

# A FRANCHISE FIT FOR EVERYONE

Julie Fisher takes a look at what's new in the UK fitness franchise market



**F**itness franchises are in abundance, from clubs offering 24-hour opening to low cost fitness, and from pilates and personal trainers to programming to keep kids active. As Tom Endean, marketing manager of the British Franchise Association, says: "The ability to operate as a local business with

understanding and commitment to the area and people, combined with the national support systems and brand, has allowed many fitness franchises to remain viable, secure and successful businesses, even in tougher economic times."

We take a look at the new kids on the block and ask how existing companies

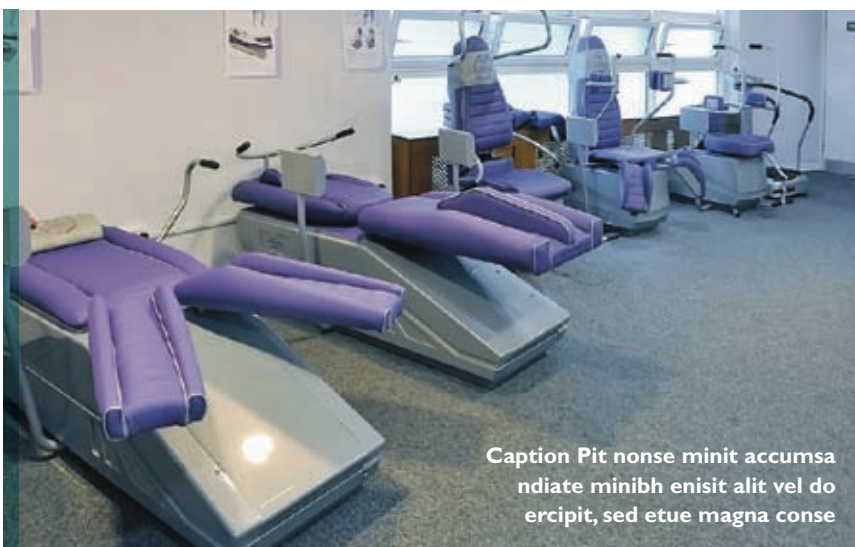
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are evolving to respond to increased competition.

### NEW TO THE UK

Originally part of the ADDleisure Group before being bought out by MD Ben Margolis, Movers & Shapers combines fast-track, Power Plate-based resistance training with convenient cardiovascular exercise – conducted outside the club and measured using a Fitbug accelerometer – and nutrition tracking. Movers & Shapers offers clients an intimate setting and a high level of service: studios measure around 85sq m (900sq ft) with only 200 active clients per location, mainly 30- to 45-year-old females. Small groups of up to five clients are taken through a 30-minute workout twice a week; located on the high street, the clubs provide the perfect opportunity to pop in during lunch or at the end of the day. There are no annual contracts.

Movers & Shapers previously



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operated only company-owned sites, of which there are still six. However, it sold its first franchise – in Stratford upon Avon – in late 2009, to the then club manager Veronica Winter. A second franchised location is imminent, with the company is hoping to recruit a further four franchisees this year. It believes, in the long-term, that the potential is there to open around 100 sites in the UK.

Your Body Active offers a mix of pilates, vibration training, diet and personal training. The sessions, starting at just £12, consist of no more than four clients at a time and target women aged 40+ who have little time to

spare. Clients only pay for the blocks of sessions they use and have access to experienced personal trainers to ensure they reach their goals. There is currently one owned club in Richmond, south-west London, and one franchise in Godalming, Surrey, with a deal recently confirmed to run programmes within the Soma Health Club in Kensington, London. Managing director Simon Bateman aims to open an additional seven sites in 2010. Bateman set up the company from scratch and understands how lonely starting a franchise can be. His aim is therefore to provide support and guidance, with regular operational and sales courses for franchisees.



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Relatively new to franchise, Shapemaster has doubled its Feel Good Factory-branded sites over the last year and now has eight in the UK. Having joined forces with multi-faceted leisure company Alliance Leisure, Shapemaster is rolling out a network of the ladies-only facilities, the most recent being at Blackbrook Pavillion in Taunton. The sites use power-assisted equipment and are aimed at the inch- and weight-loss markets, but also attract clients who have mobility and stability issues, and those recovering from injury.

