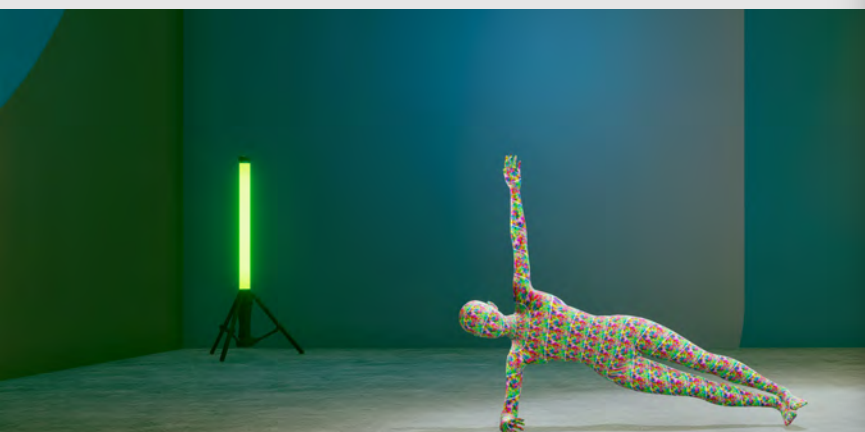
Key members helped the organisation with testing when it was the BETA version of the app. It was launched in October 2020 and The Refinery offered the app for free for the first month, then it became £7.99 a month for full access, or £0.99 per class. For our members the app is an enhancement to our in-studio and live-stream offering for when they are unable to get to us.

Reaching a new audience

The Refinery are reaching new audiences via PR, Marketing, ASO and Advertising initiatives. It has led to targeting audiences in Design and Technology sectors as well as Health and Fitness. The gender-neutral form of ALFI also resonates with a gender- progressive society, one that is body and gender positive.

The Future

The exciting thing about the app is that it is AR ready, which means that very soon, life size ALFI will be leading customers through classes in their home not just on a screen! It also allows a completely unique way of working out by offering a 360-degree view of all poses and the class. Take a look at the teaser video below to get an experience of this.



DIGITAL- MAKING THE CON- NECTION



Digital - Making the connection

Tiffeny Gould Consulting

The previous sections discussing customer journey, digital content, digital infrastructure and app development provide some valuable insights into how to approach a number of different areas within the digital space and a variety of different solutions that may be a part of your digital transformation strategy. A crucial piece of the puzzle for operators is ensuring that you make the connection between each element, your business needs and your customer.

For any operator, no matter how many members you have, adopting a customer centric approach to digital transformation is key to ensuring the solutions you create (or partner with) provide you with the means of building on your existing offering and enable you to establish a relationship with your existing and prospective customers. The better you understand your customers wants and needs, the better your ability to create solutions and meet your customer requirements, resulting in improved loyalty and an increase in lifetime value for you as an operator.

An integral part of this is creating a single customer view that draws on the data you already have about your customers including factors such as their age, gender, activity levels, activity preferences, membership type, app engagement, content preferences, social media engagement and sentiment about your products. Then utilising all this information to tailor your communications and align your offering to keep you relevant and able to be more dynamic to support existing customers and better able to reach prospects that match your target audience.

It's easy to be impulsive when working in the digital space to react to current trends and opportunities, however this may not be the best approach in the longer term. Before introducing new technology and experiences, whether that's linked to new web journeys, apps, membership management software, live streaming/on demand content - make sure you understand why you are adopting a new solution, what problem are you solving and be clear about what you are aiming to achieve and how you're measuring whether this has been achieved (e.g. KPI/ROI). This might be about improving the customer experience (digitally, in club or both), reducing friction (e.g. viewing timetables/bookings/joining), broadening your offering (e.g. introducing live streaming/on demand content), increasing productivity (maximising reach and effectiveness of your comms through your CRM system or tracking your conversion rates) or elevating profitability for example.

There are a staggering number of solutions available in the various different digital spaces, not only the brands that have provided case studies in this digital resource pack. Take the time to fully assess the variety of solutions available and identify what best matches your needs in terms of must haves, should haves and could haves. Also understand how this integrates with your existing solutions. This will help you to fully understand your customers and ensure you deliver a seamless omnichannel customer journey.

As highlighted in the earlier sections when discussing data and the customer journey – can you track your journey end to end? Do you have visibility of the full customer journey from the point of initial contact, through to the content they engage with, both digitally and in person? For example, a new customer finds you through an ad on social media, purchases a membership or enquires through your website, uses live streaming or on demand content through your app or website, and then visits your club for an in-person workout. Are you able to identify what's happening at each stage to build a full picture of what's working well to channel your customers through to the preferred end point, and identify any areas that might create sticking points or cause customers to drop off from the journey? Each of these touch points, whether web, app, or physical, are part of your customer journey and need to be considered in isolation as well as as part of the broader member experience.

In addition, it's crucial to be able to understand how you're measuring success and utilising the data you capture to grow and support your business objectives.

There are some central pillars to note when embarking on a digital transformation strategy which can help ensure whatever digital solutions you integrate into your business can be delivered successfully and deliver value to you and your customers.

- **Know yourself** – where are you now? What do you currently offer and what works? What data do you capture and how do you use it? How do you communicate with your customers and what works well?

What are your limitations? Where do you want to be? How are you measuring success? When comparing solutions, identify which areas of the business you are trying to develop and what adds the greatest value.

- **Know your customer** – who are your customers and what are they doing in your club or online? How are you communicating with them? What engages customers successfully initially and keeps them engaged?

- **Know your marketplace** – what are your competitors doing successfully and what opportunities are there? Which third parties can you partner with (if needed) and how does their offering match your requirements? What integrates with your existing solutions? What are third parties doing to future proof their offering?

- **Understand your resources** – what are your budgets? What skills do you have within your team to support digital projects? What education and support are needed to address cultural change among your team? What training and support is needed to support your customers to adopt and use any new processes or solutions?

Keeping these areas in mind while you develop your digital transformation strategy will help to ensure you select a solution, or solutions, which can support your business aims and continue to cater to your customer base now and in the future.



BOUNCING BACK SAFELY - RISK MAN- AGEMENT

Bouncing back safely – Risk management

Partners&

The new risk landscape for boutique gyms and financial wellbeing for your business.

A lot has changed in 2020 - what does your business risk landscape look like in 2021?

How has risk changed?

In a post-COVID-19 world, there are new and different "what ifs" to consider – check out our video guide [here](#).

1. Online Fitness

The pandemic has caused a surge in online fitness, with many gyms delivering classes with online payment via Paypal and other platforms. Online fitness creates an opportunity to reach far higher numbers - but with all innovation comes new risk:

What if...a member injures themselves in their own home during a class?

What if...you give the wrong advice during an online PT session because our camera view is limited?

What if...the platform crashes due to a hack/virus and you can't deliver the service that customers have paid for?

What if...there's a data breach? You may hold credit card numbers, addresses and medical information. Even if you use a third party to collect credit card and bank details a breach could mean lawsuits and regulatory fines.

2. Cyber Crime

If you make electronic transactions, you're at risk of cyber crime, through membership sales, class signups, merchandise sales. These days, gyms are far more likely to have a cyber-attack than a physical peril like fire/theft. Cyber crime is booming business for fraudsters, especially post-COVID. A Gov.UK survey released in March 2020 reported that 46% of UK businesses and charities reported a cyber incident during the year, and research suggests 75% of cyber insurance claims involve human error:

- Ransomware, from clicking a malicious link
- Email sent to the wrong person
- Phishing attacks, e.g. a scammer persuades your staff to share financial or personal information or make a transaction
- Leaving a laptop in a car – doh!



