

# Opportunity knocks

**Operators wishing to stay ahead of the game should consider diversifying into new service areas, says Gladstone's Tom Vian**

Successful health and fitness operations come in many shapes and sizes, from high-end boutique clubs to budget chains to leisure centres. But the one thing they all have in common is this: they understand that success is a moving target. To retain success – and indeed members – facilities must constantly evolve and adapt to reflect the changing landscape in which they operate. This means not only staying on top of the key trends and influences shaping the sector, but also working out if and how to integrate these into their offering in a way that benefits both customers and the bottom line.

At Gladstone, we pride ourselves on working closely with our customers to identify emerging opportunities for business diversification, and on helping them to move into these new service areas when and where appropriate. Here are just a few of the opportunities on our radar for the year ahead.

## **Health intervention**

As the NHS budget continues to be squeezed, a growing number of operators are being engaged by local authorities to deliver health intervention schemes. But to secure funding for these programmes operators need hard evidence of their impact on community health. This is even more important following the release of the government's Sporting Future strategy in December 2015, which identified physical wellbeing and mental wellbeing as two of five key outcomes that will be used to measure the impact of sport and leisure participation at a national level, and will influence what organisations receive funding for.

To help operators rise to this challenge, Gladstone has been working with community health provider Everyone Health to develop an outcome management solution that can demonstrate that schemes are meeting objectives, as well as identifying areas for improvement and allowing participants to review their progress. Available to our existing customers as a module called Health and as a standalone product under the brand name iMPACT, the solution consists of planning and evaluation tools based on logic modelling as well as management of service delivery, including the use of mobile devices to capture evidence.

Everyone Health went live with iMPACT in November and, according to Health Data and Informatics Manager Steph Shadwell, the product “adds rigour to our data collection process and gives us confidence in our ability to report accurately back to commissioners.”

## **Trampolining**

Trampolining has become hugely popular in the past few years – so much so that there are now around 120 dedicated trampoline parks in the UK, providing about 250,000 hours of exercise per week.

Health and fitness operators can capitalise on this in a number of ways. Larger health clubs and leisure centres with under-used space, for instance, have an opportunity to attract new customers and boost income by setting up mini trampolining centres within their walls, offering casual trampolining, classes and even parties. This kind of offering, combining turn up-and-play options with scheduled activities and group bookings, requires a flexible, retail-style software solution to support it, and Gladstone is already talking to customers about how we might extend our existing products to deliver this.

Another way operators can make the most of this trend is by offering trampolining courses, appealing to the young people who are most likely to visit trampoline parks frequently and might be keen to impress their friends with new



moves. A number of our customers already use our Learn2 course management tool for dryside courses, including trampolining, with great success.

## **Park running**

You only have to look at the huge popularity of the non-profit running movement Parkrun to see that many people would rather exercise outdoors than in a gym. Started 13 years ago as a single grass-roots event in south London, Parkrun now offers hundreds of free 5km timed runs around the country every Saturday morning and boasts nearly 1,300,000 registered runners.

Rather than feeling threatened by the Parkrun phenomenon, savvy fitness operators are following its lead by making use of local parkland to offer running clubs, walking clubs and/or outdoor classes, ranging from buggy workouts to sessions on running technique. The joy of this is that, provided you're not too far from a local park, you can expand your offering even if your bricks-and-mortar facility is at capacity. But there are also clear challenges, both in terms of staffing – workers cannot be easily moved to and from a remote location – and of managing access and gathering customer data. In other words, how do you make sure everyone who turns up has booked, paid and checked in?

A strong software solution can go some way to overcoming some if not all of these obstacles. Because our new signature solution Gladstone360 is mobile-responsive, staff can now use tablets to check customers in outside a facility, provided there is a signal. Our new CheckIn module makes this process easier than ever, and we're now talking to our customers about we can harness the latest technology to manage remote payments.

## **Indoor rowing**

Another hot fitness trend of 2017 is indoor rowing, identified by many as the new Spinning. The US has seen an explosion of dedicated boutique rowing studios and this year British Rowing has launched a new indoor rowing strategy



'Go Row Indoor' to promote the activity, including new class models, appointment of Master Trainers, instructor training programmes, online leagues, charity campaigns, and national and regional events.

There's a clear opportunity for operators to get involved with this, and software can support them in a number of ways. For equipment-based programmes, being able to capture and analyse usage data can be extremely valuable, both in terms of helping managers identify areas for improvement and allowing customers to review their progress. Customer-facing platforms such as Technogym's Mywellness Cloud – which syncs across gym machines including rowers, other fitness apps and customer's mobile phones, as well to Gladstone's core membership management system – are one way to achieve this.

But for group indoor rowing to really take off in the first place, initiatives will need to be supported by a comprehensive marketing strategy. Mobile apps are a great way to promote new programmes like this to your members and to keep them abreast of classes, competitions and offers. Our product, MobilePro, can be used to send push notifications on all these things, as well as allowing customers to book classes. And because the app now allows users to share interesting content on social media, you can even promote the programme to non-members too (MobilePro creates a microsite page for each article so your member's followers don't need the app themselves to read the full post).

### **The gym within a gym**

Small boutique clubs and gyms – often with a specialist niche such as cycling, boxing or yoga – continue to be big business. Far from being a flash in the pan, brands such as SoulCycle, Psycle, Kobox and Yotopia appear to be offering something that is clearly in demand.

Rather than resigning themselves to losing customers to these facilities, could mainstream fitness operators see this an opportunity, by launching their own exclusive boutique concept within their existing facility? While this may not be



appropriate for all leisure centres and health clubs, it is certainly an option for some, particularly those with under-used space.

For operators taking this leap, a strong software solution would be not just advantageous but essential. Deciding what to focus on in the first place – yoga, group cycling, group rowing or functional training, for example – would require in-depth analysis of existing member usage data, provided by a business intelligence tool such as Gladstone's eyeQ and potentially some tailored data consultancy, too. Further to this, the core system must be flexible enough to offer a range of membership options, while also able to dovetail with an access control solution that can limit entry to a specific area of your facility – all possible within both our Plus2 and Gladstone360 solutions.

But to really work the 'boutique' angle, operators should think in terms not only of creating a facility within a facility but a brand within a brand. To this end, a good software supplier should be able to work with you to develop a separate website and mobile app for the new venture, with unique branding and tailored content.

### **And finally...**

Although diversification can strengthen your business, no one can be all things to all people, and we know the opportunities above will not be appropriate for every operator. At Gladstone, we don't believe in forcing square pegs into round holes. What we do believe in is talking to our customers and prospective customers to identify how we can help them to grow their business in the best possible way. So if you're after some advice or just want to kick around some ideas, we invite you to get in touch.

