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Brexit's potential impact on the sports trade



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TIM GROVES specialises in rugby union. He contributes to print and online publications and works in sports television production for BT Sport and others.

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SPORTS
INSIGHT

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MAZZON





Running

*The latest sector trends
from the NPD Group*

The running category is one of the strongest performing categories and one of the key drivers of overall sales growth in the sports market in Great Britain.

British consumers spent £600 million on running footwear and apparel in 2015, according to NPD's Online Consumer Panel. Consumer spending increased by 50 per cent in comparison to 2010 and since then the category has shown consistent year-on-year growth.

INCREASING PARTICIPATION

During the last six years, 2014 was the best performing year, with double digit growth in both running footwear and apparel. In 2015, the category did not maintain the same pace as the year before, but still showed healthy growth.

Prices increased at a moderate rate against 2014 and the growth reported was mostly driven by an increase in demand. An additional 700,000 pairs of running shoes were sold in 2015 versus the previous year and volume sales in apparel increased by 500,000 units, according to NPD's Online Consumer Panel.

The good performance experienced by the running category correlates with the latest Sport England survey results. During the 12 months to September 2015, athletics (which includes running) was ranked the second most popular sport in which adults took part at least once a week after swimming.

Furthermore, Sport England reported that athletics showed the biggest rise in participation. The number of adults taking part in athletics at least once a week has

reached its highest level - 2.3 million people in the 12 months to September 2015.

LEISURE USE DECLINING

Purchasers of running shoes and apparel are not all runners. Some buyers intend to use them at the gym, to play football or for other outdoor activities, while some intend to use them for leisure purposes.

However, since 2010 running shoes and apparel used for leisure have shown year-on-year decreases. In 2010, 28 per cent of running apparel purchased was intended to be used for leisure, while in 2015 this fell to 19 per cent.

Looking at running footwear, 31 per cent were intended to be used for leisure in 2010 against 22 per cent in 2015, according to NPD's Online Consumer Panel.

In both running apparel and footwear, leisure usage showed a significant nine per cent drop. The reason for this is linked to the increasing popularity of running witnessed in recent years, as well as price.

The price of running shoes used for leisure has shown a strong increase since 2010 and the price gap with a simple leisure shoe has grown. On average, a running shoe used for leisure cost £8 more than a leisure shoe in 2015, while the cost of a running apparel product used for leisure was on average 14 per cent higher than leisure apparel in 2015.

MAIN FACTORS INFLUENCING PURCHASE

Price influences consumer decisions the most. However, there's a difference when we compare running footwear and apparel, as 27 per cent of running apparel bought was



influenced mostly by price in 2015. Looking at running shoes, although the price remains the most influential factor, the percentage is lower at 20 per cent.

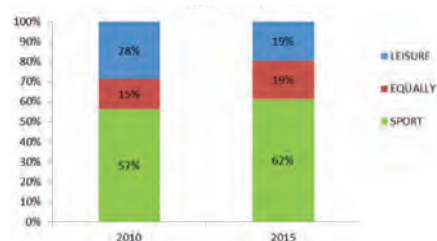
Consumers do pay more attention to the price of running apparel, although paradoxically the average price of a running garment is much lower than running footwear.

Besides price, the most influential factors are look, fit and quality of the product for both running footwear and apparel.

The NPD Sports Tracking Consumer Panel is a demographically representative sample of the population, who record their sports footwear and apparel purchasing. This information is then projected onto the total population using census data to determine the overall market size and trends.

The NPD Group monitors the sales of sports footwear and apparel in many countries around the world. For more information call the NPD Group sports team on 02082 371316.

RUNNING APPAREL BY USAGE IN VOLUME %



RUNNING FOOTWEAR BY USAGE IN VOLUME %



Source: The NPD Group - GB Sports Footwear & Apparel Consumer Panel

WHAT'S NEWS

ALL THE VERY LATEST IN THE SPORTS INDUSTRY...

CHRIS DOBEY AND ADAM HUNT JOIN UNICORN



Twenty-five-year-old Doby is aiming for a place in the world's top 50 and a spot at the dart's world championship.

This year Doby reached the last 16 of three consecutive Players Championship tournaments and came close to shocking world number one Michael van Gerwen in the quarter-finals of the German Darts Masters in March.

Hunt, 22, is having a good year on the PDC Development Tour. Currently in third place on the Development Tour order of merit, he's won one tournament, reached the final of another event and made two quarter-final appearances.

According to Unicorn stablemate and double world champion Gary Anderson, Doby and Hunt are both capable of making a big impression on darts.

Anderson adds: "The link-up with Unicorn will help that process. They are both cracking players and cracking lads and deserve all the success that's going to come their way."



"EVERY BOOKMAKER IS CRYING OUT IN PAIN."

SIMON CLARE FROM BETTING FIRM CORAL AFTER LEICESTER CITY WON THE PREMIER LEAGUE. IN TOTAL, BOOKIES PAID OUT AN ESTIMATED £25 MILLION TO PUNTERS.

UK LICENCE FOR BLK PURCHASED

TRADING AS BLK UNITED KINGDOM, CHIEF EXECUTIVE BEN HOUCHEM AND CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER MARK HOLT, TOGETHER WITH CLAIRE FIDDLER, HEAD OF PURCHASING, AND BEN AZADI, HEAD OF MARKETING, HAVE INVESTED £450,000 TO ACQUIRE THE UK LICENCE FOR THE AUSTRALIA-BASED APPAREL BRAND.

Headquartered at the Durham Tees Valley Business Centre, the business has already created eight jobs for local people, with more expected.

BLK is working in partnership with the RFL to

provide the England Rugby League team, the RFL and match officials with kit for the next four years.

BLK United Kingdom says it has ambitious plans to work with high profile teams across a range of sports and is planning to launch a bespoke range of non-licensed sports fashionwear.

Houchem says: "Acquiring the BLK licence for the UK

represents a significant investment, but we have a wealth of experience in the team and a myriad of exciting and innovative ideas to make the business a major success story."



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DIARY DATES

✦ INTERSPORT UK Q1 2017 SHOW

June 28-29, Solihull

✦ ISPO SHANGHAI

July 6-8

✦ INTERSPORT UK Q2 2017 SHOW

September 27-28, Solihull

✦ STAG UK WINTER BUYING SHOW

November 20-21

Four Pillars Hotel, Cotswold Water Park

✦ INTERSPORT UK Q3 2017 SHOW

December 7-9, Solihull

✦ ISPO MUNICH 2017

February 5-8

GOT A STORY? CONTACT THE
SPORTS INSIGHT NEWS DESK.
CALL 01273 748675 OR EMAIL
SIEDIT@PARTRIDGELTD.CO.UK.

ASICS Europe Q1 sales up seven per cent

Net sales were €248 million between January and March this year.

ASICS reported strong growth in its running, indoor and lifestyle categories. Women's performance running apparel saw a 14 per cent increase, while indoor footwear increased by 15 per cent overall, with standout growth in volleyball and squash/badminton footwear.

Part of the lifestyle category, ASICS Tiger nearly doubled its business in 2016 compared to the first quarter of 2015.

Russia enjoyed triple digit sales growth during the period. France, Germany, Sweden, Austria, Poland and South Africa recorded double digit sales figures.

Sales in ASICS' own retail stores increased by 15 per cent.

Alistair Cameron, CEO of ASICS Europe, says: "2016 is about consolidated growth for the brand. In the future, ASICS plans to focus its resources on a smaller group of quality retail partners, who we will work closely with.

"This will allow ASICS to maintain high levels of service for consumers and ensure our positioning as a premium sports and lifestyle brand results in sustainable long-term growth.

"We will also continue to reinforce our organisation globally, linking category centres of excellence with regional offices and expanding our footprint in emerging markets such as the recently opened ASICS Middle East LLC in Dubai."



BJÖRN BORG ACQUIRES UK SUBSIDIARY

Shares held in Björn Borg UK by former managing director and minority shareholder Callum Sneddon have been purchased and Sneddon has left the business.

Former UK sales manager Neil Smith is now country sales manager for the UK.

Henrik Bunge, Björn Borg CEO, says: "We have taken yet another step to cut the distance between the Björn Borg headquarters and the end consumer.

"Integration is crucial to understand and consequently make a difference for consumers in our different markets."

GLENBRAE TO PARTNER WITH SURREY

A RANGE OF LAMBSWOOL AND MERINO SWEATERS, AS WELL AS A COLLECTION OF MERINO ACCESSORIES, WILL BE SUPPLIED TO THE FIRST CLASS COUNTY CLUB BY THE YORKSHIRE-BASED BUSINESS.

A project to manufacture a range of bespoke, pantone dyed lambswool and merino knitwear is also in place.

In addition, Glenbrae will use its bespoke embroidery division to produce merchandise featuring the club's emblem.

Samurai to supply GB Sevens kit

IT'S CREATED A RANGE OF KIT THAT WILL BE WORN BY GB SEVENS MEN AND WOMEN DURING THEIR PROGRAMME OF PREPARATION AND COMPETITION BEFORE THEY LEAVE FOR RIO.

For the men's squad, this includes the Rugby Europe Sevens Series in Moscow, Exeter and Gdynia, as well as Sevens and the City at Allianz Park.

The women's preparations will be supported by Rugby Europe's tournament in Kazan and an invitational event in Tignes.

Samurai has also extended its long-term partnership with Exeter Chiefs.

The new deal will see the brand continue to supply Exeter's players with playing kit and leisurewear, as well as kitting out club coaches and officials.

The partnership, first signed in 2010 before the Chiefs were promoted to the Aviva Premiership, is the joint longest of its type in the top flight of club rugby in England.



THE NEWS TICKER



1. GOLA

has appointed Buster White (pictured) as a UK sales agent. Based in Twickenham, White will cover London, the south east and the south coast with immediate effect.

2. MACRON

will be Stoke City's technical sponsor for the next five years. As well as kitting out the team, Macron is also developing a retail collection for the Premier League club.

Tekkers shareholders vote to sell brand

Founded in 2010, the sports casualwear company has enjoyed success in JJB Sports, Champion Sports in Ireland and Sports Direct.

A company spokesperson told Sports Insight: "A great deal of work has gone into Tekkers over the years and there is an immediate opportunity for someone to acquire a plug and play sportswear brand, which would deliver immediately for the right business.

"Wherever Tekkers has sold, either in store or online, it's converted with healthy margins."

For more information call Joe Sillett on 07766 804402.



Pentland Brands is one of UK's top workplaces

Canterbury, Speedo, Mitre and Prostar's owner was ranked 11th in the Best Large Company category by the Great Place to Work Institute.

The Best Workplaces 2016 list is selected based on an independent GPTW employee survey and analysis of all aspects of organisational culture.

The results from the Pentland study showed improvements on previous surveys, with 88 per cent of people polled saying it's a "great place to work" - up from 84 per cent in the previous survey conducted in 2013.

Andy Long, CEO of Pentland Brands, says: "As a family owned company, we care about people.

"If our employees feel valued and engaged with the business, we'll get the very best out of them and they'll get the most out of their time with us.