3. Work with vulnerable clients

Gyms are doing valuable work in this area and broadening their memberships to include older clients, people with disabilities or who are being rehabilitated, perhaps after suffering from “long-COVID”. This may involve upskilling your workforce and could expose you to additional liabilities. Check your insurance is good to flex with your changing activities.

4. Business as usual

You still face all the “old normal” risk exposures of operating a gym:

- Public liability and injury to members
- “People risk” in your liability for employees, your reliance on contractor staff like PTs having their own professional indemnity insurance
- Property risk – good old fire, theft and flood
- Risk from debt in the business – most gyms purchase their equipment through loans.

So, there’s plenty of risk to keep you awake at night, but how can you manage your risk?

Managing Your Business Risk

Following a series of natural disasters and climate-change linked major losses, insurers are increasing rates to remain profitable – a “hard market” is coming. The best way you can control your premiums is to keep a “clean sheet” on claims; and managing your risk is key to this – check out our new support pack. [A simple guide to Risk Management for Gyms and Health Clubs.](#)

Top 10 Risk Management tips

1. Identify the key risks (both to your business and to the people within it), evaluate them and put measures in place to address the main threats.

2. Keep records – this includes training, equipment inspection, cleaning, daily checks etc.

3. Offer induction training to all members and if they do not accept, make sure they sign a waiver.

4. Create a robust regime for inspection of equipment – this should include daily visual inspection, period servicing of equipment and statutory inspection of plant (if applicable).

5. Make a Business Continuity Plan (or disaster recovery plan) – it doesn’t have to be sophisticated but will be invaluable in the event of a claim.

6. If you have any more specialist activities such as boot camps, swimming pools, children’s classes etc. these warrant their own **risk assessment**.

7. Consult your insurance broker if you are unsure about the cover under the policy – particularly important if you are changing the way you operate or introducing new activities

8. Seek expert help as required – for health and safety and HR matters a specialist consultant can make a significant difference to getting it right.

9. Strongly consider installing CCTV – when falsified claims arise and there are no independent witnesses, CCTV can be the difference between a successful defence and being forced to settle.

10. Don’t let it get in the way of running a business; risk management should be practical and appropriate to your activities.

Is your insurance fit for purpose?

With good risk management practices in place, you have a better chance of reducing claims and you can turn your attention to financial protection from your remaining insurable risks. As your business grows and changes, so should your insurance protection. Getting the right insurance advice can make all the difference to the outcome of a claim - and to the financial robustness of your business.

- See how [Boom Cycle](#) adapted their insurance in preparation for their growth curve

“Thanks very much for this and all your help. It’s made such a difference. You rock!” – Hilary Rowland, Master of the Boom

So...how can Partners& help?

Partners& is proud to be ukactive’s Strategic Partner for insurance. A leading insurance specialist for gyms and health clubs, we work with over 800 gyms nationwide, supporting them with advice and financial protection for their businesses.

See how we helped [Roko](#) manage their risks and secure flexibility on their insurance and payment arrangements during the pandemic.

“When we were facing hurdle after hurdle, Partners& understood our priorities and were in our corner when it mattered” – Nigel Maglione, Chief Financial Officer, Roko

Insurance is not just a transaction; it’s about the right advice, founded on a strong working partnership:

- People who stand shoulder to shoulder with you
- Advice that makes a difference
- Outcomes that shape your future

Contact us now for free advice and specialist cover for gyms:

Neil Adebawale

T: 01183 347814

E: neil.adebawale@partners&.com

MARKET- ING AND BRANDING

Marketing and branding

Action Group

Know your customer

Sounds obvious? One of the major issues we see time and time again is that boutiques haven't done enough work to define their customer(s). If you don't know who your customer is, you simply can't deliver effective marketing. For every piece of marketing you create, you should ask yourself the question: does this talk directly to my customer? You can't ask this question if you don't know who they are. Spending some time at the outset, properly mapping your target demographics will stand you in good stead in the long run.



Audit your website

Your website is the foundation of your business. A marketing campaign could be generating 100 leads a day but if your website isn't dealing with them effectively – perhaps because the user journey is clunky, or the copy and images don't match your market positioning – you won't convert them to customers.

Audit your website and consider:

- Does it communicate your market position and USPs, immediately on arrival, or do you have to hunt for the key info?
- Is there a data capture lightbox and does it appear at the right time to capture leads?
- Is it optimised for all the key words and terms for which you want to be found?
- Is the user journey to enquiry / purchase intuitive?

Marketing starts with strategy

Don't just jump straight in and start advertising, or launching your PR campaign. Have a strategy! Marketing is rarely effective when it's ad hoc. This means considering absolutely every possible marketing avenue and planning exactly what you will do across the board, from advertising to social to search, PR and beyond.

Marketing and sales go hand-in-hand so ensure you have a system for generating leads and capturing data, followed by a system for converting those leads into sales. All prospect and customers should enter a comms journey. Save time by creating an automated customer journey for prospects using software like Mindbody or Mailchimp.

The six major member acquisition areas for consideration are:

1. Direct response social advertising to drive website visits and data capture. Ensure you target your core demographics, use clever copy and beautiful imagery
2. Organic and paid search, again to drive website visits and data capture. Target your specific fitness terms plus your location
3. Royal Mail drops, if the studio is in a residential area, flyer to households within your catchment. Consider a 'first session free' offer to drive visits
4. Consider Above the Line advertising in the immediate vicinity. If budget is limited, prioritise pre-sale and the first 30 days after opening
5. Create beautiful advertorials in local media publications, consider offering a free pass within each placement to drive visits
6. Create partnerships with high end retailers and locations [members clubs, hair salons etc.] in the surrounding area

Ensure you have a creative strategy which hits the spot with your customers and cuts through in a competitive market.

Awesome assets

Once you have your marketing strategy, remember that no marketing can happen without assets, so this should be one of the first points you address.

If you don't have a physical space ready, then invest in an agency who can concept and deliver a creative photoshoot that will provide you with images and impactful video that reflect the intent and DNA of your brand in lieu of an actual space. This enables you to have a suite of enviable assets with which to populate your website and social media channels in plenty of time pre-launch. You can re-shoot a second time once you have trainers and the space is complete.

Hire models that will connect with your customers, so the content resonates with the people you are trying to target. Ensure you have a creative strategy which hits the spot with your customers and cuts through in a competitive market. Launching your boutique properly will require a powerful PR campaign. A PR agency will help your studio get off to the best possible start, gaining traction in a competitive marketplace. Ultimately, PR will help to get your boutique noticed, talked about and elevated above the competition. A good agency will cement your brand DNA into the hearts and minds of new and existing customers.



Powerful PR

Launching your boutique properly will require a powerful PR campaign. A PR agency will help your studio get off to the best possible start, gaining traction in a competitive marketplace. Ultimately, PR will help to get your boutique noticed, talked about and elevated above the competition. A good agency will cement your brand DNA into the hearts and minds of new and existing customers.

Social Media Tips for 2021 : Maximising Instagram for your Business

Instagram is an extremely powerful marketing tool for businesses, and more so than ever in Covid times. Here are some tricks to help you make the most of your business Instagram account:

1. Engage, don't just promote

Whilst your page is an opportunity to promote your brand, it is important you use it as a platform for engaging with consumers, rather than simply pushing your products in their faces. It's about building up a personality for your brand, so followers enjoy seeing your content, without seeming self-promotional.