#### EXPANDING

Coach Me Slim and Trim founder Erak Simsson has launched a new programme, the Women's Kettlebell Gym, which

aims to bring the benefits of kettlebell training to a new market – working out with them requires explosive movements totally unlike normal weight training, exercising core muscles as well as specific areas of the body. This mobile fitness concept means one licensee can deliver classes in a number of different locations; classes are currently available at various locations around the Salisbury area, but Simsson's aim is ultimately to allow licensees to set up in their local area, having one licensee per county who will oversee a number of locations. Sessions tend to be held in community centres and potential licensees are likely to be fitness instructors looking to expand their offering, earning a living that fits in with

## FRANCHISE UPDATE

### CELEBRITY LIFESTYLE

Another company bringing the celebrity element to the fitness industry is RESULTS4U, which has teamed up with TV fitness presenter and personal trainer Danni Levy to form the Danni Levy PT franchise. Levy, who currently receives more requests for personal training than she is able to deliver herself, will pass clients on to the selected franchisees to offer well-heeled customers the 'ultimate in personal training'. Potential franchisees will be offered operational and business training as well as branded materials, along with assistance in finding premises. As well as having a flow of new clients from Levy, franchisees will have access to her training systems.

### DIVERSIFICATION

With more than 80 per cent of those who join a gym doing so to lose weight, Ladies Workout Express director Chris Donaldson has launched a goal-setting, weight-loss programme called Diet Express. Based on the G.I. diet, there are four weekly, personalised weight-loss options where journals are reviewed, as well as small consultation Diet Clinics, Lifestyle classes, Pocket PC online support for those who don't have time to travel to a consultant, and a Family Fitness programme to teach parents how to educate their children/family to make healthier food choices. Diet Express will operate in all Ladies Workout Express facilities and will also be available as a standalone, low-cost franchise.

Rosemary Conley continues to diversify and, along with the sustained success of the brand's magazine, has recently launched an internet channel, [www.rosemaryconley.tv](http://www.rosemaryconley.tv)

Available 24 hours a day, the channel has many health and fitness features to keep members motivated. Other recent Conley initiatives include the Kids 2 programme, designed to help tackle child obesity, and GP referral schemes with local PCTs.

Curves has incorporated CurveSmart, a state-of-the-art personal coaching system, into its 30-minute circuit workout. Every piece of equipment in the circuit will be programmed with the individual member's personal data/measurements to provide moment-by-moment

feedback. Currently around 45 per cent of UK sites have CurveSmart installed. The company also appointed Niki Keene as international wellness director in 2009 to develop programmes and partnerships, and is looking to work more closely with the NHS (see interview, pxx).

### NEW OPENINGS

SHOKK énergie is set to open a 230sq m (2,500sq ft) SHOKK Youth Activity Centre, targeting five- to 18-year-olds, within the existing énergie Club in Wilmslow. It plans to have nine venues and 15 new franchises open by the end of 2010, building on the two franchise sites already open.

Meanwhile, the latest Fit4less site opened in Canterbury last month – the



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▶ their lifestyle, especially as start-up costs are relatively low.

Active Kids is a licensed programme that's offered to health clubs and sports centres – the brainchild of Greg Dryer, who worked in physical education for almost 20 years and felt strongly that every child should experience sport. The aim of the programme is to equip children with the core skills needed to enjoy an active lifestyle: it's based on more than 30 fundamental physical and mental competencies, such as 'run fast', 'see space' and 'respond quickly'. Over the last six years, Active Kids has expanded from its initial offering of short holiday courses to providing a network of franchise centres. Up until now, only these franchise centres have had access to the Active Kids programmes, but the latest development – the launch of an

e-resource, scheduled for Easter 2010 – means any organisation that works with children can buy a licence to the Active Kids programmes, from schools to sports centres and health clubs. The e-resource will bring programme activities to life using text and animated graphics, along with advice on safety and delivery modes. Training will also be available, with flexible pricing so multi-user purchasers such as health club chains can roll out the programme across a number of clubs. coming soon...

Anytime Fitness, the world's largest unisex chain of health clubs, is also expected to enter the UK market mid-year this year, and anticipates three locations by the end of 2010. With 24-hour access available, facilities are conveniently located near to where people live and work. Members,


spanning a wide age range but typically aged 30–35, can also attend any of the 1,300 clubs around the world. John Kersh, vice president of international development, comments: "Our best franchisees are passionate about helping people and this is something we cannot teach them. However, franchising a fitness business has little to do with fitness and everything to do with franchising – understanding the key elements of franchising is essential before taking on a franchise as a business." (see also HCM March 10, pxx)

However Jim Teatum, president of Global Business Systems and one of the experts bringing World Gym to the UK, disagrees. "We want to move away from franchising as merely a business transaction. Everyone on the World Gym team has in-depth experience and understanding of the fitness industry and will be hands-on to help our members achieve their goals. We understand the challenges operators will face, the marketing they require and the consumers they're trying to reach to achieve a healthy bottom line."

Recently purchased by the Cammilleri family, Los Angeles-based World Gym is due to launch imminently in the UK. Founded in 1976 by Joe Gold, one of the original Muscle Beach ringleaders, and with links to the glamorous Hollywood jetset, it focuses on 18- to 34-year-olds with targeted six-week programmes based on the 'West Coast California'



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