

THE UK'S NO 1 DIGITAL MAGAZINE FOR GYM OWNERS & FITNESS PROFESSIONALS

GYM OWNER

Monthly Magazine

ISSUE 49 // APRIL 2020

THE BIG INTERVIEW

WITH

MARCUS KINGWELL

FROM



the national governing body for group exercise

PAGE 22

MATT GLEED

HOW TO ADAPT
AND EVOLVE
DURING
COVID-19

PAGE 81

JOEY BULL
ASKS THE
QUESTION?

PAGE 71

KEVIN
LAMERS
FROM
VIRTUAGYM,
YOUR SECRET
WEAPON

PAGE 90

"IN
RESPONSE
TO A
CRISIS"
BY JAMES
GRIFFITHS
PAGE 66

FITNESS
BUSINESS
SURVIVAL
AND MINIMISING
CANCELLATIONS
BY GUY GRIFFITHS

PAGE 73

GYM OWNER

OF THE MONTH!
with

DAVE THOMAS

page 18

PT OF THE MONTH!

featuring

SOHEE LEE

page 27

MARCUS KINGWELL, CEO FROM EMDUK 'SUPPORTING INSTRUCTORS, GROWING THE SECTOR'

THE
BIG
INTERVIEW



How did you get into the fitness industry?

I started working in the physical activity, sport and leisure sector 23 years ago. I began in local authority sports development in the late 1990s before moving into leisure consultancy, working with local authorities, Sport England and governing bodies of sport. In the last decade I moved into chief executive and managing director positions with the Institute for Sport Parks and Leisure, Welsh Cycling, London Sport and, most recently, the Association of Colleges Sport.

I started my role as CEO for EMD UK last October. There's a lot to learn about the world of group exercise but the EMD UK team have been fantastic in helping me understand the industry, as well as the challenges many instructors face.

Tell us more about EMD UK

EMD UK are the national governing body for group exercise. We're funded by Sport England with the remit of increasing participation in group



exercise. There are currently 4.86 million people taking part in group exercise every week: one million more than 2016. In fact, fitness activities are also the third most popular physical activity in the UK. Increasing participation is no mean feat and there are a variety of ways to do this, from instructor training and support to projects and partnerships.

Increasing participation starts with a highly skilled and qualified workforce. We're an endorsed CIMSPA training provider and deliver a range of nationally recognised Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications, awarded by Active IQ, including Group Training for formats like HIIT or bootcamps, Group Training to Music (formerly ETM), and Pilates.

Our team are made up of PTs, group exercise instructors, dance teachers, and sports coaches so we understand what it's like to take your first steps into the industry and build a career. We also have a dedicated support team who look after instructors once they have qualified. The support includes answering questions about setting up classes, which insurance package they need, how to advertise their classes and what CPD options would best suit their career goals.

Of course, people can only go to classes if they know about them. Visibility and communication are key, which is why we created classfinder – the UK's largest directory of group exercise classes. The site currently lists over 44,000 group

exercise classes across the nation, making it as simple as possible for the public to find classes near them. We project was funded by Sport England and we worked with the Open Data Institute to make the platform open data enabled, meaning classes can be shown across numerous activity feeds. Large leisure operators, such as Everyone Active and GLL, are already utilising the platform, with more gyms opening up their timetables to be displayed.

Over the years, we've worked with a variety of organisations on projects to get people active. We're currently partnered with This Girl Can, where we have created a group exercise class concept for less active women. Since launching, the This Girl Can campaign has got over 3.5 million women and girls engaged with physical activity, and now we hope that the project will attract even more women. The project launches later this year so watch this space!

What sets EMD UK apart from its competitors?

As a not for profit organisation, we're able to put the instructor at the heart of everything we do and create value for money products that make professional development as smooth as possible.

We work for the instructor community. During this coronavirus pandemic, we are working with Sport England and the Government to ensure self-employed fitness professionals are not given a raw deal. Through surveys and lobbying via CIMSPA and Sport and Recreation Alliance, we are ensuring the whole instructor workforce is represented and cared for, not just those on contracts.

Our insight has shown that cost is a major barrier to study, which is why we offer a £200 Sport England bursary on our qualifications, reducing the cost of training. Once qualified, the instructor also receives a year's instructor insurance (our PT package is £84 per year with £10 million cover) and a library of resources, including PAR-Q forms and business bits, to help them get set up as quickly as possible.