2. Keep your enemies close

Competitors can be a great source of #inspo. Research what they are doing in the space, what they are talking about and the sort of images they are sharing. As well as helping you to understand more about what you are up against, this can be a great source of learning for you around what the target demographic responds well to and what they don't.

3. Share in real time

Instagram stories are the best way to engage with followers on a day-to-day basis. They provide the opportunity to offer behind-the-scenes access, give customers sneak peeks at new products and share real time news, like flash sales.

We use Instagram stories to share the coverage our clients have been featured in. It shows how proud we are to represent our clients and when we get them into the publications that matter. Here are some examples – our client GroupX fitness provider [Les Mills](#) featured in the Metro's 'Top Family-Friendly online workouts to do in lockdown', and our client celebrity personal trainer [Monique Eastwood](#) who had a shoutout on the [Women's Health Instagram page](#).

Utilising Instagram to Engage with Customers Post-Lockdown

With gyms and fitness studios also facing months of closure, lockdown forced these brands to devise innovative ways of using social media to fuel our thirst for fitness. When the Government gave gyms and indoor fitness facilities the green light to reopen back in July 2020, for many fitness brands Instagram was a vital communication tool in preparing customers ahead of reopening. For our client, boutique HIIT/Boxing studio [Victus Soul](#), we integrated a social media strategy that consisted of three key intentions:

1. To inform



The instantaneous nature of social media meant we could immediately announce to Victus Soul customers studio's full reopening plan, new class timetable, plus any 'Welcome Back' deals and offers. The direct messaging feature on Instagram also allowed us to answer any queries their customer base had.

2. To reassure



To comply with Government guidelines and ensure members' safety, studios needed to make a series of operational changes to their facilities ahead of reopening. Relaying this information was vital for securing members confidence in how proactive a gym brand was being. With Instagram being an image-led communication vehicle, it allowed fitness companies to detail each measure they had put in place in a visually appealing and digestible format.

3. To generate excitement



In the week leading up to Victus Soul's reopening, we utilised the Instagram story to post teaser videos of the trainers back in action, accompanied by the 'Countdown Sticker'. We also used the Story tool to facilitate audience interaction and feedback by asking members what aspects of their return they were most excited about, using the 'Question Sticker'.

How to Create an Instagram Aesthetic that Fits Your Brand

The aesthetic is the first thing potential customers will notice when landing on your Instagram feed. A distinctive and cohesive Instagram feed works to establish brand recognition, convey your brand's personality, and ultimately turn users into brand fans. Using our client, fitness equipment provider [Pulse Fitness](#)' feed as an example, here's six simple steps to a seamless Instagram aesthetic:

1. Establish your brand audience

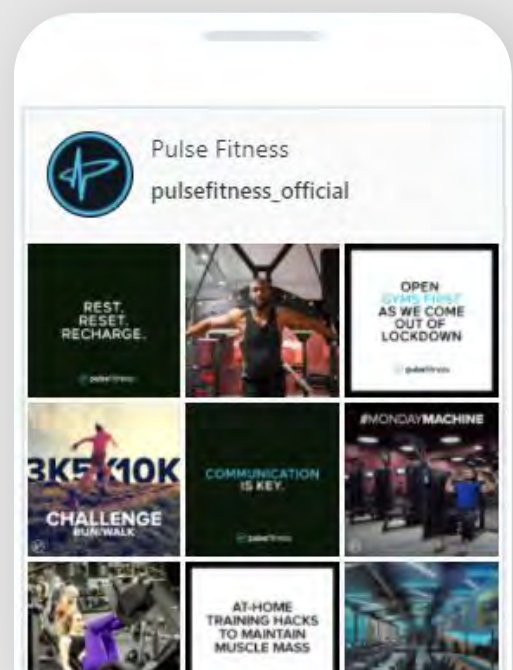
Each post on your Instagram feed fits together to give audiences a sense of who you are and what makes your brand stand out. It's crucial to establish your target audience as a first step. As an equipment provider, Pulse's content should work to engage with fitness facility owners as a primary TA but also PTs and fitness fans as a secondary audience. Creating a feed that appeals to both your primary and secondary audience is your ticket to success.

2. Decide your content pillars

Next are your core values which will form your content pillars –themes which encompass your brand ideologies. Build your Instagram feed around these and in-turn build a stronger, more engaged audience. Content pillars such as 'equipment', 'fitness', 'health', and 'lifestyle' work to guide the specific content created for Pulse's feed.

3. Find your colour palette

Colour is the first thing users will register when looking at your Instagram feed. It's important to decide on a few complementary colours that will form your brand colour palette and stick to it. Despite the content being a culmination of text posts, equipment shots and lifestyle imagery, you'll notice tonally that Pulse's feed adheres to a specific colour palette.





4. Nail the typography

It's also important to ensure that your typography is on point. The right fonts help convey your brand personality and build consistency into your Instagram feed. With Pulse being a fitness equipment provider, a cursive font style would not sit right. Instead, Pulse's content interchanges between two bold and impactful font styles which reflect the tone of the brand.

5. Get creative with your content

Experiment with brand images, custom-made graphics, and premium stock photography to create an immaculate and professional aesthetic. Rather than just posting equipment photo after equipment photo, Pulse's feed is kept fresh and exciting with other insightful content, e.g., fitness themed posts and slick lifestyle shots of people using the kit.

6. Plan the perfect layout

The final step is to plan. By carefully planning out your feed, you produce a well-thought-out overall aesthetic. It's all about planning your feed so you can visualise how the posts will sit together before they are uploaded for the world to see.

Utilising Instagram to Generate Business Sales

When our Action Consultancy team helped create Everyone Active's [new online shop](#), which launched during the second national lockdown, the next step was to maximise it via Instagram. Here are some of the top shoppable features we utilised...

1. Instagram Feed Posts

A brilliant aspect of feed posts is the ability to use carousel posts. They enable you to let your followers swipe through each colour variant of an item and decide which they like best. With the ability to tag exact products in the image, users can see how much the item costs, click through to the shop website, and purchase.

2. Instagram Stories

One way to utilise stories is by posting a video tutorial of navigating through your online shop, which allows you to showcase many more products than a still image can. Another way to use stories is to encourage upselling. Show followers how to style their looks by pairing up two items from your website with a fun and visually appealing story. Add the product tags to enable customers to click directly through to the product page on your website and they will be rocking the full look in no time at all.

About Action Group

Action Group is a service provider to the fitness and wellness industry.

From PR, Marketing, Design and Content Creation to Business Development and Commercial Consultancy, we have the specialist teams to drive success.

Over the last 11 years, Action PR has delivered projects that span the entire marketing mix. In 2017 we launched our business consultancy division which has delivered strategic products for a wide range of clients from start-ups to companies turning over more than £150m. See more of our work [here](#).

For more information, go to www.action-group.co.uk.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT - BRAND-FOCUSED ENGAGEMENT

Staff development: Brand-focused engagement

TA6

How passionate are your staff towards your brand? Is there energy and drive from all your team to deliver amazing customer experiences and exceed expectations? Do your managers inspire their teams to want to perform, for the brand, for their colleagues and most importantly for their customers. Creating a brand that lives, breathes and is embedded in all you do is an essential ingredient for survival and to bounce back after the current lockdown.