"We're always seeking to find motivated people, who share our values, to join our business because, ultimately, it's the people that keep our culture unique and make this a great place to work."



Retail Ombudsman launches 'trusted retailer' scheme

The government approved scheme is inviting small and medium-sized shops to apply to become accredited retailers in order to boost their reputations on the high street and online.



After passing a strict criteria test, they will be allowed to display a gold tick and the Retail Ombudsman's logo on their websites and merchandising.

Chief ombudsman Dean Dunham (pictured) says: "There are thousands of small retailers and many thousands more springing up online. This presents the consumer with the problem of 'who can I trust?'

"Many take the easy option of choosing to shop instead at the more recognisable high street shops. This has always been frustrating for smaller retailers, many of which have excellent customer care policies - except the customer doesn't know it.

"When the customer sees the Retail Ombudsman's gold tick, they will know they can trust the retailer as much as the biggest names on the high street."

Retail Ombudsman accredited member status tells the consumer:

- They have terms and conditions of business that are legally compliant, fair and easy to understand.
- They have a fair returns and complaints policy.
- The Retail Ombudsman has verified their VAT status (if applicable), verified their contact details, carried out a check of their website and taken up references from past customers.

The Retail Ombudsman's membership fees start from £100 (plus VAT) per year.



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The best known products within the range are Origin and Neon. Both waterproof (7000mm) and breathable (7000gsm), these products share almost all their features, such as reflective details, back venting and foldaway hood. The only difference is that Neon is well, neon.

There are other products in the range, such as the increasingly popular Poncho, the jersey lined Synergy and the long length Travel coat.

Add to that the highly breathable ULTRA, which is new for SS17. This product is the premium Mac in a Sac designed for high performance activity. The Teflon coated outer and superior breathability make this the most comfortable Mac in a Sac to exercise in. Neon highlights also give the product some added safety benefits.

Contact Target Dry for details of how to become a stockist. Retailers can benefit from a complete sales package, healthy mark-up and reassuring stock back-up.

For more information call 028 90 790 588 or email sales@targetdry.com



PING-PONG - THE ORIGINAL

FOR OVER A CENTURY PING-PONG, THE ORIGINAL TABLE TENNIS BRAND, HAS SET THE STANDARD FOR SUPERIOR GRADE TABLE TENNIS EQUIPMENT FOR ALL LEVELS OF PLAY.

There are three different sets available in the Ping-Pong player sets range, which come in striking clam packs and deliver great margins.

The entry level set is the Classic 2-Player Set, which retails at £9.99 and consists of two hard style bats and three grade one balls.

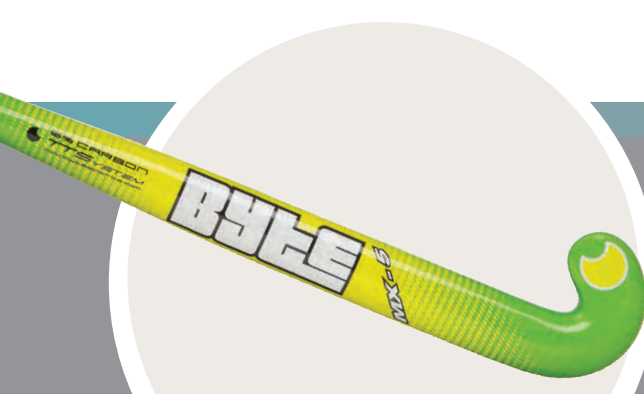
The Performance 2-Player Set is next with two custom bats and three grade three balls, which retails at £12.99.

Finally, the Performance 4-Player Set, which has four custom bats and three grade three balls, retails at £24.99.

For more information call

Dan on 07825 897774 (Midlands/north west), Lee on 07584 858978 for the south and Darren on 07826 707371 for all other areas.





STAR PRODUCT ★★★★★

Byte hockey has revamped its stick range for season 2016/2017. The MX range includes lightweight sticks retailing between £30-£50. The carbon content in this stick range varies between 5-20 per cent and all feature a 24mm mid bow. These sticks are ideal for club players and juniors. www.bytesports.com

OS1ST ES3 ELBOW SLEEVE

READY FOR THE TENNIS AND GOLF SEASONS? STOCKING THE OS1ST ES3 ELBOW SLEEVE?

Incorporating Compression Zone Technology, the three-zoned elbow sleeve targets tennis and golfers' elbow symptoms and helps ease lower arm pain by directly treating lateral and medial epicondylitis issues.

It supports and stabilises the tendons and provides muscle stability, plus it also improves circulation.

The soft, moisture wicking fabric is thin and lightweight, so it can be worn during sports activities.

Point of sale resources are available to sell and merchandise this range of Brace Layer System supports, which also includes the FS6 - six-zoned foot sleeve; CS6 - six-zoned calf sleeve; FS6+ - 11-zoned combined foot and calf sleeve; PS3 - three-zoned patella sleeve; KS7 - seven-zoned knee sleeve; QS4 - four-zoned quad sleeve; and WS6 - six-zoned wrist sleeve.

Join the OS1st team. Call Darren Alger, OS1st retail operations director, on 01206 796247 or email emea@ingsource.com

2016 FAST TRACK SERIES HAS ARRIVED

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Meticulous attention to detail is demonstrated in every aspect, from the ingenious detachable day bag and internal toiletry pouch, to the lightweight aluminium trolley frame with its adjustable harness system. Available in 75 and 85-litre sizes.

For more information on the Fast Track or any Caribee products call Brand Agility on 0131 554 5555 or email jacque@brandagility.co.uk

PERFECT FOR SPORTS TOURS, THE FAST TRACK IS THE TWO-IN-ONE BAG THAT WON'T WEIGH YOU DOWN



KIT STOP

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A LEADING NAME IN RUGBY, OPTIMUM HAS LAUNCHED AN EXCLUSIVE RANGE OF HOCKEY ACCESSORIES, WHICH ARE NOW AVAILABLE TO ORDER.

The Fusion Hockey range includes balls, shin guards, mitts and gloves. Training balls are priced at RRP £2.99, shin guards are priced at RRP £12.99.

Fusion mitts are priced at RRP £9.99 and Fusion gloves are priced at RRP £12.99. Both feature moulded foam back hand protection.

For more information on the Fusion range or any Optimum products call 01942 497707 or your local Optimum sales representatives.



THE FUSION HOCKEY RANGE INCLUDES BALLS, SHIN GUARDS, MITTS AND GLOVES



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STAR PRODUCT ★★★★★

With two layers of high performance carbon integrated into the blade, surrounded by solid walnut outer pile, the Ping-Pong Carbon Fusion table tennis bat features improved rigidity and response for increased speed and power. Call Lee on 01635 517560 or email lee@phoenixsportinggoods.com



REUSCH

THE REUSCH RE:PULSE PRO X1 ROLL FINGER GLOVE IS A POPULAR STYLE FOR UK GOALKEEPERS, INCLUDING ENGLAND LIONESSES' AND LIVERPOOL LADIES' GOALKEEPER SIOBHAN CHAMBERLAIN.

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The X1 Wet 'n Dry latex offers a reliable grip in both conditions, so if the weather changes during a match there's no need to worry about having to change gloves or losing the reliability of excellent grip.

As well as offering a comfortable fit, the seamless neoprene cuff also helps repel moisture in the wettest of conditions.

So with an ergonomic fit, pull loop to help get the glove on and a 3D thumb crotch to increase flexibility, there are plenty of features to make this style an excellent choice for goalkeepers of all levels.

For more information email Bob Fidler at reuschuk@btinternet.com or call 0161 439 4383. Twitter: @ReuschUK. Facebook: Reusch UK. Instagram: reuschuk

BLIZ ACTIVE EYEWEAR

BLIZ ACTIVE EYEWEAR LAUNCHED IN AUTUMN 2007 TO A DEMANDING AUDIENCE OF FITNESS ENTHUSIASTS AND TOP FLIGHT ATHLETES.

The performance, style and durability of its products has seen the brand quickly gain respect and success in Scandinavia - home to some of the world's most extreme sports and gruelling weather conditions.

Now BLIZ Active Eyewear comes to the UK, where its rugged, energetic and sporty appeal makes it an ideal prospect for cyclists, runners, cricketers, climbers, golfers, tennis players, hockey players and more.

Excellent in both competitive and exercise situations, BLIZ Active Eyewear brings Scandinavian design, quality and functionality to the UK sporting arena.

For more information call Clive Arthur on 07432 482261 or email clivearthur@reydonsports.com

NOW BLIZ ACTIVE EYEWEAR COMES TO THE UK, WHERE ITS RUGGED, ENERGETIC AND SPORTY APPEAL MAKES IT AN IDEAL PROSPECT



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Meet customers' kit requirements with a bespoke embroidery service to generate additional income for your business, targeting those in charge of football teams, tournaments and events.

From tops, shorts and boots to personalised bags, the PR1000e and PR655 machines can customise sports kits quickly and easily with team logos, players' names and numbers.

For more information visit www.brothersewing.co.uk



MCDavid FREELASTICS ARE CREATED WITH A UNIQUE 400-NEEDLE MACHINE THAT PROVIDES A TUBULAR KNITTING TECHNIQUE



MCDavid FREELASTICS

MCDavid FREELASTICS ARE CREATED WITH A UNIQUE 400-NEEDLE MACHINE THAT PROVIDES A TUBULAR KNITTING TECHNIQUE.

By utilising tubular knitting, McDavid can create a superior elastic support that's designed to prevent skin chafing and irritations due to annoyingly placed stitching seams.

The Freelasics range's high compression properties are knitted into the yarn and specifically designed to follow the contours of the joint, providing targeted zonal support and compression. Neoprene supports, while offering many benefits for sports injuries and protection, don't have the targeted compression benefits of tubular knitted elastic supports.

The Freelasics range helps to relieve minor pain and promote healing of tendonitis, bursitis, arthritis and ligament instabilities. The Freelasics range is available in the 5135 plantar fascia ankle sleeve (RRP £22.95) and the 5140 knee sleeve (RRP £22.95).

For more information email chris@hy-pro.co.uk or call 01582 670100.

STAR PRODUCT ★★★★★

New Dual Compression technology from McDavid integrates compressive support tape into a comfortable, easy-to-use sports support. Each product in the range is focused on specific joints and their related ligaments, tendons and muscles. Email chris@hy-pro.co.uk or call 01582 670100.



TECNIFIBRE

USED BY BOTH THE CURRENT SQUASH MEN AND WOMEN'S WORLD NUMBER ONE, THE CARBOFLEX 125S IS TECNIFIBRE'S BEST-SELLING RACQUET.

A fast paced, agile and powerful racquet, it's been developed with men's world number one Mohamed El Shorbagy to provide a racquet for the demands of today's game.

The racket features Tecnifibre's leading technologies, including a Basaltex Isomorph shaft, custom fit bumper and, of course, comes pre-strung in Tecnifibre's new DNAMX string, which is now used by 50 per cent of Tecnifibre professionals, including El Shorbagy.

