



TIRED OF THE TREADMILL

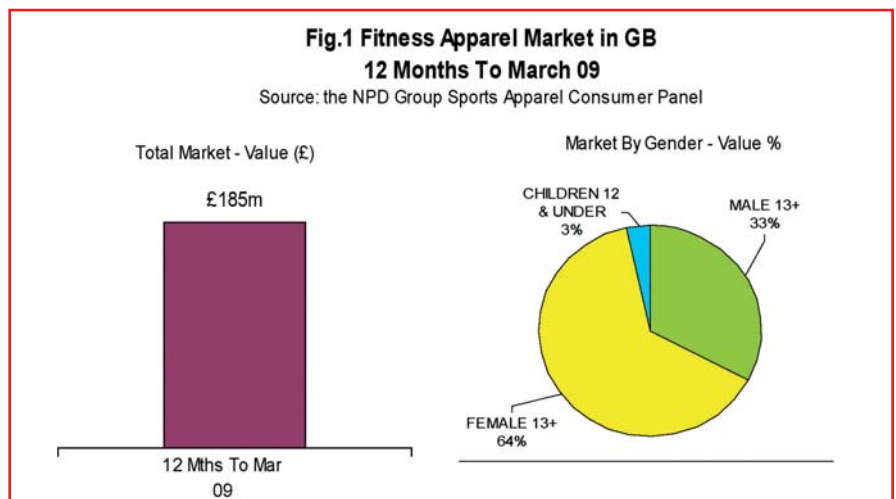
How are gyms combating the fall in member numbers and how is this drop-off affecting sales of performance apparel? The NPD Group investigates

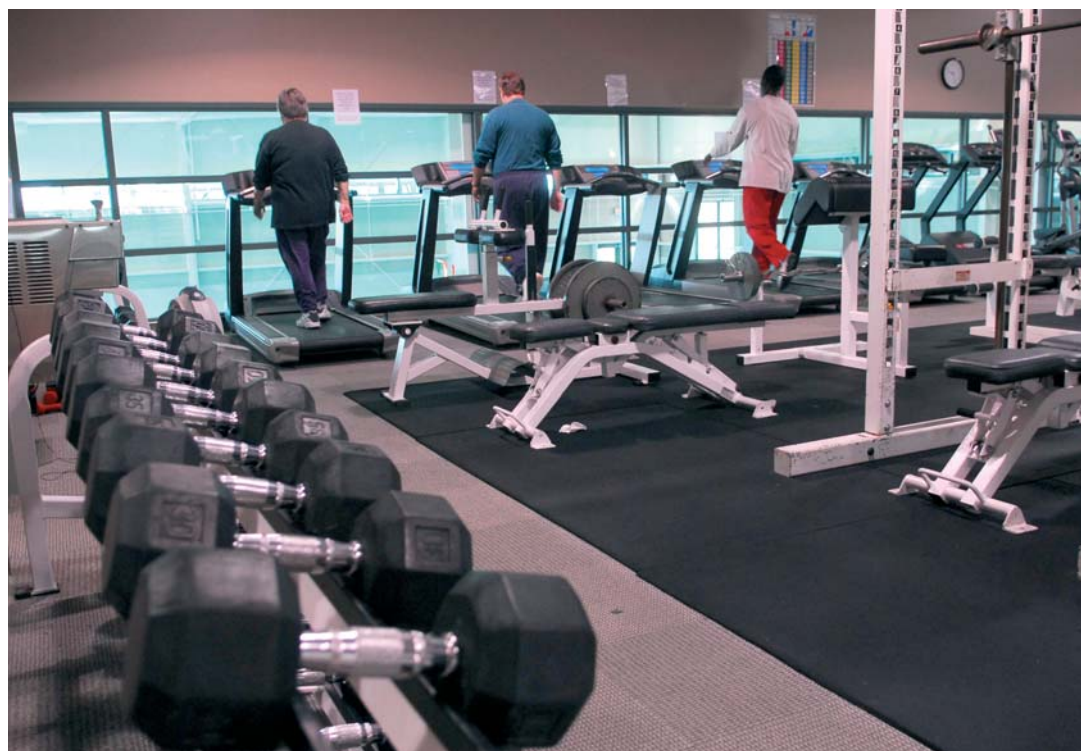
Type 'Ways to save money' into Google and you'll be presented with a raft of tips to ensure the cash doesn't fly out of your wallet quite so quickly each month. One of the most frequent suggestions is to 'Cancel your gym membership'. That's all well and good, but how far do these 'top tips' actually reach into consumers' minds?

Gym memberships are reportedly being cancelled in significant numbers across Great Britain. This is not just due to people making cost savings, but also to the fact that consumers are feeling jaded about the atmosphere in many gyms, high membership costs and lack of improvement in their body shapes.

Counter measures

Some of the leading gyms are trying to





counter this by offering short-term contracts or days for free to entice customers back through the doors, but the actual workout areas are still suffering. Classes are becoming more popular as people need a goal to focus on, and often company when exercising does wonders. A class of spinners with everyone working together can be much more rewarding than a 30-minute solo session on the treadmill. Also, pilates and yoga classes are becoming more popular than traditional workouts.

Gaming consoles that offer keep-fit activities at home is another growth area - the Nintendo Wii Fit has sold over 20million units

worldwide alone. Women in particular have stated that they would prefer to stay at home to exercise rather than make a trip to the gym. A recent survey stated that, of the women interviewed, almost half had a Wii Fit, compared to around 30 per cent who had a gym membership. Only 17 per cent said that a trip to the gym was their preferred method of exercise.

As people are staying at home more to exercise, does this mean there's been a drop in sales of performance apparel? The need to pay more for a new training top will dwindle if the consumer is only exercising in front of the TV. Looking at the sales of gym wear in Great Britain for 12 months to March 2009, the total amounts to almost £200million (figures provided using NPD's Online Consumer Panel).

Comparing this to the 12 months to March 2008, we see a four per cent decline. However, the actual number of items sold has increased as the discount stores, including Primark, increase their sports clothing ranges. When splitting the purchases by gender, it becomes clear that the focus has turned towards females within the fitness category. Prices have been reduced by the majority of the top brands, which have consequently seen volumes steadily rise. As a result, the market value has remained relatively constant, but has not grown. For males, the decline is

more evident - values are down 12 per cent to March 2009.

Low cost

There are alternatives to the established health clubs. Before the sale to Dave Whelan, JJB Sports had used one of its gyms to create a low-cost, but highly interactive workout. The MiFit gym was set up with a one-time joining fee - around the price of a standard monthly fee - plus a monthly charge of £9.95. Members were given a key upon joining, which connected to every piece of machinery. As you ran through your workout the key saved your performance data and the next time you exercised you could see if you had improved.

The Gym Group also offers a new no-frills solution, with 24-hour gyms for £15 per month and no contract. New locations are opening throughout 2009. The lower monthly costs and abolition of contracts that force members to give notice before they leave provides people with the financial flexibility they require in times like these. People still want to keep fit, train for a sport, or just stay in shape, but many are now looking for health clubs to provide a little assistance. 51

The NPD Group monitors the sales of sports footwear and sports apparel in many countries around the world. For more information contact The NPD Group sports team on 01932 355580.