After a year of isolation and restrictions, a high percentage of your customers are desperately looking forward to connecting and enjoying an experience, not just a workout. Creating experiences and supporting your customer community to reconnect will come from the energy and passion of your staff and instructors. Simply re-opening and expecting your teams to bounce back motivated and ready-to-inspire is not reality. 'Skill Drain' has hit our sector and extended periods of not working have naturally meant skill levels have dropped. Your team may not realise that their potential performance has been effected. Boredom, anxiety, fatigue, lack of stimulation and lethargy have created a potential experience timebomb for the fitness and leisure sector.

Take some simple steps to re-engage with your team:

1. Review and re-enforce your core values with your managers
2. Schedule 1-to-1 return-to-work catch ups with your staff
3. Set clear KPIs to maintain motivation
4. Identify areas for skill growth and personal development

TA6 have developed a [game plan for 2021](#) that will ensure your teams are ready for the challenge of getting the nation moving again. Click on the headings below for more information on each area of focus.

Train your managers to be able to coach and re-energise returning staff

Furloughed employees may have suffered an understandable loss of drive and vision whilst unable to work. It is vital therefore to instil a sense of purpose early on when reboarding the team. Clubs will thrive when their

people have a clear vision and what their part is. It's essential your management team have the skills and awareness to support staff returning to work after lockdown, its essential your brand delivers a safe, clean and engaging offering, the team must keep service levels high.

Create Sales Champions

Deliver empowering content to anyone in your team who will influence sales. Offer coaching through a mixture of 1-to-1 and group sessions to your key staff. We recommend a focus on the following key areas:

1. Enquiry handling (Web, social, telephone, email and in-person)
2. The power of follow up; how to respond positively and effectively to all enquiries
3. Effective lead management
4. Closing out trial sessions
5. Subtle but effective up-selling

Communication Training for a post-COVID environment

Your staff are constantly being challenged by new ways of working, new government regulations and a public that wants service faster, cheaper and more efficient. You need to give your teams the skills and confidence to communicate with confidence when challenges arise as customers come back to your centre after a lockdown.

Develop your Livestream Legends

Your instructors, personal trainers and managers need to bring your online digital offering alive! And it's not just the delivery but consider the setup, sound, video quality, how easy is the platform to use, how do you create an online community, can you up-sell other services, and studio décor.

"We thoroughly enjoyed working with Claire on the Livestream Legends workshop and really appreciated her support. We organised the workshop 3 weeks prior to launching our online live streaming service. The timing enabled the instructors time to take on all the advice and tips they were offered and support them in planning test sessions and their first live sessions. The ongoing support of Claire and the TA6 team has been crucial in both marketing the product and the quality of sessions we are providing."

SECONDARY SPENDING

Secondary spend

Emma Barry

In the context of a fitness studio, 'secondary spend' (or ancillary spend) relates to additional revenue generated beyond core membership/blocks/class passes. Think movie theatres and popcorn, car purchase and financing. Add-ons or product pairings, like HIIT and Coach Jon's favourite recovery protein shake, can embellish the experience and increase revenue per person.

Done well, secondary spend items can be a triple threat for the business:

- Additional revenue generator;
- Member experience enhancer
- Brand builder.

1. Additional Revenue Generator: A case study on [Fitness Business Podcast by CJ](#) at [Invictus Fitness](#) took this point to the nth leaning into its cult CrossFit following to generate online/offline merchandise sales of 750k USD. [Styles Studios Fitness](#) in the Midwest in the US offers DEXA scans, nutrition advice, personal training, pre-prepared shakes, athleisure, and challenges to a highly engaged membership.

2. Member Experience Enhancer: In the club world of fitness and according to IHRSA, clubs that have higher secondary spend generally have higher retention ([IHRSA 2018 Global Report](#)). With additional brand touches, members generally deepen their relationship with the brand. The power of boutique fitness is extreme focus on one or several fitness experiences. With a like-minded membership anticipating and meeting those needs becomes easier.

3. Brand Builder: When Rihanna launches a new product on [savage x fenty](#), her burgeoning lingerie line, it sells out in 10 minutes. [SoulCycle](#) set the industry standard on merging brand love with high fashion as evangelists took to the streets in [Lululemon](#), [Spiritual Gangster](#), [APL footwear](#) and own-branded apparel. James Balfour, co-founder of [1Rebel](#) did the same and describes their secondary spend strategy as, "Our clothing gives us brand advocacy, and loyal customers like having a 'look' that represents them and their connection with our brand....1Rebel clothing is also available at selected concessions, so there are people sporting our 'industrial luxe' look who don't necessarily work out at our studios. That's fine with me: *we're rebellious and disruptive!*"

Secondary products and services may include:

Membership Extensions Gimme more philosophy. VIP PT/Small Group Training Open Gym Education Series Digital add-on, tiered membership, digital only membership. Challenges Retreats BLOK Y7	Necessary Fitness Accessories Rent and/or buy. Socks, wraps, gloves, mats Locks, towels, water bottles Small equipment – bands, weights, at-home kit Totes, bags	Nutrition Members are more likely to trust recommended F&B options endorsed by their studio and trainers. Nutritional coaching. Shakes, juices, bars Pre-packaged meals Meal delivery Challenge meals	Technology Self-monitoring is our future. Biometrics – MyZone , Apple Watch , Fitbit , Garmin Strava , Whoop , Oura , DEXAfit , Inbody EVOLT360 Styku , fit3d , Sensored clothing - and other wearables highlighted at the Consumer Electronics Show.
Beauty Essential multi-sensory house-hold items with a twist. Products offered in the locker rooms Product launches or local brands	Health Testing, monitoring Health insurance Ten Health & Fitness Mindfulness and mental health coaching	Recovery The new black. Sleep coaching Percussive therapies like Therabody Compression UV sauna Cryotherapy	Ath-leisure Leggings: the swiss army knife of modern-day wear. From zoom to club to brunch. Branded essentials.

Partnerships and collaboration

The art of symbiotic relationships. Help members build out their health and fitness marketplace by cross promoting and partnering with on-brand alternatives. To partner successfully listen to Jack Thomas, CEO of [Base](#) and host on the [Fitness Business Asia Podcast](#) as he outlines best practices on [how we partnered with Adidas](#) post-pandemic - expect medical spas and health services to amalgamate through mergers.

Secondary spend lessons from other sectors, post-pandemic

Budgets – the demographic seeking the affordable, “no frills” fitness, educates us in the price-sensitive “user-pays” mentality towards necessary fitness requirements such as water, protein bars, towels, water bottles and accessories similar to those brands that deliver steady returns from the convenience of a vending machine. Planet-Fitness, the budget behemoth in the US, famous for its \$10 per month fee offers a ‘Black Card’ membership for all-access and allowing multi-location access at twice the \$10 per month fee, with the majority of the membership taking that option.

Luxury clubs – Equinox (reported in the financial times) and others report up to 30% secondary spend contribution with personalised services such as PT, spa services, F&B and Shop (retail). Since boutiques also operate in the luxury sector, with less variables than full-service clubs, additional items are highly viable.

Connected fitness- [Hydrow](#) were reported by Piper and Sandler in their ‘Understanding Armageddon report (2020)’ enjoying 5X growth in secondary spend partnership with [Hypervolt](#) by [Hyperice](#).

Boutique studios – community sits in the foundations of boutiques and the stronger the (cult) following, the stronger the secondary spend opportunity. With brand advocates [#livingmybestlife](#) additional contribution is a no-brainer. [Barry's Bootcamp](#) does it better than most pivoting to at-home equipment, outdoor workouts, program variants and swag.