RRPs range from £70 to £150.

For more information visit www.tecnifibre.com. Alternatively, call UK distributor Smash Sports on 01392 78311 or email office@smashsports.co.uk



THE CARBOFLEX 125S IS TECNIFIBRE'S BEST-SELLING RACQUET



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The shoes also feature a high grip non-slip lug pattern sole made from Salming's most durable rubber compound. RRP £115.

For more information visit www.salmingrunning.com. Alternatively, call UK distributor Smash Sports on 01932 781311 or email office@smashsports.co.uk

SWIMMING



STAR PRODUCT

The arena Swim Snorkel Pro features a hydrodynamic design, fixed hand band, two-size silicone mouthpiece, plus an option for a multiple size top and small size tube. Email: info@solosport.co.uk. Web: www.solosports.co.uk

JAKABEL

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arena's Spiky 2 is another large backpack that features a padded and breathable back panel, mesh side pockets, plus a reinforced bottom with a compartment that's ideal for shoes.

For more information on arena products call Solosport Brands on 015396 22322, email info@solosport.co.uk or visit www.solosports.co.uk



INTERSPORT ANNOUNCES NEW E-COMMERCE SITE

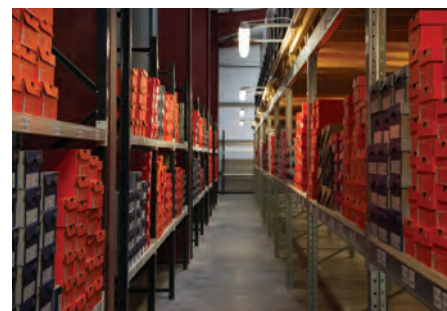
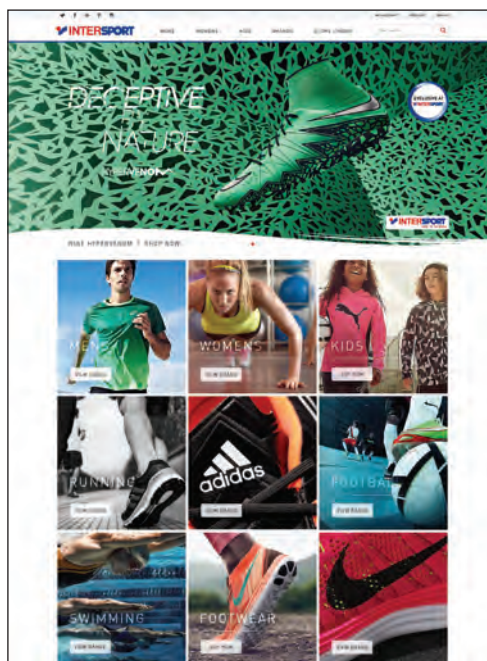
Sports performance retailer Intersport UK will be launching a new e-commerce site at **www.intersport.co.uk** within the coming weeks.

The opening of its online store is an important and positive step for Intersport, and has been welcomed by the many brands it endorses. The website will support the 200 retail stores across the UK whilst taking loyal consumers to the next level with fast and easy purchasing

As a showcase of sports performance products, intersport.co.uk will be a major boost to brand awareness and appeal to a wide customer audience. Visitors to the site will be able to search for key brands under the focus categories of running, training, fitness, swim and football, with an emphasis on Intersport exclusive products.

The new website will support all Intersport retailers by offering a click and collect to store option enabling the retailer to have a wider product offering which the size constraints of a high street store doesn't always allow. It will also support the increased traffic to the website and enhance the consumer's shopping experience whilst being informative, quick and convenient for all involved. The site will also feature expert advice, product reviews, competitions and links to partners such as parkrun.

Intersport has chosen online sports merchant Sportswise (Borders) Ltd, which operates the rugbystore.co.uk to host its UK website. A premium online sports merchant, Sportswise is a long serving and highly respected member of the Intersport group.



Tom Foley, General Manager at Intersport UK, said: "This is a very exciting time for Intersport UK. The launch of our e-commerce store is a natural progression for the company, and will allow us to continue to build our reputation as providers of the highest quality sports merchandise in the UK, bringing sport to the people."

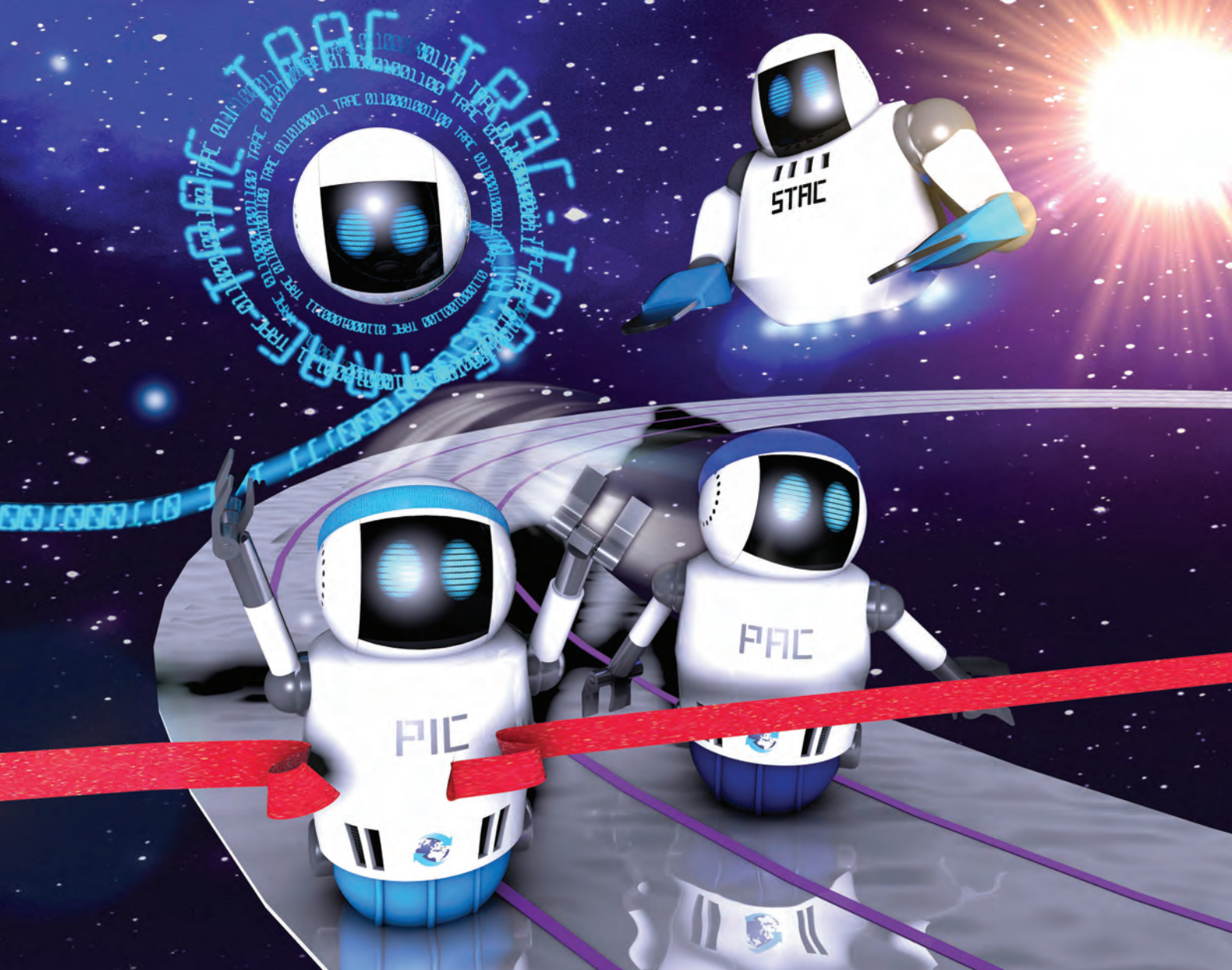
"We have found the perfect partner in Sportswise (Borders) Ltd as they have both the expertise and facilities to help us make this important next step in developing our online presence. I would like to thank Sportswise, our Retailers and all of the sports brands for their support."

Intersport are leading the way on initiatives and this is a further highlight of the dynamic direction and progressive pace that Intersport UK & Ireland are moving at.



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*A focus
on running
has paid off for
Steve Millward,
co-owner of
Gloucester
Sports*

*“We love
to try new
products and
I’m learning
to take a few
more risks”*

THE INSIDER

How and why did you set up shop?

I took over Gloucester Sports with my friend, Ian Summers, in 2009 when the previous owner, Chris O’Carroll, retired. Previously I’d worked with Nike to provide product trial and gait assessments in specialist running shops throughout the UK and Ireland. I learnt a lot from those retailers about how to run a business and have used those ideas as a template for Gloucester Sports.

Why have you specialised in running?

I’m a keen runner, so it made sense to focus the business around that. We’re based about 400 metres from Gloucester Rugby Club, so we have a reasonable rugby presence too, but we’ve reduced it over the past seven years.

Space is limited, so other sports have gone by the wayside, but we’d rather do a couple of sports well than try and do a little bit of everything.

How’s business?

It’s tricky. The market’s very crowded with brands, shops and retail platforms, but we’ve seen steady, sustainable growth over the past five years.

What’s the competition like?

There is one other local independent sports shop, but it focuses on rugby and multisports, so we don’t conflict. The big issue for us is the outlet centre in Gloucester Quays, which is slowly strangling the life out of the town centre. The ASICS and Nike shops there make things much harder for us.

How do you remain competitive?

By offering superior service combined with a wide choice of brands, specialist gait analysis and team kit for local running clubs. All our staff run, so we offer a broad spectrum of knowledge to customers. We don’t advertise a great deal - recommendations from other customers are the best form of endorsement you can get.

What are your plans for the business?

We have slowly increased the range of footwear, apparel and accessories we offer in-store and will continue this over the next couple of years. We also plan to organise events locally to tie in with the shop. My dream would be to move to a bigger site that would have space for a biomechanics lab and treatment rooms.

What about marketing?

I struggle with marketing. Other than a Facebook page, we’re not great at self-promotion. We make sure we have a strong

presence at events, both locally and further afield, but we could do more. It’s something I’m planning to address.

How do you find out about new products?

We love to try new products and I’m learning to take a few more risks. I like to gauge opinions from other retailers who are friends and whose opinions I value and trust. We’re also members of STAG, which gives us a good service as well as the opportunity to see lots of brands in one place at the STAG show.

How does the business in your physical shop compare with online?

The online aspect of our business is a small percentage of our turnover. We don’t have the money or resources to compete with the big online stores.

Would you ever consider being an internet-only retailer?

Absolutely not, even if this limits our potential. It would suck out all the enjoyment I get from owning a running shop, such as meeting runners and helping people select the right footwear.

What are your best-selling brands?

Footwear wise, we do extremely well with Brooks and adidas. Brooks work because they make very safe shoes with no gimmicks, adidas because they offer a strong range of shoes at different price points.