Being an instructor, especially a new instructor, can be daunting and lonely. We want instructors to know they're not alone; we don't leave them as soon as they've qualified. Whether a member of EMD UK or not, any instructor is free to contact us regarding their career. Our dedicated team, industry experience, and helpful resources are available for all.

In light of the current COVID-19 situation, we would like to remind readers that our insurance covers instructors to deliver online classes. These can be via two-way video platforms, one-way video platforms, or even face-to-face. These are testing times for the fitness community and we can support instructors to get online to reduce their loss of income.

What are your biggest challenges you face in your business?

Group exercise is a widely undervalued activity, which can have huge impacts on gym businesses. In our 2019 white paper, entitled *Sweating Your Assets: The value of group exercise*, we identified the true value it can bring. For example, gym members who attend group exercise classes are 26% less likely to cancel their gym membership than members who only use the gym. When you consider that clubs can lose 50% of members every year, promoting an activity that can improve retention makes complete business sense.

Aside from business, the group exercise workforce has historically been undervalued too. A great instructor can make or break your members' exercise experiences. If they feel their needs are not being met and their voices not heard, they are less likely to be club promoters. An instructor doesn't just turn up and teach a class; they spend hours programming the classes, learning the choreography, and creating a progression pathway. They're as much a fitness professional as a personal trainer. Operators can learn a lot from the boutique model, where instructors

are the heart of the business. We welcome the opportunity to talk to operators about how group exercise can increase their retention and boost their income.

For too long, the fitness industry has had very little regulation, with few minimum requirements for people to become instructors. As the national governing body for group exercise, we strongly advise that all group exercise instructors (and those staff who step into classes at short notice i.e. gym instructors) are qualified to the minimum of Level 2 in a group exercise related qualification, for example, Group Training to Music. Understandably, gyms are wary of training their gym floor staff due to costs. After talking through these concerns with Heads of Group Exercise from a variety of operators, we created a group training CPD product that upskills gym instructors and personal trainers to deliver group exercise classes, without the cost and length of a qualification. Instructors from Frame and Virgin Active have already utilised the training, taking the stress out of

finding cover staff.

What's the most valuable lesson you've learned from the fitness industry?

That fitness is not limited to studios and gyms! As an industry, we tend to limit our conversations to what's happening in clubs, but this is wholly short-sighted. There are thousands of instructors that teach community classes in local halls and have a rich history in getting people active. They are a key asset in increasing participation and, more importantly, keeping people fit for life. Our three founder organisations FLEXercise, the Keep Fit Association (KFA), and the Medau Society have been teaching community classes for decades. In fact, FLEXercise are celebrating their 90th birthday this year. How many studios can say they've been going that long?

As much as we speak about the growth and strength of the industry, we must ensure conversations are inclusive of the whole workforce and recognise



the success community instructors have in reaching people who have no inclination to step inside a leisure centre or gym complex.

What's next for EMD UK?

We're currently reviewing how group exercise can make a wider social impact. We have already run a wealth of successful projects getting different communities active through group exercise, including older adults, hospital patients, and teenagers. We will continue to seek out a run projects that make a positive social impact and make communities healthier.

A large part of our future lies in educating educate both the public and the industry on the benefits of group exercise and assisting businesses in upskilling their workforce. In the past year, we've worked with such boutiques as Third Space London to broaden their

timetable by upskilling their instructors to deliver Pilates classes, giving them the opportunity to increase their earning potential as a business. We are also opening up our consultancy services for health clubs, boutiques and fitness brands. We have delivered successful consultancy in areas such as timetable reviews for maximum impact, identify areas for staff development, and delivering insight sessions for businesses to understand the impact of group exercise.

If any of your readers would like more information on our work, please get in touch!

In your opinion, what is the current state of the UK's fitness industry?

The industry is in a strong position with a peak penetration rate of 15.6% and our own National Survey showed

an increase in 1 million people doing group exercise compared to 2016. However, there is still work to be done in achieving a healthier nation through exercise as the majority of the population need to be more active. Part of this work involves how we talk about fitness and the imagery we use. We cannot expect continued growth if the public cannot see attainable bodies. Fitness has become synonymous with the 'body beautiful'. We should be promoting fitness as a means to better living throughout life, which would reduce social care costs and strain on the NHS. Furthermore, we need to ensure that group exercise is accessible and attractive to all which means having instructors who are representative of the communities they serve. I'm keen to encourage people from diverse backgrounds to join the group exercise family and help get the nation more active.