Success Secrets to Secondary Spend and Caveats

Your products and services must net a profit in terms of deepening and extending your member experience, adding potency to your brand and contributing to the bottom line.

Be on-brand - Every interaction with your customers is a touch point and opportunity to validate or deepen their relationship with you. Every class attended, live or virtual, puts the body and mind in credit, each piece of clothing worn or product consumed places your brand in or next to their body. Each positive push notification creates an endorphin hit.

Don't lose your shirt

Running a café is not your core strength unless you come from hospitality, so explore solutions that mitigate the risks of holding stock and chewing through valuable employee hours. Similarly, the rag-trade is notorious for being a big black hole in terms of managing inventory and being left with last season's XXS and XXLs. Consider selling by consignment, drop ship-options, baking merchandise into challenge costs – paying in advance, pre-ordering and partner to share the risk and contribute expertise.



Innovate in the marketplace

We are in data-led times. The consumer holds all the power, so include them in research and product development. Ask your members what they want, survey and poll key decisions, set up innovation groups who guide you in advance. Travel brand [AWAY](#) does a great job of this choosing colour pallets, price points, and product extensions based on customer insights before they invest in the expensive exercise of re-tooling and committing to stock. [Barry's Bootcamp](#) pivoted to at-home equipment, apparel and tiered programming options and launched Ride.

The future is lifestyle

As we quicken our march towards creating a broader lifestyle ecosystem and acknowledge that home, gym, work and self-care now co-exist in one bubble, we take a different perspective on owning the relationship by acting as the hub for this. Learn more in Ian Mullane's white paper [The Fitness Future](#).

As with all parts of your business, you will be tweaking secondary spend items to maximize ROI selecting products with higher earning power across your key metrics of revenue, member acquisition and retention and employ predictive software that maximizes this.

RECRUIT- MENT & WORKFORCE

Recruitment & Workforce

Love Recruitment & Good Soul Hunting

This section focuses on recruitment and the workforce in the sector. The first part of the section is written by [Love Recruitment](#), who summarise the past 12 months from their perspective, identify the key challenges faced in recruitment and examples of the best solutions they have found to tackle some of the challenges. The second part is written by [Good Soul Hunting](#), who focus on the importance of building a people plan as organisations look to rebuild teams post-COVID.

Summary of the past 12 months and our perspective on recruitment during this time.

There can be no doubt that this year has been immensely challenging worldwide, including the UK fitness industry and more specifically the boutique and independent operators. Among the plethora of challenges you have been facing is recruitment and your people during this time. We have seen clients, many of whom are friends, face several but similar challenges in regard recruitment during this time. I have listed these below and if you have faced or are still facing some of these, hopefully you can take something tangible away.

We have also conducted interviews with industry leaders, asking them for their insights and how they have dealt with the challenges faced.

[Jon Cottam](#) – CEO Lift Brands Europe (Boutique brands Snap Fitness and 9Round)

[Neil Randall](#) – CEO Anytime Fitness UK

[Elaine Coulthard](#) – Industry Expert and Consultant who works extensively with independents and boutiques

Key challenges

Financial Instability and Uncertainty

Keeping your people and teams engaged during this time has been hugely challenging yet unbelievably essential. The leaders we have spoken to, who placed this front and centre, have retained their teams as much as possible and will come out as better businesses with levels of engagement from their teams they haven't seen before. We spoke at length with Australian fitness expert [Justin Tamsett](#) about this last year, watch this for case studies, it's extremely helpful.

Secondly, financial instability and uncertainty has obviously been a significant factor in your recruitment strategy. We understand this and do not take this lightly, we have been affected as a smaller business too. However, when recruitment has been necessary, we have seen some specific common challenges.

Inability to meet people

We have experienced and also heard directly from operators of the inability, reluctance and for safety reasons, the inability to see candidates.

We covered this in depth in our [joint 'Together' article](#) with ukctive in 2020 where we discuss this factor being a clear issue that our clients were facing.

Operators had vacancies but with safety necessities in place which prevented travel or restrictions making it challenging, we found operators struggling to find ways to effectively conduct a recruitment process. One way we found that not only solved but actually improved the selection process in many ways was our [Video Interview](#).

"Since lockdown 1 we have still needed to recruit for both our clubs and central team but faced logistical and process concerns immediately to make sure we hired, it was effective, and it was safe for everyone. Abhi explained to me their solution of the video interview process and it was perfect and was have used it extensively and found some great additions across the business".

Jon Cottam, CEO Lift Brands Europe (Snap Fitness and 9Round).

"We used Tom and his team to recruit a Club Manager at our east London site. The video interviews and CV screenings were fantastic. You really get a better feel of the candidate before interview and we found it to be an incredibly useful tool. Love Recruitment are head and shoulders above the rest in terms of fitness industry recruitment. They took the time to understand what we were looking for in terms of soft/hard skills and culture which was reflected in the selection of candidates they sent over. Having worked in this sector in a previous life, I am thoroughly impressed!"

Shazia Hemmens, Franchise Owner, Anytime Fitness.

Volume of applications

We have seen applications triple for vacancies. Effectively assessing and professionally dealing with this volume of application is often a harder process than having very few applications, but that factor is for another day.

Dealing with this volume of applications is daunting. Firstly, make sure you have a clear recruitment plan. How are you assessing and screening the applications? What criteria are you going to use to screen in and screen out applications? Why have you chosen this and HOW do you know that will work. We all may think we can assess a CV quickly and effectively but HOW do you know? What evidence do you have?

You must ensure you have a strong process in place before you start. We have found that the clearer you are before you start, the more success you will have with high volume applications.

Fear of joining a smaller brand

We have heard this from independents and boutiques as well. These times have been uncertain and joining a 'smaller' brand and with the perceived concern of this versus joining a big operator has been a legitimate concern. My advice here is firstly to realise this factor. Do not take it personally and understand that it is a fully legitimate and real concern.

Secondly, we have found the best solution for this is to provide the best possible recruitment experience and having an authentic and clear narrative. To attract great talent, you must be a great and attractive proposition. Ensure your process is clear, clean and challenging. Regarding the narrative, can you be clear as to why this role is available? What is the future of the role and club?

Key tips for people who may be looking for work.

I wanted to finish by suggesting the following actions for those looking for work. These are not designed to be a magic wand, but they are an extremely effective way to start.

1. Connect to us at loverecruitmentgroup.com. You will then be able to set up alerts for the types of role and location that is of interest. Secondly you can set up a call/video with the team.

2. Prepare an effective CV. We have both a written blog covering putting together a really effective CV for the fitness industry plus videos on our YouTube channel.

3. Ready yourself for interview. Again, within our blogs section of the website we have guides for every stage of the preparation and job hunting process.

4. Personal Profile. Ensure your LinkedIn profile is up to date and effective. Your personal profile and representation in the market is really important.

Thank you everyone and we are proud to be alongside you in this wonderful industry and if you would like to ask anything at all regarding any of these points or gain some advice on other challenges you have please just let me know and we would be really happy to help. We are a Strategic Partner with UK Active and if you need recruitment support or guidance, we are here to help.

Abhi Lakhina, Managing Director, Love Recruitment Group. abhi@loverecruitmentgroup.com



Building a People Plan for the New Norm

This resource addresses people plan needs as you rebuild your teams post-COVID.

People remain our greatest assets. As business leaders one of our top priorities is applying the art and science of perfect people placement to drive our dreams forward. With many bricks and mortar fitness facilities furloughing or letting go up to 98% of their staff during the pandemic, alongside the acceleration of technology advancement, the future of work is shifting in seismic proportions. McKinsey & Company displays 9 organizational imperatives that compile an inspiring future-ready business.