New Balance are our fastest growing footwear brand and are making some really appealing shoes. It’s always nice when we take on a new brand and it does well too. Aftershokz, Sunwise and CEP fall into that category for us.

What do you like most about your business?

The interaction with customers and chatting about all aspects of running, not just the shoes. One of my favourite tasks is deciding what to stock in the shop.

And the least?

I don’t like being told what to stock in my own shop by certain brands. This seems to be a new trend that’s creeping in and it worries me. Do the big brands not realise that one size doesn’t fit all? What sells in London may not sell in Gloucester. It feels like we’re being held to ransom if we want to continue stocking that brand.

What’s been your biggest challenge?

Apart from balancing the books, it’s getting the right staff. We have been lucky so far, but getting enough reliable help to cover all the events and races we do is difficult.

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Pictured left:
Mohamed El Shorbagy

*James Fenton,
director of Smash
Sports, provides
the inside track on
Tecnifibre squash*

*“It’s exciting
times for
Tecnifibre
and this
is only the
start”*

ON THE PODIUM

Tell us about Tecnifibre squash

Tecnifibre has been in the squash market for over 30 years. Its first product was the 305 green squash string, which is still the best-selling squash string in the world.

The brand launched its first racquets in 2004, with the introduction of the Carboflex range. This racquet was used by world number one and world champion, Thierry Lincou, and today is used by both the men and women’s world number ones.

Tecnifibre offers a specific product range designed and developed to be the best for today’s squash player. It doesn’t use products and technologies that cross over from its tennis range.

What’s Smash Sports’ relationship with the brand?

We’ve had an involvement with Tecnifibre for a long time and have been its distributor since 2004. We have a strong relationship with the guys at Tecnifibre headquarters in France and work with them closely on product development for the squash market. Being part of Tecnifibre is like being part of a big family.

How big is the squash market in the UK?

It’s the biggest of the squash markets in the world. England Squash says 500,000 people play squash each year.

Is it growing?

Not at the moment, but it’s still one of the top 10 participation sports in the UK.

Brand USPs?

Tecnifibre has two main squash products - strings and racquets.

No other brand can make a string in the same way as Tecnifibre. The brand’s PU multifilament strings, such as the 305 green string, are saturated with polyurethane, not just coated. This means increased durability, elasticity and performance.

We string all our premium racquets in a PU multifilament string rather than a basic synthetic one, which means a player receives over £20-worth of string in their racquet.

The Carboflex racquet has a unique shape, while all our racquets have unique technologies.

Tell us about Tecnifibre’s brand ambassadors’ recent successes

Our ambassadors have had some amazing successes in recent

years and we’re proud to see them representing Tecnifibre.

Mohamed El Shorbagy won the junior British Open when he was 16, 17 and 18 years of age. He is now in his early twenties and is the world number one.

Nour El Sherbini won the junior British Open every year from the age of 13. She became the youngest women’s world champion at the age of 20 a few weeks ago and at the same time took the world number one spot on the women’s tour.

It’s exciting times for Tecnifibre and this is only the start.

What type of retailer stocks the brand?

As a premium brand, we work with specialists such as Intersport retailers, STAG retailers, generalist stores and department stores. There’s a demand for Tecnifibre squash products at all levels.

Are you looking to grow the number of retailers stocking the brand?

We’re always happy to hear from new retailers and discuss opportunities.

What support do you offer stockists?

We’ve created a lot of demand for Tecnifibre at an international and national level, but we also work with retailers in their local area by supporting coaches, players, clubs and tournaments.

We’re happy to provide staff with training on our products and can provide branding for in-store.

How quickly do you turn orders around?

Our aim is to get orders out on a next-day service, which we achieve the majority of the time. We aim to keep all products in stock at all times, but of course sometimes products will go out of stock.

Is there a minimum order level?

Not for top-ups. We work with retailers to place pre-orders for the coming season, which we give discounts in return for.

What’s your plan for the brand for the rest of the year?

We have a good strategy and strong network, so we’ll not be doing anything too different. As always, we’ll be working hard to keep improving in any areas we can to give the best service and continue building upon our successes.

For more information visit www.tecnifibre.com. Alternatively, email Smash Sports on office@smashsports.co.uk or call 01932 781311.



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*Hy-Pro International has been the UK distributor of Shock Doctor for over 15 years and acquired the UK distribution for McDavid last March. We spoke to UK brand manager **Chris Lord** about the transition and the current UK market*



“In terms of products, we have some exciting new lines”

FRONT RUNNERS

When did you get into the sports trade?

2005. After completing my degree in business management and sports coaching, I did a stint in sports recruitment before joining HaB International. I worked on a great product called POWERbreathe and was involved in sales, marketing and events.

Following this, I moved to British Swimming as sponsorship manager, looking after the likes of Kellogg's and Speedo in the build-up to and after the 2012 Olympics. I have now been at Hy-Pro for nearly three years, initially looking after Shock Doctor, but now also McDavid.

What does your role at McDavid entail?

It's a broad role that incorporates all the key aspects of managing the brand's presence in the UK, including account management, marketing, procurement, sponsorship and sales.

Best part of your job?

I get to work on different projects with different teams. I have to manage my time effectively, as one day I will be working with the guys at Saracens doing mouthguard fittings, the next day writing copy and then on the road meeting customers.

Proudest professional moment?

Working at the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics games was an amazing experience.

We also did a big free swimming promotion with Kellogg's that year, which was featured on over 50 million Kellogg's cereal packets and resulted in over 160,000 kids getting free swims at local pools. It was great to see how two partners could work together to increase participation and get more kids active.

My current role working with the team at Saracens has been superb. Their feedback has been so positive and to see all the team wearing Shock Doctor mouthguards during the Premiership and European cup finals was a proud moment.

Favourite sporting moment?

The Rugby World Cup in 2003 was pretty special, but the reason it was so memorable for me was that I was at university at the time. I remember getting a bit overexcited the night before and to ensure I didn't miss it I slept under the TV cabinet in the lounge of our student house.

To then watch it surrounded by all my university friends and win in the manner we did was very memorable, if not a bit nerve wracking.

How's business been since you took over McDavid's UK distribution?

Overall, business has been good. As is the case with picking up

distribution, there are always a few challenges. However, we have a great team at Hy-Pro and everyone has been superb in ensuring we are making the transition as smooth as possible.

Also, the team at McDavid in Belgium have been on hand to offer support and guidance. There is still a lot to learn in regards to the products, as the McDavid range is pretty large and very technical, but we're learning more and more each day.

What plans have you got for the brand?

In terms of products, we have some exciting new lines. On the sports medical side, we have the Freelasics range, which is a high quality knitted support that uses a 400 needle vertical stitch pattern. This means we can achieve targeted support and compression and eliminate any seams that could irritate.

We also have the Dual Compression range, which uses the principals of kinesiology taping, but applied to a lightweight support. In terms of marketing activity, we are in the process of working with two high profile sports teams and will hopefully be announcing some pretty big partnerships soon.

Has the increased focus on player safety been good for business?

Yes, in the sense that the consumer is more aware than ever about the demands sport places on them and in the case of parents, their children. As a result, our sales over the last three years have increased year on year.

However, I think there's a lot of misinformation and a general lack of understanding about player safety. I'm also the brand manager for Shock Doctor and we frequently see wording such as 'potentially prevents concussion' or 'might prevent concussion' on marketing communications.

We deal in facts and research and until we have seen solid independent evidence that something is the case, we won't mislead the consumer into thinking our products can do something they potentially can't.

In both the supports and mouthguard markets, we are seeing cheaper and cheaper products coming to market. The lower end is becoming very congested and we're at risk of devaluing the market and forcing overall quality and prices down. At a time when player safety is becoming even more crucial, quality should be leading the way, not just price.

If you could change one thing about the industry, what would it be?

When it comes to safety and protection, as an industry we need to be more informed and responsible when selling to the consumer.

For more information email chris@hy-pro.co.uk, visit www.hy-pro.co.uk or call 01582 670100.

Sam Ward



The England and GB hockey international has reached the top of his sport the hard way.
Tony James reports

As an England and GB hockey international with over 30 caps, Sam Ward's job is to score goals - even though at one time they were costing him £50 each.

"Three years ago, a good friend of mine and former teammate was diagnosed with a form of leukemia," Ward explains. "Thankfully, he is now in remission, but money is urgently needed for blood cancer research and I felt I should do something."

What he did was to pay £50 out of his own pocket every time he scored an international or Premier League goal. Word got about in the close knit hockey family and soon friends and supporters were pledging another £250 every time Ward found the net for his high flying Holcombe team.

"It was a win-win situation," Ward says. "Holcombe won the hockey Premier League and in nine months Bloodwise, a blood cancer research charity, benefitted by over £13,000. The money from my goals couldn't have gone to a better cause."

On and off-pitch challenges

Conscious of his good fortune in being in prime health, Ward goes out of his way to help those who aren't. He has cycled from Land's End to John O'Groats for Macmillan Cancer Support and is currently looking for a new charity challenge.

In fact, challenges on and off the pitch have long been an integral part of Ward's sporting life. For instance, he reached hockey's highest level not by the usual university path, but by working in a Volkswagen car dealership in Loughborough.

"I started there when I was 17, doing a bit of selling and working in their fleet department," Ward says. "It was very hard to train as much as you should to reach the top level. It was just a case of

cracking on and doing as much as you could in club hockey, having not played for a university.

"It was tough working long days and then going training. I did it the hard way - I didn't play in any junior international tournaments. I went to a few training camps and after that it was just playing club hockey for the next two years, before I was offered a contract for the England squad."

MOVE TO HOLCOMBE

Leaving his first club, Beeston, and moving to the Holcombe club in Kent was another major gamble. At that time, Holcombe were not league contenders, but with an influx of England stars, they are now.

"What they have done is incredible," Ward says. Modesty forbids him to say he's had a lot to do with the transformation.

"They were an unfashionable side, but then they managed to pull a fantastic team together. A lot of people couldn't believe how we've changed. We finished top of the Premier League and we have qualified for next year's Euro Hockey League. I haven't looked



back and I'm enjoying every minute.

"There's a pressure to perform, as a squad like ours is always going to draw attention from outside, but we're experienced and we try to get on with our jobs and play well as a team to get results."

BRAND SUPPORT

Now aiming for a place in the Great Britain Olympic team for Rio, Ward has the support of Grays International, whose sales and marketing director, Richard Gray, says: "We believe he has both the talent and tenacity to succeed in this increasingly demanding sport.

"We are fully committed to giving him the best equipment with which to deliver in Rio and beyond."

The world's longest established hockey brand, Grays International is characterised by its famous orange flash. The brand has innovated hockey stick technology from the beginning of the modern game.

Founded in 1855 by rackets champion HJ Gray,

*"You do your
best, chase
your dream
and it's
turned out
well for me"*

the company claims more international hockey players use Grays equipment than any other brand.

Ward certainly knows what he wants: "I like a heavy stick that's nice and strong, but with a soft feel, so I use a 90 per cent carbon stick with a damping mechanism in the handle.

"Enormous strides have been made in equipment technology. The Grays stick I'm using fits my requirements exactly. The key to the equipment I use is that it allows me to play hockey to the very best of my ability and Grays sticks and equipment fit the bill perfectly.

"We train every day and play games at the weekend, so sticks have to put up with some punishment - and Grays can cope with that."

Growing up in a Leicestershire village near Loughborough, there were hockey sticks in the house for as long as Ward can remember: "Apparently, I showed an interest in the game before I was four and always had a stick in my hand.

"I would watch my parents play. They were good club players and my dad did a lot of coaching. I would go along with him and hit a ball on the side. It all went from there.

"Leicester ladies' hockey club had a mixed junior section called the Banana Bunch and I played for them from six until nine. But when we didn't have enough boys for a team, I joined Beeston and played there until I went to work at 21."

PLAYING FOR ENGLAND

Ward watched England play when he was younger. "When I was about 18, I used to say I would love to play for England, but I never dreamed it would be achievable," he adds.

In fact, it took Ward 19 years from that first childhood ambition to pulling on an England shirt for the first time. He remembers: "The feeling was incredible.

I can't describe what it meant to be out there singing the national anthem. The shivers going down my spine was a sensation I won't forget.

"Nor have I forgotten the people who helped me and what it means to young sports people to be given a chance. So I have a strong focus on helping and inspiring the next generation of the game to show them how hard work and a tough mentality pays off.

"You do your best, chase your dream and it's turned out well for me. Hopefully, the dream will include playing in the Olympics and getting a medal."

Ward became one of England's centrally contracted players in September 2014 and scored twice on his senior international debut against world champions Australia three months later.

"Since joining the England programme, there's been a big change in me mentally and physically," he says. "There's been a lot of hard work in the gym - my shape was far different when I first started.

"If you're carrying an extra seven or eight kilos, it's a lot more to have to move around the pitch, so losing that has helped increase my speed, footwork and reactions."

At 26 and at the top of his game, retirement is hopefully a long way ahead, but Ward, a canny Midlander, has already had thoughts about that distant day: "I will probably go back into the car industry.

"I loved my job with Volkswagen and giving it up for hockey was a big gamble, not knowing if you would make the grade as a professional sportsman."

Some 30 England and GB caps later, we all know the answer to that.

QUICK-FIRE QUESTIONS

PROUDEST MOMENT: joining the England centralised programme.

BIGGEST REGRET: not working harder at a young age.

GREATEST INFLUENCE: my family.

SPORTING HERO: cricketer Ian Bell.

BEST MOMENT: scoring two goals on debut for England against Australia.

WORST MOMENT: missing a shuffle in the EuroHockey Championship semi-final against Germany.

REMAINING AMBITION: to succeed at multiple Olympics and world cups.

HARDEST OPPONENTS: any of the world's top three seeds.





Unlock the Sales Potential from Summer Snorkelling

The team responsible for the sales growth of Aqua Sphere's award winning swimming products across the UK is also responsible for the Aqua Lung Sport range of premium made-in-Italy snorkelling equipment. This team is eager to help retailers to effectively meet the holiday needs of newbie or avid snorkelers who trust the construction integrity of a proven name in masks, fins, snorkels, wetsuits, rash guards and travel kit accessories. From compact combination sets that pack easily into the holiday suitcase to powerful fins and the latest dry top snorkels, Aqua Lung Sport is the longstanding name to rely on for patented technologies and the highest quality materials, meeting the snorkelling needs of all ages and abilities. Offering retailers the chance of a fresh Summer sales stream with minimum risk – now is the time to unlock the potential of snorkelling.

Always innovating, new Aqua Lung Sport products include the Amika short bladed fin which incorporates the 'Power Flex Zone' which optimizes the bending of the blade during kicking, offering impressive

propulsion for a short blade fin. The Duetto mask and Palau snorkel combo set includes Pivot Dry Technology which affords a cleaner and easier purge when surfacing from under the water. For kids, the Mix combo pool/beach set, manufactured in the freshest and funkiest summer shades, now includes an improved Softeril skirt and a strong silicone strap. Set to become a favourite this season, the Amika three piece travel set is packed in a robust beach bag to answer those essential Summer holiday needs and includes the very latest 'travel ready' Amika fins, the premium Vision Flex mask and Airflex snorkel.

Happy to help devise carefully selected packages of products to meet very specific customer needs, large or small, Aqua Lung Sport invites retailers to email swim.sales@aqualung.uk or phone 01254 692200 for a no obligation discussion.





“You need a sharing mentality to make this idea work”



Co-op promotions



Paul Clapham *highlights the valuable commercial benefits to be gained*



he term co-op promotions may not be well known to you and the concept may not be high on your priority list. One half of the problem with the concept is that it goes under several different names - joint



promotions and multi offers as two cases. The other half of the problem is that it's not easy and there's no straightforward structure to work with.

That said, it's worthy of serious attention because there are valuable commercial benefits to be gained. These apply to both winning customers and reducing costs and that's a combination you don't get too often in marketing activity.

DIRECT COMPETITORS

Let's start with your direct competitors - other independent sports retailers in your town or part of a city. Would you cooperate with them to your mutual benefit and that of your customers?

The very idea may be anathema to you. You may dislike them intensely and have no respect for what they do or how they do it. Equally, you may recognise that they have strengths you lack and, obviously, vice versa.

Let's take summer sports. One of the above retailers is run by a tennis enthusiast and expert, the other is run by his cricket counterpart. But it's a racing cert that both of them are stocking product for both sports. Does this make sense, given that the non-expert, non-enthusiast has to commit money and shelf space to product they're not really conversant with?

Would it not make more sense for both retailers to focus on their area of expertise and agree that they won't stock competitive mainstream product? I'm not suggesting you try to run a cosy cartel (however appealing that might be, it's illegal). You just focus on your strengths. That in turn will improve your buying power and, hence, the offer you can make to customers.

This principle could work particularly well with developing lower profile, but growing sports. It's not easy developing a small market, but it's harder still if somebody else in your immediate catchment area is doing exactly the same thing. Over time you will both tend to destock 'because it didn't work' and then the customer loses.

OTHER RETAIL BUSINESSES

Let's move on to other retail businesses in your area. Can you benefit from mutual activity with them? This requires that you go to them with an idea - it need not be brilliant, just practical and appropriate. The principle is that you drive trade to your commercial neighbours and they do the same for you.

What might apply? Try independent health food stores. With a broad brush take, you are in the same business, ie keeping people fit and healthy. If you think they're a bunch of sandal wearing hippies, have a rethink. This is an increasingly mature commercial sector. I know because I also write for a magazine in that trade.

How would that work? Certainly, there's no obvious quid pro quo at the retail level because of the significant price differentials. But the opportunity to share customers must be excellent. Lots of health stores sell supplements aimed at gym goers. You have a customer database and they do too. You may both have a loyalty card scheme. The opportunity to reach new potential customers through both is significant. You need a sharing mentality to make this whole idea work.

INSURANCE COMPANIES AND BROKERS

What other commercial neighbours might feed you business this way? Think about anywhere that the health benefit is high. Insurance companies and brokers are an obvious example, assuming you do business with them. They get plenty of approaches, but if you have a clever idea they are inclined to listen.

Insurers use direct marketing in a big way, so they will have an organised database and be keen to develop it as much as possible. If they're selling health insurance or indeed specialise in it, the fit is perfect. You could offer them a free money-off voucher to be used in your store. Your suppliers might be interested in this and increase the value offered if it's specific to their brand. That is an approach that could be campaigned across a number of product areas.

DOCTORS' SURGERIES

Do you have a doctors' surgery in your locality? It's just recently been announced that overweight patients will be prescribed exercise by the NHS. At the point of writing, the details are not spelt out, but there is every reason to imagine there will be business opportunities there. I strongly recommend keeping your eye on this particular ball.

Among those classed as obese are a growing number of youngsters, some of them as young as seven or eight. I suspect a combination of poor diet and overeating is the main cause, but inactivity will do it just as well.

I suspect, too, that teens and sub-

teens are inactive because they haven't yet found a sport they enjoy. They may well have been exposed to sports they disliked and that's part of the problem. Being a source of ideas and recommendations of where they could try new sports could get you recommended. Remember that lots of people have no idea what's available or where.

If local doctors can recommend an activity expert (ie, you) you would benefit enormously. I should add that some of the health food stores I've spoken to have said that they get referrals from doctors, so why not referrals to healthy activity specialists? You may find that district nurses who visit people at home or visiting carers funded by social services would give you access to those who need to get active.

Given that 47 per cent and rising of the population is over 50 years old, this is an important business sector and, if you can be referred to them by any or all of their professional back-up team, you wouldn't need to do more marketing to reach them.

LEISURE PARTNERS

As well as co-op partners where there is a health link, there's also the fun aspect to consider. Since the 18-30 age group is considered the most fertile for recruiting new players, focus on them.

They probably meet and mix in a local pub and plenty of landlords are keen sports fans. I used to drink in a small pub that had a football team, a cricket team and a running team, as well as two darts teams. Find that pub.

You can instantly see the commercial potential from team kit to individual kit needs. That pub might well develop into other sports, such as a five-a-side team. Look for multiple purchase opportunities and aim to support the team.

You could offer a discount on clothing and other kit bought by individual team members, but the value of that discount can go to the team. You can be decently confident the bulk of it will come back to you.

On the other hand, the teams in that pub might wish to turn that cash into a beer fund. You might be disappointed by that, but you would be associated with them enjoying themselves in the broadest sense and it would be far more of a co-op promotion.



Onward fitness soldiers



*Military life is arduous, but on returning to civvy street former soldiers have adapted by using their skills to get civilians fitter. **Adrian Hill** reports*

The string of wars and conflicts ongoing around the world, plus their role in the fight against terrorism, has made the popularity of military personnel among the general public as high as it's ever been.

The plight of those with life changing injuries from the battlefield and the families of those who never came back has also captured the imagination of grateful millions in the UK.

For those who have finished their service in the army, navy or RAF, the inevitable question is: what now? Sadly, it's a fact that many find the transition as tough, or even harder, than their careers in combat.

It's reckoned one in 10 of Britain's

estimated homeless population of 90,000 are former military personnel. Yet there are many success stories to be found and an increasingly number of fulfilling and lucrative post-armed forces careers are being eked out in the fitness industry. It's a case of military discipline and willpower meets the need to lose weight and/or get fitter. A seemingly perfect marriage.

BRITISH MILITARY FITNESS

The British Military Fitness brand was founded in April 1999 by Robin Cope and Harry Sowerby, spawned from a chance conversation around that fateful 'what now?' question.

"We were sitting on the film set of

Saving Private Ryan - we were extras," Sowerby explains. "I had returned from the reserves and had just completed my Army PTI training. Robin, who had reached the rank of major, had been training with his girlfriend in a park and she said to him: 'Why don't you become a personal trainer?'. Robin suggested we set up a company.

"We had no business plan, but put £1,000 in each to put an advert in the Evening Standard and bought some computers. We then stood in Hyde Park and waited. 10 people turned up and off we went."