Let's unpack the bubbles. The black bubbles in the centre rightly place people and purpose at the heart of the business. The light blue bubbles bring the supportive and accelerating power of technology to the system. The dark blue bubbles illustrate attitudes and behaviours that constitute a more lean, transparent, and agile business.

Reshape your business of fitness

Take a blank sheet of paper approach given there are many new variables in our business equation now. Establish a clear why (purpose), how (values) and what (strategic initiatives). Create a minimum viable organizational structure that meets the challenges and opportunities of the new world factoring in advances in tech support. Plan flatter organizational structures and independent workers or pods can execute inside and outside the business. Expect, plan and train for agility.

Know which roles stay, which roles go, and which need to be added

Audit your current team, note the gaps in culture and expertise and start to work towards your future team. Place a stronger operational focus now you are dealing with increased customer perception of safety and health. Focus on growth, marketing and partnerships.

Articulate each new role in a way that facilitates uber performance

Be crystal clear about what you want from a role and understand the impact each person brings. Put the role to 'challenge' where you brief the candidate to do a short project that is typical of the work they would be doing. Have an open mindset and use solutions-based thinking. Generate an environment that cultivates self-perpetuating, self-management so there is a level of autonomy and buy-in that happens with staff.

Feed your passion and go the extra mile for your people so they learn to do the same.

Apply the three secrets of success

1. Tell better stories about your business, your dreams, your staff and your members.
2. Look for people who have been where you are going. They already believe it can be done and they will get you there faster.
3. It's a numbers game. Like any pipeline, finding great people is about always looking for new talent.

Avoid the 6 Pitfalls of Placement

1. Doing it just for the money. The majority of millennials will consider a pay-cut to work for a purpose-led company. Lead with your dream of making the world better.
2. Hiring in a silo. The whole team needs to place their arms around a new starter - from the top down and bottom up. To feel welcome. To know what good looks like.
3. Mishandling change management. Mindfully blend the wisdom of longer serving members of the team with the fresh energy and ideas of the new intake.
4. Assuming the best person is close and convenient. Great people are often hiding in roles. Knowing when to look and how to find them can be crucial in assembling your bench of high performers.
5. Just delivering to the 'needs' of your candidates. Make sure you hit 'wants' as well. We live in the hashtag reality of #livingmybestlife and the workforce demands it now.
6. Running incomplete onboarding. What I'm here to do and how we go about it here are often left to the new starter to figure out. Make training immersive to accelerate productivity and happiness.

Resources

Exciting Lockdown: Opportunities to Rebuild and Engage your Team Practical considerations for rehiring your team. Ideas to use this crisis to create your dream team. How to facilitate People Plan Workshop (Webinar).

Structuring Post COVID Teams with the Good Soul Touch (Webinar).

Good Soul Toolbox

Interview tips, resources to bolster on-boarding and ongoing communications, and fun team exercises.

Self-assessment Survey

How well do you know your team? No Really. A 10Q pop quiz to find out where you sit today in the currency of employee awareness.

About Good Soul Hunting

Good Soul Hunting is an executive search brand for purpose-led fit tech, well tech, and health tech businesses, placing senior roles for C-Suite and senior specialists. For more information and tools sign up for Soul Bites - our snackable tips, trends and thought leadership for those in the business of talent at www.goodsoulhunting.com

LEARNING AND DEVEL- OPMENT

Learning and development

Chris Foster (supported by Future Fit, Active IQ and Premier Global) & CAWS

This section focuses on Learning & Development (L&D) in the sector. The first part of the section is written by Chris Foster (Head of Learning & Development at [ukactive](#)) who summarises the past 12 months from an L&D perspective and highlights some of the great work a number of our Strategic Partners ([Future Fit Training](#), [Active IQ](#) and [Premier Global NASM](#)) are doing in this space. The second part is written by [CAWS](#), who focus on how the fitness sector is best placed to support individuals in their rehabilitation from COVID-19 after the acute phase, and in particular, managing individuals out of Long-COVID.

Looking back over the past 12 months since we last met for SWEAT 2020, it would be far too easy to focus on the negatives. In the world of learning and development, we've seen students affected in unprecedented ways, and training providers unable to deliver their courses in-person or assess the practical aspects of their learners like they usually would. However, we're not here to dwell on the negatives. We're here to look at the amazing work that has been happening despite the restrictions we've all been living and working under, and when it comes to learning and development it really has been an incredibly busy period!

One of the biggest 'wins' has been that individuals have been allowed to engage with learning even whilst on furlough, which demonstrates how important it is for people to be engaged in lifelong learning. This has been a huge benefit for employers, enabling them to keep their workforce engaged during lengthy periods in what could very easily have felt like a lonely wilderness. Furthermore, many training providers who adapted quickly to the new norm of online delivery have seen a surge in new students enrolling in their courses. Considering that there are significant risks of existing members of our workforce leaving to find alternative employment, it's positive to hear that others are looking to join the health and fitness sector at a time when helping people to be more active has never been more important.

At ukactive we are proud to have a number of Strategic Partners in the Learning and Development arena, and here we take a look at the great work they have been doing and the great resources they continue to provide to support the workforce.

ReActivate for the sector

Back in February 2020, Future Fit Training launched their Community Interest Company, Future Active Workforce (FAW) with the aim being to give back to the sector, enriching the skills of the workforce and spreading the passion for being healthy and active.

In response to the global pandemic and following the first lockdown, FAW were successful in bidding for development of the Covid recovery programme, known as ReActivate. Along with a consortium of partners including Right Directions, Sport Structures and GM Active, Future Fit Training played a major role in the development of the ReActivate platform and content. This content was then delivered to the sector via their award-winning ProZone platform. Organisations and individuals continue to be supported by the Future Fit support team to ensure that everyone receives the training they need.

The ReActivate platform has been rolled out, funded by Sport England and free of charge, to Leisure Operators, NGBs, self-employed fitness professionals and volunteer coaches so that they can all receive training that will help them to return to their sport and physical activity roles with confidence.

To date, over 18,000 individuals have enrolled on the ReActivate training, and over 600 leisure facilities have received a bespoke branded ReActivate platform. FAW continue to work closely with NGBs, sport organisations, leisure clubs and Active Partnerships to roll out the platform to hundreds of sites across the country.

ReActivate is completely free and aims to bring government and industry guidance, including ukactive's COVID-19 Guidance to life in an easily digestible format. Clubs and organisations who wish to implement the training for their staff are able to receive a bespoke branded platform for their teams, allowing it to sit seamlessly alongside existing training. You can find out more details on ReActivate [here](#).

Future Active Workforce has also been looking to help individuals and organisations during lockdown. In partnership with Future Fit training, Future Active Workforce has given access, free of charge, to their Mental Health Awareness course to a number of sports organisations in the North West and to the Blue Light Services.



Active IQ adapted training and resources during lockdown

Active IQ acted swiftly to adapt training and assessment processes during lockdown creating a wealth of support resources for the leisure sector's learners and training providers. The introduction of flexible digital learning and assessment adaptations for its Level 2 Gym Instructor and Level 3 Personal Trainer core qualifications have kept everyone on track. Working in close contact with CIMSPA and Ofqual, Active IQ has ensured all its adaptations keep in line with regulatory guidelines to be flexible and pragmatic and deliver adaptations that are both valid and fair. See more [here](#).