The idea was to get people of all fitness abilities outdoors training in parks. BMF now operates in 135 locations across the country employing over 500 instructors, all either former or serving soldiers.

"We didn't see anyone or copy anyone back in 1999," Sowerby adds. "In the parks there were only team sports or people going for a jog. We chose not to call it boot camp, as that's an American term. We don't shout at people or belittle people, as they do in

boot camps - that's the difference. We try to motivate people, as is done in the British military. Therefore, British Military Fitness was the name we went for."

BMF operates a tiered bib system whereby people of different physical ability are separated into coloured bands - red for beginners, red for intermediates and green for advanced. At larger venues the groups are paired down further. At their first class, newcomers are given a health questionnaire from which any pre-existent health issues and injuries can be flagged up.

XTREME BOOT CAMPS

In Worcestershire, Xtreme Boot Camps was started in October 2013 by mother and son team, Zoe and James Evans.

The concept of getting soldiers to help the fitness fight has reached all shades of the public. Tattoo parlour owner Samantha Patterson says she went from being overweight and unable to walk upstairs without being out of breath to taking part in half marathons, mud runs and high intensity training, thanks to a series of week-long camps and weekly sessions with XBC.

Patterson says: "I am now doing things I never dreamed possible. I have more energy than I have ever had and take part in some form of exercise every day. Anyone can make the change if they're prepared to put in the hard work. XBC has helped me all the way and pushed me to never give up. The variety it provides has meant exercise is no longer boring."

COST EFFECTIVE

In financial terms, these military sessions can be more cost effective than employing a fitness specialist on a one-to-one basis. The customer needs to make a buy-in, though, to fulfil their ambitions within a group. Perhaps not ideal for all, but it's the assistance given in the mental battle, which is often as tough as the physical challenge for those who are not natural athletes, where the soldiers believe they

can make a difference.

"It costs £40-140 per hour to employ a personal trainer - our sessions cost £30-50 per month," Sowerby states. "With personal training, it's you and one other person. Ours is a group activity and you will make friends. It's about motivation."

"We have all been up mountains with a rucksack the size of half a house on our back. We know how it feels to think you can't do it, but we did it and we will do all we can to help you. We see ourselves as a vehicle to get you where you want to be or never thought you would get to."

"It's about personal goals. One woman told us we had helped her so much that she could now wear jeans for the first time in 14 years."

A business model of an outdoor activity employing so many instructors and with turnover annually at risk from a bad winter needs a boost from elsewhere. BMF has started to operate classes at workplaces, with the likes of Travis Perkins, Wickes and Blacks among its clients.

As well as two classes a week, there are regular health checks and fitness assessments. Individuals who don't normally work together join up with a common goal that, it's claimed, is good for esprit de corps.

SPONSORSHIP DEALS

Sponsorship is another income provider and this year BMF has entered into an initial three-year agreement with Blacks. The benefit for clients is the offer of a 20 per cent discount at the outdoor retailer. A similar arrangement is in place with Under Armour.

"We have put ourselves out there, something which we were perhaps a bit slow to do," Sowerby admits. "What we will not do is sell out. We get approached by a lot of companies and sometimes we say: 'Sorry, but no thanks'."

"We have so much still to do in the UK. We have a training academy, where you can work towards a level four fitness qualification recognised by the Ministry of Defence. If you have a military background and you're good, we can give you a job."



MILITARY MADNESS

In addition to those who have moved on from the forces, serving soldiers are also operating in the industry.

Perry Lane (pictured) has been a physical training instructor in the army for six years and in his spare time has developed his own company, Military Madness, in west London. Lane is on a year-long posting in the area recruiting for the army.

Think of military fitness and images of soldiers with heavy backpacks yomping through forests comes to mind, but Lane's sessions follow a similar path to British Military Fitness in terms of adapting the physical exercise programme used in the forces for civilian use.

Lane explains: "I had a small injury that necessitated some recovery and rehabilitation time, so I posted a message on social media asking if anyone would like to train with me. Six people turned up and it showed there was scope for this in my area."

"I now have 150 people on the books. We have neuroscientists, directors and people who work on checkouts in retail stores. I work with them early in the morning or in the evening to fit around my job. My commanding officer in the army is more than happy that I do it and I use serving or ex-serving soldiers as instructors."

Like BMF and others in the industry, Military Madness pays a fee to local authorities for its use of parks. It's also working in colleges and universities in west London training lecturers.

"It's a great way of networking and allows me to link up with my job in army recruitment, as I've been able to set up a military recruitment stand at the colleges," Lane says.





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“EU membership is estimated to have boosted British trade with other member states by 55 per cent”

BREXIT

Paul Sherratt of Solutions for Sport considers the impact the UK leaving the EU might have on the country's sporting goods industry



For the majority of businesses in Britain, the possibility that the UK might leave the European Union is a major source of concern. While no one can know precisely the impact of leaving the EU, what is clear is that it would be likely to have huge repercussions on many aspects of UK life.

On June 23 the EU referendum will take place and, while much of the early debate seems to have centred around core concerns such as immigration and the wider economic ramifications, the impact on sport and the sporting goods industry has been largely neglected in the vast majority of discussions. So what might a Brexit mean to the sports trade?

THE COST OF SPORTS EQUIPMENT

Perhaps the first, and most obvious, place to start is the potential impact on the cost of goods and the way they enter our market.

Emma Boggis, chief executive of the Sport and Recreation Alliance, recently commented on the fact that currently the UK imports a lot of sports clothing and equipment from companies based in the European Union.

According to her: “We could see some form of tariffs on EU goods exported to the UK and vice versa, which would be expected to make goods, including sportswear or sports equipment, more costly than they are now.”

With participation levels a constant driving force behind grass roots sport, the worry is that if prices were to rise, the ability of sport to get people active might be diminished.

EU ECOMMERCE

If we set these comments against the current growth in, for example, UK-basedetailers expanding in the European marketplace, a Brexit and the subsequent potential product price rises - compounded by a weaker sterling versus the euro - is almost certainly likely to challenge the developing business model of many of our ecommerce sports retailers.

At present it's relatively straightforward for these retailers to service European markets through open trade agreements. However, the removal of these - and the time it would take to renegotiate new ones - will undoubtedly cause some issues.

The Global Counsel report 2015 notes that EU membership is estimated to have boosted British trade with other member states by 55 per cent, equal to £130 billion in 2013. Thus any threat to these trading opportunities should not be underestimated. Of course, the flip side of that means the UK would be free to strike its own trade deals elsewhere.

SPORTS DISTRIBUTORS

What about our sports distributors? The UK sells about 50 per cent of its goods to the EU, while the EU sells about six per cent of its goods to the UK. So the movement of goods into the EU is key to the development of UK brands, while the UK is less important for brands coming in the other direction.

That being said, many sports brands have established central hubs to service their European customer base. These operations are efficient at delivering goods across their European distribution networks and driving brand strategy.

Obviously, while the UK would still remain a core market within this strategy, a more complicated trade strategy may cause some issues. The change will not be instantaneous - UK exporters will be charged import duties on the goods they sell into the EU, just as they do to any country that's a member of a trading bloc.

This, in turn, will increase the price of their products in that market. These duties are on top of the local VAT charged between states and impact the final price charged.

Existing EU regulations would make it harder for London to serve European markets, particularly for retail products and in euro trading. Business could move as a result.

All these issues - and many more we don't have the space to cover in this article - are entirely dependent on what model we would adopt were we to exit.

MODELS FOR A NEW RELATIONSHIP

The Global Counsel report 2015 considered five models for a new relationship. The Norwegian model, involving membership of the European Economic Area, would not give the UK the political flexibility required to justify Brexit. By contrast, a much looser model, in which the UK trades with the EU on a 'most favoured nation' basis would provide flexibility, but jeopardise trade and investment.

The most likely models are either a Swiss-style series of





bilateral accords governing access to specific sectors of the single market or a comprehensive free trade agreement. Either would require prolonged negotiation followed by compromises and still impose sizeable costs. A lack of clarity over what would replace EU membership is just one reason why the path to Brexit - and beyond - would be long and uncertain.

The end point for the UK-EU relationship would be subject to negotiation. Business would face high and increasing levels of uncertainty during this process, impacting on investment decisions and with macroeconomic consequences.

If a Brexit does happen, there's no doubt our industry, much like any other, would be forced to adapt accordingly. However, without the benefit of a crystal ball the exact nature of those changes remains cloudy. I, for one, await the vote result with interest.

ELITE SPORT

Away from the sports retail environment, one interesting angle, picked up in a recent BBC article, is the potential impact on the sport we watch and the impact Brexit could have on British football.

The referendum will take place in the middle of the EURO 2016 football championships. By then England, Wales and Northern Ireland will either be in the last 16 or out of the competition. For a few days European sport and politics will dominate, with the question being the same - in or out?

The EU has little direct influence over sports policy in member states, although it provides limited funding to UK grass roots sport. But the rules in areas such as free movement and broadcasting mean Brexit would have a big effect on the sport we watch.

Karren Brady, CEO of West Ham United, warned that if the UK left and was outside the EU's free movement arrangement, players from the EU would not be able to sign so easily for UK football clubs.

Two thirds of European football players currently playing in this country would not meet automatic visa criteria once EU rules were swept away. Would we lose these players and the kudos and value of Premier League football as a consequence?

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THE RISE AND RISE OF BUDGET GYMS

*They've revolutionised the fitness industry and could be set to take over the market, **Tim Groves** say*



Low cost alternatives have shaken up the airline and supermarket industries, among others, in the past couple of decades and now it's the fitness industry's turn to have its foundations rocked.

The first budget gym in the UK opened eight years ago and there are now over 300 operators up and down the country, accounting for almost 10 per cent of the total number of private gyms and as many as a quarter of the members of private gyms. And it looks like the revolution has only just begun.

VALUE OF THE MARKET

The gym market in this country is estimated to be worth in excess of £4 billion and its value grew by over five per cent in 2015. As many as one in eight of us are now members of a gym and the success of the overall market is being driven by budget gyms, according to last year's State of the UK Fitness Industry Report.

According to the study, the growth in the industry continues to be driven by strong performance from the rapidly growing low cost market in the private sector. This expanding market now accounts for nine per cent of the total number of private clubs, 10 per cent of the private market value and an impressive 24 per cent of the private sector membership.

David Minton, director of The Leisure Database Company, which conducted the study, says: "The results are great news for the industry and finally we have some innovation and fresh thinking coming through. The consumer obviously appreciates the new experiences, as shown by the sharp increase in member numbers and the all-time high penetration rate."

What's on offer at a budget gym does vary depending on the company, but the concept is a simple one and its appeal to consumers is clear, with average prices of between £15 and £20 per month.

PURE GYM

Pure Gym is the market leader, with over 150 clubs and almost 800,000 members. As well as saving people money, there's no hard sell or complicated contract and it has a big advantage over others when it comes to flexibility, with most gyms

open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The company opened 48 new gyms, attracted investment from Chris Hoy and acquired LA Fitness and its 43 fitness clubs for around £70 million in 2015, leading to annual revenues of £125 million.

It's now widely expected to be floated on the stock market in the near future, with an estimated value of around £500 million, and chief executive Humphrey Cobbold doesn't think the rate of growth will be slowing anytime soon.

"Pure Gym has had an exceptional year in which we have seen a significant increase in membership of all ages, reinforcing the demand for access to affordable, flexible and high quality gyms across the country," he says.

"The acquisition of LA Fitness, the strengthening of our management team, the investment in rebranding and launching new initiatives has put us on the front foot for another successful year ahead."

THE GYM GROUP/ XERCISE4LESS

The Gym Group is also following a similar model, with around 60 clubs and 400,000 members at present, while Xercise4Less is expanding fast as well, with 36 gyms and counting and membership approaching the 300,000 mark.

All these companies lack the saunas, steam rooms, swimming pools and other frills of their competitors, but the new model is experiencing extraordinary success and Xercise4Less CEO Jon Wright thinks budget gyms will be the norm in the UK in a few years.

"Supermarkets are a great example of how the mid market has been completely squeezed," he says. "There has been a significant rise in the budget sector and the likes of Waitrose and others at the top end have done pretty well, but you don't want to be in the mid market in anything these days."

"In the United States, budget gyms are pretty much the norm and generally you wouldn't expect to pay more than \$15 per month for your gym membership. I would say the UK will be in a similar position in three to five years."

Countries like Germany and the Netherlands also have a sizeable budget gym sector, which makes up 30-40 per cent of the market.

Of course, there will always be room in the UK market for high end fitness

clubs with spa facilities, but an increasing number of people don't have the time to take advantage of these extras on a regular basis and don't want to pay for them.

POOR VALUE FOR MONEY

Wright, whose company has doubled in size every year since it started and boasted sales figures of £21.9 million in the year to July 2015, says some of the established and more expensive gym chains are not best pleased, to say the least, with the way the market is heading. But he insists the industry offered poor value for money for too long.

"I have worked in this industry for 25 years and for a long time I thought it represented poor value for money, offered poor customer service and, in my opinion, wasn't good in business terms, so I think it was an obvious market to disrupt," he says.

"Once we had the commercial property crash after 2008, that was the catalyst for people to start doing this."

Budget gyms are thriving by setting up in large sites (up to 46,000 sq ft in Xercise4Less' case) at as low cost as possible, keeping overheads such as employment costs low and being able to accommodate members in high volumes.

TREBLE IN SIZE

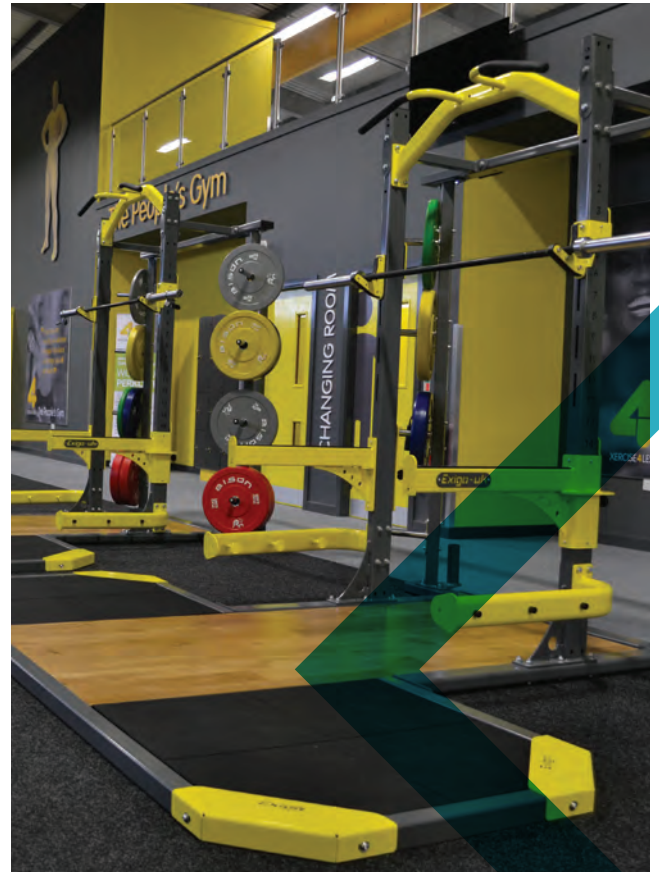
Almost nine million people are now members of well over 6,000 gyms across the UK and around 200 new facilities opened between 2014 and 2015. It's an industry on the rise and Wright says there is evidence to suggest the budget sector has the potential to treble in the coming years.

"Right now there are around 300 budget clubs across the UK as a whole and the research on the many transactions in the sector suggests that could increase to 1,000 clubs in the near future," he adds.

"We have just opened club number 36 and should be up to 50 by the end of the year. We are getting into a steady flow and would like to be opening two new gyms per month in an ideal world."

"I suspect the number of budget gyms as a proportion of the gym market as a whole in the UK will grow to well above 30 per cent."

To describe their rise as rapid would almost be an understatement and it doesn't look like slowing any time soon. Budget gyms have revolutionised the fitness industry and are not only here to stay, but could be set to take over the market.

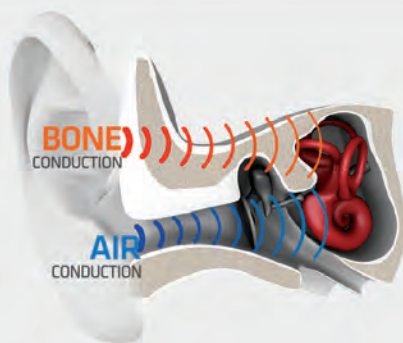




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BKFAIT



*More and more of us are cycling, whether for leisure or to get to work - opening up new revenue streams for independent sports retailers. **Louise Ramsay** gets the lowdown from Sean Deane, UK sales and operations manager at Optimum Sports*

Biking is big right now. According to the latest research from the Department for Transport, around 15 per cent of adults in the UK cycle at least once per month and about nine per cent cycle at least once a week.

Some people cycle purely for leisure, but for others bikes are becoming alternative methods of transport. Indeed, around 6.5 per cent of us now get on our bikes to get to work.

It's a trend that's spawning a dizzying array of cycle products and brands. Cutting a swathe through the market is UK outfit Optimum Sports.

MOVE INTO CYCLING

Established in 1996 in Wigan, initially as a rugby protective brand, Optimum moved into cycling in 2008, helping the brand to grow into a respected sportswear brand worldwide.

Sean Deane, UK sales and operations manager at Optimum Sports, says: "We started out in cycle protection because it made the most sense for

us. We were already experts in it and people trusted us.

"It was aimed at extreme cyclists, so we were doing things like knee supports and back protectors. It went well, but while rugby protection retails through general sports retailers, cycle protection doesn't. Instead, it sells through specialist cycle retailers, but we already had a business built up in general sports retailers, so we decided it made more sense to work with our existing clients."

The brand switched from protection to cyclewear in 2011 at The London Bike Show. "We already had 500 retailers selling Optimum rugby products, so we could just ask them to try out our cyclewear," Deane says. "Apart from a helmet, your general commuter or lifestyle cyclist doesn't need protection and it's a much bigger market. Having said that, there are

now probably more cycle retailers than there are general sports retailers, but 60 per cent of those only sell bikes, so it's not as big a market for us as it might at first appear.

"But more and more sports shops are stocking cyclewear. Retailers also have lots of respect and trust for our brand and because we have no minimum order requirements, we can supply just one product if a retailer wants to try it out. It's the advantage of us distributing directly to retailers."

Optimum does work with independent bike shops - 25 per cent of its sales are made through them - but it's not an easy market for Optimum to target.

"Lots of specialist cycle brands are distributed through wholesalers and as we're not it's quite hard to get into specialist cycle shops," Deane says. "We're not established enough as a cycle brand. But we're steadily making inroads, even though our main focus is on independent general sports retailers."

COMMUTER-LEISURE CYCLIST

Optimum's focus is on the commuter-leisure cyclist who wants good quality, functional products that are good value.

"We offers a good place for cyclists to start out and grow not just into



the sport, but also into the market," Deane says. "To start out, people are less concerned with what other people are wearing - they just need the kit - and our products last. One customer told me the other day that a jacket of ours he bought three years ago for £30 is still going strong."

SAFETY FIRST

The biggest trend in cycling is safety. "Cyclists need hi-viz clothing, which is where our Nitebrite clothing and accessories range comes in, Deane explains. "We do the whole spectrum, winter and summer, and it includes everything a cyclist needs."

"We advise retailers that they are able to stock a comprehensive cycling range with just five or six products - it isn't important to have a huge selection, just the right selection. We're aiming at commuter and leisure cyclists, so winter gloves, shorts, Nitebrite jerseys, Nitebrite rain jackets and Nitebrite winter jackets all sell well."

"We're currently working on a new extra hi-viz technology, which will result in a fabric that's three or four times brighter than anything around. And while other brands are already doing similar things, it's the way we'll incorporate the fabric into our designs that will make our products unique and attractive to consumers."

MARKET CAN ONLY GET BETTER

How does Deane see the market developing? "It can only get better," he says. "Cycling has come into its own since 2012, when Bradley Wiggins won Olympic gold. It's so much more accessible."

The government's put a lot of investment into cycling infrastructure and there are so many more non-elitist cycling events such as Sky Ride. It's a huge family bike ride around town, which is taking off in cities all around Britain. Everyone can do it - you don't need to be super fit or have a £3,000 bike.

"The rise of the electric bike is also making cycling to work more attractive and the cycle to work schemes are making buying a bike much more affordable."

"Because of cycling, the car is starting to seem a bit old fashioned. A bike gets you fit, is low stress and gets you to where you want to go. That's a pretty hard combination to resist."

"Cycling has come into its own since 2012"



The Optimum cycle range can be seen at The Cycle Show at NEC Birmingham on September 22-25 and The London Bike Show on February 16-19, 2017.



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CE

The organisers of The Running Awards 2016 in association with JustGiving are thrilled with the fantastic turnout at the third and most successful event yet



A NIGHT OF CELEBRATION AT THE 2016 RUNNING AWARDS IN ASSOCIATION WITH JUSTGIVING

The awards ceremony, which took place on Friday 22nd April at indigo at The O2 in London, was the exciting culmination of months of voting by the running community and was deemed an overwhelming success by all.

The prestigious event welcomed 450 A-list industry figures as well as

running enthusiasts from the running community, running press and fitness bloggers, all of whom witnessed the best in the industry receive the sought-after Running Awards trophies.

There is no doubt after this year's event that The Running Awards in association with JustGiving is 'the event to be seen at', and the winners of the prestigious Gold awards can be proud

of the esteem their accolade brings.

The evening started at the Intersport Sport to the People Drinks Reception for VIP and B2B guests. Running and fitness bloggers squeezed in a 6K Run with STRAVA accompanied by Mike Bushell before reaching the Reception. A sumptuous three-course dinner was then served by

Gaucha before the awards ceremony got under way.