Digital learning and remote assessments have proved successful and adaptations will stay in place for as long as lockdown disrupts the sector. Active IQ gives training providers extensive tools and guidance to enable them to deliver digital learning with confidence. Meanwhile, learners have the opportunity to keep studying with many finding the extra time at home through flexible working or furlough gives them time to focus on their studies.

Furthermore, Active IQ is encouraging fitness professionals to use their time during lockdown to upskill by offering free access to its online Skills Hub CPD and Medical Advisor training resources including a diverse range of CPD courses including webinars and podcasts. Armed with new skills and broader knowledge, fitness professionals can return to work after the pandemic feeling optimistic and in a stronger position.

Finally, Active IQ has run a series of webinars to help training providers navigate the online landscape of digital delivery, online assessments, remote support and more. Previous webinars are available to hear again [here](#) while new events will be posted in their Skills Hub and on their social media channels. You can access the Skills Hub [here](#), or to find out more you can contact Active IQ at Skillshub@activeiq.co.uk.

Premier Global NASM going from strength to strength

In April 2018, well before any of us had ever heard of COVID-19 or lockdowns, Premier Global NASM launched the UK's first, digital Personal Trainer Diploma. Learners study via our Live Learning through Digital Technology methodology, meaning they are still required to attend live, tutored sessions delivered through a virtual platform.

Over the last 2 years, Premier Global NASM has learnt and responded to valuable lessons with a continuous improvement cycle running to evolve and improve the experience for learners. When the lockdown took effect, Premier Global NASM was able to continue to deliver courses, fulfilling its obligation to all learners without interruption. This not only ensured learners could complete their courses, but also maintained a vital pipeline of qualified, talented individuals into the workforce.

At a time when many individuals were facing financial challenges, Premier Global NASM offered a portfolio of free course giveaways to ensure professional development remained as accessible as possible. These courses were carefully designed to cater for a broad range of professional competencies and covered a wide spectrum of topics. The free courses included: Mental Toughness, How to eat healthily at home, Improving Nutrition habit, Your guide to stretching, NASM Foam rolling techniques, NASM Online PT guide Speed, Agility, Quickness guide and Understanding the NASM OPT model. Between April and December they saw 15,146 course enrolments across these 8 courses, demonstrating the appetite for learning despite the pandemic.

One of the Government initiatives launched during the past few months to help organisations was the Kickstart programme, and in October, Premier Global NASM was approved as a Kickstart gateway organisation by the Department of Work and Pensions to work with employers

in the sector to support young people back into employment through the Government £2 billion Kickstart scheme. This has been well received, although the intermittent lockdowns have caused issues with continuity of employment. Further details can be found [here](#).

In November, Premier Global NASM successfully launched the [NASM Virtual Coaching Course](#), specifically designed to teach the skills and knowledge necessary to enable fitness professionals to successfully coach/ train clients via a virtual platform. The course uses a step-by-step approach to address the skills and knowledge required to launch a successful business in the digital training world.

In January 2021, Premier Global NASM launched the new [NASM Weight Loss Specialist](#), designed to drive behavioural change in order to turn the tide of the growing obesity epidemic. The obesity crisis is being fuelled by a number of factors including sedentary lifestyles, urbanisation and mechanised transport to name a few. In response, Premier Global NASM has created a comprehensive programme that considers the motivations for weight loss from every angle, providing the scientific and psychological tools to help clients achieve their goals.

CIMSPA Stronger Together

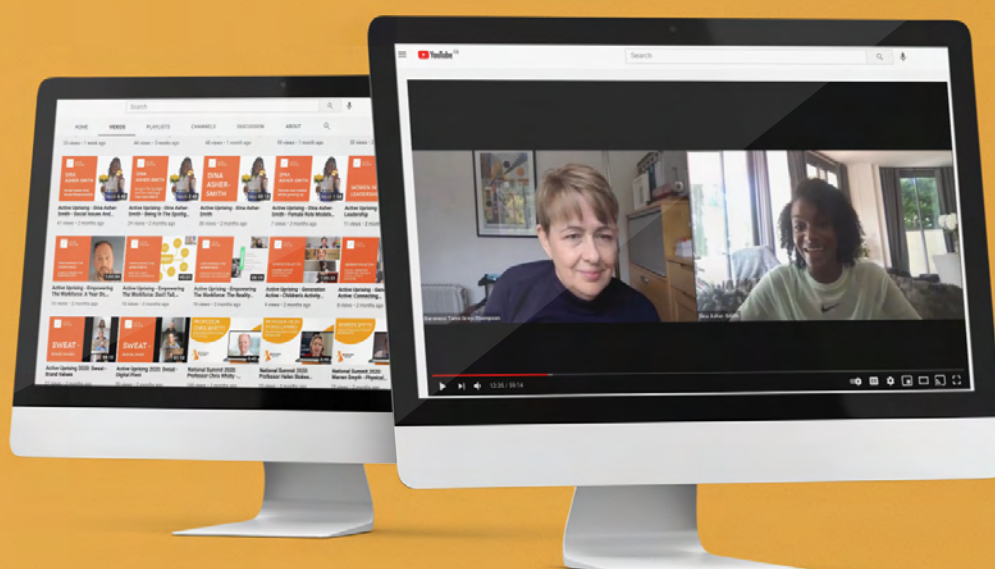
ukactive and CIMSPA have worked incredibly closely throughout this unprecedented period, and a whole host of CIMSPA Training Provider Partners have offered up a range of free to access or discounted learning resources for the workforce which you can find out more about [here](#).

ukactive Learning and Development

Alongside CIMSPA, training providers and Awarding Organisations here at ukactive we continue to support the professional development of our members. Through 2020 we facilitated a range of incredibly insightful and well attended learning sessions at our virtual Active Uprising and National Summit events, and you can catch up on anything you missed on our [YouTube channel](#).

Our virtual Learning and Development Network events have also proven popular with members at all levels of organisations, as alongside Active iQ we've explored topics including 'working with people with long term medical conditions', 'delivering an engaging member experience' and 'whether apprenticeships are the silver bullet in addressing the L&D needs of our sector'. All members are invited to attend these free events, so keep your eyes out for future sessions.

In other areas, we've collaborated with Health Education England on the development of a free [COVID-19 Recovery and Rehabilitation e-learn module](#); an interactive e-learning resource for healthcare staff, exercise professionals and carers working with people recovering from Covid-19 and via our partnership with high performance consultancy Sporting Edge we're delighted to be able to offer you a free 1-month access to their exclusive new Members Club. This is a pioneering digital coaching experience that will transform your mindset, leadership and performance. For more information and to claim your **free** 1-month membership access [click here](#) and enter code **ACTIVE21** at checkout. We're really excited to be able to pass on this support offer given the current challenges we face and we're sure that you'll benefit hugely from being part of this exciting global community.



Where does the fitness industry 'fit' into the government's COVID-19 rehabilitation plans?

Between mid March and December 12 2020 it's estimated that 1.7m people in the UK contracted COVID-19. In the seven weeks that followed there were a further 2.1m cases alone. Coming into the New Year members and clients who have endured COVID-19 and many of whom now facing the repercussions of Long-COVID, are looking to their local club or personal trainer for guidance and support in their recovery. And if they're not, they should be.

Embed a COVID-19 recovery programme into your club services

The fitness sector is best placed to support individuals in their rehabilitation from COVID-19 after the acute phase, and in particular, managing individuals out of Long-COVID. As a sector we are primed with the facilities infrastructure and workforce to support the millions of people seeking help and support at a time when they need guidance the most, and our facilities are already embedded in every community nationwide.

Coaches with the required skillset and knowledge are already making a huge impact to the rate of the recovery with the COVID-19 clients they're working with. For us to come together, step up and intervene, and lead the rehabilitation of the nation from COVID-19 will help to restate our sector as an essential service and the role we play when it comes to preserving and driving the fitness, health, and performance of the population.

The role our sector can play in the rehabilitation of a person from COVID-19 is profound and doesn't necessitate public money. Right now the government's plans for recovery and rehabilitation is disjointed at best and focuses on the problem far more frequently than the solution and the media has done little to balance the discussion. As an organisation we're doing the upmost to drive cohesion between government, healthcare and our sector to move us all forward.

With the support of a Sector Skills Taskforce – fitness facilities and professionals with the appropriate knowledge, skillset and confidence – we can help rebuild the lives of those who have been impacted by COVID-19.



WATCH VIDEO: *The difference that together we can make to an individual who has experienced COVID-19.*

Whilst one death from COVID-19 is one death too many, globally 96% of individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 will survive. It's estimated that more than three-quarters of that group are now dealing with Long-COVID. Common side-effects and risks of COVID-19 can include cardiovascular disease, stroke and neurological dysfunction; the potential damage is far more profound than an acute cough, fever, and period of isolation. Work is being done to identify and categorise the most common repercussions of COVID-19 and symptoms of Long-COVID but with the rate of cases increasing and the onset of a 'new strain' it could be some months before we are able to really determine what is considered 'common'. There will be coaches who work with clients who have dealt with the less severe symptoms of COVID-19 but with such a broad spectrum of symptoms experienced in the wake of COVID-19 there will be instances where coaches are faced with new and unique, complex client scenarios to unpack, help walk their clients out of and back to full health.

Are your coaches ready? Three simple things you can do now.

80% of what your coaches will need to know to support your members and their clients through COVID-19 and Long-COVID they will already know. The remainder we can teach – see overleaf. In-between time and as your members start to ask more questions from their go-to coach and club, here's three simple things that you can do now:

1. Be the limiting pace - The role of the coach is vital in providing bespoke, personalised assessment and guidance to determine the safest and most effective pace of rehabilitation from COVID-19. The absolute worst thing that a person in recovery can do is rush a return to their usual pace of life and intensity of exercise. Let your coaches know that if a person's recovery from COVID-19 is not handled appropriately i.e. slowly and assured, this can lead to prolonged symptoms and the onset of Long-COVID. Without the appropriate guidance we have seen Long-COVID ensue for more than 12 months.

Not to forget, once a client emerges from Long-COVID they will have a period of deconditioning to contend with as part of a second phase. This is also best facilitated by their coach at their local club, goes further towards breeding the coach-client relationship, consistency and good habits with our member community for the longer-term.

2. Don't be dismissive of a person with COVID-19 or complaints of long-COVID - COVID-19 can present as much of a mental challenge as a physical challenge to an individual. Without guidance from our sector the Long-COVID community is at a loss, 'losing hope' of a full recovery and return to daily life, and making a series of wrong turns that prolongs their return to full health. They feel lonely, not heard, confused and wonder whether it is 'just them'. Together not only can we listen and hear them, and be the authority they need to support their health, we can provide a local sense of community for individuals to share experiences and feelings. The internet is awash with dozens of Long-COVID online forums with testimonies of fear and symptoms, which can further anxiety and confusion. Build a community for your clients that focuses on informed guidance, positive sharing, solutions and a safe route out.

3. Demonstrate leadership & proactivity - An initiative that came from one of our very early graduates, Chris Thomas, was to provide a health assessment for all of his clients, whether they had contracted COVID-19 or not. Health assessments are not new, but specific tests done today and repeated in the event that an individual contracts COVID-19 can provide a very clear cut picture for the coach and something tangible to present to a client to understand the impact that COVID-19 has had on their system. What a powerful message to be able to present to clients that you're willing to invest in their future health now so that in the event that they contract COVID-19, you know precisely how far removed they maybe from their usual health status, what their start point needs to be, and illustrates to them just how straightforward a rehabilitation programme under your guidance can be.

If there's a single thing we can all do, it's to get behind the message that the club and the coach are best positioned to facilitate an individual's recovery from COVID-19 and Long-COVID.

Together with a shared voice we can raise the profile of our sector quicker.

Our challenges

Despite the consequences, individuals are not quick to recognise the signs of Long-COVID or are aware of the negative impact rushing recovery can mean. We can play a huge role in reducing the onset of Long-COVID by encouraging individuals to treat the damage inflicted on their system with a level of seriousness.

Equally coaches who have not had any huge exposure to individuals who have endured COVID-19 might not understand the implications and importance of identifying any damage that may have taken place when a client has had COVID-19, and be too quick to resume a usual programming routine.

Our biggest challenge as an organisation is driving both consumer and coach awareness, and working with as many club partners and coaches at as quick a rate as possible in preparing them to launch their own COVID-19 Rehabilitation Programme across their local communities to reach as many people who need help as incidences of COVID-19 occur.

If as a sector we get this right, and become the authority on COVID-19 and Long-COVID recovery we can achieve a number of things beyond demonstrating our leadership in health and practice in the community.

This is a segue to improved links and ways of working with other populations who equally need our support, in particular but not limited to those living with cancer, cardiovascular disease, the effects of a stroke, diabetes, metabolic syndrome and cystic fibrosis. Actions we take now will drive the role will play in the post-COVID era.

What are the opportunities for business leaders?

1. As the centre point for COVID-19 recovery and resource centre for Long-COVID rehabilitation we help to restate the sector's position as an essential service.

2. Provides on-demand support to existing clients and members seeking access to help in a familiar environment they trust.

3. Newcomers across our communities with a new or renewed interest in our services in the context of COVID-19. These individuals are making contact directly or via their local health care practitioner.

4. Local corporates, schools, colleges and universities are struggling with employees and students out on long-term sick. Their duty of care and vested interest in their recovery and return has already changed the way they respond to outreach.

5. The number of referrals from existing clients and members with friends and family affected by the virus is becoming a major source of new members and clients for Rebuild™ coaches.

6. Growth in your digital community from a new demographic and pipeline for club members once the sector reopens, or in any event capacity is limited.

7. New group initiatives (within restrictions) and a gateway to personal training, from COVID-19 rehabilitation through reconditioning and beyond.

Other resources available to you now

[The PTMA Podcast: Rebuild from COVID-19](#)

[What does COVID-19 Look Like? Filmed June 2020](#)

[The Difference a CAWS® Rebuild™ Coach can make to an individual dealing with Long-COVID, Jan's Story](#)

[CAWS® FAQs Series available now on YouTube](#)

[ukactive x CAWS®: January webinar, recording](#)

[Sign up to the next ukactive x CAWS® call](#)

[Click to access your local parliamentary letter template on the matter of COVID-19 rehabilitation](#)

About CAWS

The CAWS® Rebuild™ Programme teaches trainers and coaches how to rehabilitate individuals from COVID-19 and Long-COVID.

CAWS® is a strategic partner of ukactive, and an accredited CIMSPA Training Provider with EREPS Approved Lifelong Learning Status. CAWS® co-founder Dr Colin Robertson is a member of the Advanced Clinical Practice panel for Public Health England, a new taskforce for 2021 driving parity in rehabilitation services across the UK and shortening the skills gaps between healthcare and fitness.



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