This was the bit everyone had been waiting for. It was time to reveal the nation's favourite products, brands, publications, sports retailers, charities and events, as voted by runners themselves. Every essential running category had its place, from marathons to fun runs, online communities to apps and clothing to nutrition brands, with gold, silver and bronze medals to be awarded in each.

Two special awards were presented this year, with the first 'Innovation in Running' Award presented by Tom Williams, Chief Operating Officer at parkrun, to Ivo Gormley at Goodgym. Sam Mollaghan then accepted the first 'Inspiration in Running' Award on behalf of Sport England and England Athletics for her contribution to the This Girl Can Run campaign.

Mike Bushell was presenting the awards for the third consecutive year, and was joined on stage by special guests including Martin Yelling, Paul Evans, Susie Chan and Nell McAndrew.





RESULTS: THE 2016 RUNNING AWARDS IN ASSOCIATION WITH JUSTGIVING

Favourite Charity:
Cancer Research UK

Best Blog:
The Fat Girls' Guide To Running
Best Community:
Virtual Runner UK
Best Magazine:
Runner's World
Best Book:
parkrun – More Than Just A Run In The Park

PRODUCTS
Best App: Strava
Best Headphones:
Yurbuds Inspire Pro Earphones
Best Nutrition Brand:
SiS
Best Sports Drink:
Lucozade Sport
Best Well-Being Brand:
Clif Bar
Best Wearable Technology:
Garmin Forerunner 220
Best Wearable Tech Brand:
Garmin

SHOES AND CLOTHING
Best Men's Clothing: adidas
Best Women's Clothing: Nike
Best Men's Shoe:
Brooks Adrenaline GTS
Best Women's Shoe:
Brooks Adrenaline GTS
Best Trail Shoe:
Salomon Speedcross
Best Shoe Brand:
ASICS
Best Women's Sports Bra:
Shock Absorber – Ultimate Run Bra
Best Accessory:
Event Clip
Best Underwear and Socks:
Hilly

RETAILERS
Best Independent Retailer:
Run4It
Best National Retailer:
Sweatshop
Best Online Retailer:
Wiggle
Best Customer Service:
Run4It

RACES
Best Marathon:
Virgin Money London Marathon
Best Half Marathon:
Ealing Half Marathon
Best 10K:
Southport Mad Dog Seaside 10K
Best Charity Event:
Race for Life
Best Endurance Race:
Dixons Carphone Race to the Stones
Best Event Series:
parkrun
Best Fun Run:
Rock 'n' Roll Liverpool 5K
Best International Event:
Uganda Marathon
Best New Event:
Hope24
Best Obstacle Race:
Wolf Run – Winter Wolf
Best Trail Event:
Hope24
Best Triathlon:
IRONMAN UK

The full results are available at: <http://therunningawards.com>.

Official partners of The Running Awards 2016 were **JustGiving**, **INTERSPORT**, **England Athletics**, **Strava**, **Eventbrite**, **Pic2Go** and **Sports Insight**.

Paul Corrick, co-founder of The Running Awards, commented: “The 2016 Running Awards in association with JustGiving have been fantastic and we are delighted to have hosted such a successful, high profile event for the third year running. It is inspirational to see so many big names from the running industry together under one roof to celebrate the achievements of industry favourites. We would like to thank the thousands of runners who voted and everyone who has supported the awards. It was a truly memorable night and many congratulations to our deserving winners and finalists.”



FIGHTING TALK



There's more to fightwear than the fight market, Fighters Inc director Paul Alderson says. And there's no better way to prove it than with urban fightwear brand Kraken. **Louise Ramsay** reports

Boxing gloves, silky shorts and headguards. And, of course, those ubiquitous thick cotton jackets that tie up round the waist. It's easy to think that's all there is to fightwear - and no one would be interested in it unless they enjoyed combat sports. But according to Fighters Inc director Paul Alderson, nothing could be further from the truth.

There's no doubt Alderson knows about fighting. He not only represented Great Britain in karate between the ages of 17 and 26, he also held the world open weight karate title in 1996.

But for him, winning was about more than just knowing how to land a good strike. As in most sports, it was about hard work and good preparation too, skills he's put to good use in the world of business.

BUSINESS FOUNDED IN 1997

Alderson and Joe Long set up Fighters Inc in 1997, working primarily as a sports marketing agency specialising in combat and strength-based sporting genres.

Alderson says: "We work with brands, media and promoters who want to actively target markets such as fightsports, martial arts, power sports and functional fitness. We started by producing a range of innovative events and exhibitions to help develop the fightsports sector and recently we have launched the CombatANDStrength.com store to distribute some of the products we now represent and promote."

KRAKEN BRAND

One of the brands Fighters Inc has just started to work with is French-made fightwear brand Kraken. The ultimate in urban cool, it has its origins in Brazilian

jiu jitsu and mixed martial arts.

"It had no traction in the UK, but we found the product so unique and to have so much potential, we were really keen to take it on," Alderson says. "One of its main strengths is that it has appeal not just in the fight market, but also outside of it. It transcends MMA and martial arts in that its quality is borne out of fightsports apparel, but it exists as urban sports and fitnesswear too."

"The feedback we get from our buyers and sponsored athletes is fantastic and non-stop. It's refreshing to see disciplines such as parkour and functional fitness wearing the brand too."

Kraken produces a range of fightwear as well as lifestyle products. "I think outside of fightwear, all of it has a wide appeal," Alderson explains. "The hoodies and t-shirts are silicone printed and half the range is made as fitted garments, which is getting people talking. There's a female range being developed too, which is launching this year."

"The problem is that unless retailers are already dealing in the fight market, they might not be aware of the amazing quality and competitiveness of the brand at the high end of the sector. Kraken not only has the quality, but because of its identity also appeals outside of fightsports."

"Kraken not only has the quality, but because of its identity, also appeals outside of fightsports"





SENI COMBAT & STRENGTH SHOW

Kraken is one of the sponsors of the SENI Combat and Strength Show, which takes place at The O2 in London on July 16-17.

"It'll be a great opportunity for retailers to pop down to take a look at the action and the range," Paul Alderson says. "The show is the original exhibition for combat sports, which we first launched at the NEC in 1999. It moved to ExCeL in 2007 and then in 2014 to The O2. We work with a network of the best people in their fields to put on a large array of live events across two days."

This year sees a huge amount of activity - far too much to talk about here, or even try out on the day, but the highlights are truly tempting.

"There's a first UK show by Viacom's Bellator MMA, as well as the first Giants Live amateur strongman competition across all weights," Alderson says.



DEVELOPING MARKET

Fighters Inc isn't the first company to think about selling fightwear outside of the fight world. "adidas has developed boxing and taekwondo trainingwear and training kit," Alderson says. "Reebok is also working with the fight fitness concept, which is proving to be highly successful in gyms nationwide."

"Lonsdale is the brand people traditionally associate with boxing, but adidas has done a fantastic job of developing a strong martial arts and fightsports range of gloves and fight apparel. Because of its sponsorship associations, it has credibility in the sector, which is hard to achieve as a mainstream sports brand because fighters like to wear niche fightwear."

Kappa is another brand that's moving into the fightwear market with judo and karate apparel. Alderson adds: "They've seen how well adidas has

developed, though it'll be a while before they can compete because they have to first generate the right publicity."

SALES POTENTIAL

In terms of the fight market, things are looking good.

"MMA and boxing are seeing good growth in terms of spectators and participation at all levels of martial arts has always been high," Alderson says.

"The diversity of martial arts is its key. Dance is the closest comparison I can make, not just because of the range of styles and disciplines, but also because there's something for everyone."

"There are no barriers, but sometimes that diversity can be a hindrance. The sport is so wide ranging that sports retailers can't even attempt to try to cover all martial sports, so they just carry protection. Kraken is the brand that can bridge that gap."



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Improve your email campaigns



Expert advice from
Dave Howell

1 ENHANCE THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

The emails you send to customers should be one component of an integrated marketing campaign that supports your brand. The connections you make through email should reinforce marketing messages, but should also aid customer service. If you can make your emails relevant and engaging, this will vastly improve open rates and click through transactions.

2 BETTER EMAIL DESIGN

Emails need attractive design to prompt recipients to open them. HTML emails are now widely used. Various applications can be used to create them, including the Adobe Creative Cloud suite. Thousands of templates are also available from vendors such as ThemeForest, while a range of templates are built into services such as Campaign Monitor and MailChimp. Other services include Inkbrush, AWeber, Constant Contact and iContact.

Clarity and engagement should be your watchwords when creating marketing emails. Use images and video, but don't forget their purpose. Emails are likely to be viewed on smartphones, so design them to look good on smaller screens.

3 MULTIPLE DEVICES, MULTIPLE PLATFORMS

There will always be a small percentage of recipients who won't be able to open your messages, but you can minimise this by having options such as text only

versions of your emails.

According to the latest study from market research company Litmus, the iPhone email client has the largest market share at 33 per cent, Gmail has 15 per cent, the iPad 12 per cent, Android 10 per cent and Microsoft Outlook six per cent. Your emails should open on all these services.

4 CREATE VIRAL MESSAGES

Viral is a term often associated with social media content that's been shared an unusual number of times. Viral emails are also possible to create and can lead to a welcome boost in sales.

According to Litmus, 'forwards' expand the reach of your messages and generate additional conversions, but they have significant meaning beyond that. They're a powerful indication of the overall health of an email marketing campaign, because they show you're fulfilling subscribers' needs at the highest level.

There is no secret formula that will result in an email going viral, but you can increase your chances by making your messages highly targeted to specific groups. Making your message strong and clear with a prominent call to action are essential components of viral emails.

5 WRITE GREAT SUBJECT LINES

Grabbing the attention of a recipient with a subject line is vital. Matching the subject line to the content of the email is also important. If the message includes offers or discounts, say so in the subject line. If there is a specific benefit to the audience, make this very clear.



IN NUMBERS

33%

of all emails opened in 2015 were opened on an iPhone.

75%

of Gmail users access their email accounts on mobile devices.

25%

Email marketing was the key driver of Black Friday purchases, with 25 per cent of sales coming from this channel.

8X

Transactional emails are opened eight times more than other types of message, with these emails generating six times more revenue.

26%

more marketing emails are opened when the message is personalised.

40X

Email is 40 times more effective at acquiring new customers than Twitter or Facebook.

Sources: Litmus, TechCrunch, Custora, Campaign Monitor, Experian, McKinsey.

Urgency or scarcity can be powerful motivators. The call to act to receive a specific offer or meet a deadline for a limited quantity of products are all great ways to get your message to go viral.

Make your subject lines as concise as possible. Around 50 characters or seven words has proven to be the most effective.

6 PERSONALISE MESSAGES

Making a personal connection with customers is important. The emails you send should have a level of personalisation, but in an age of phishing, identity theft and cybercrime, consumers have become wary of emails addressed directly to them. However, personalisation doesn't have to mean using a customer's name. Using location can also be effective.

Segmenting your customers into groups and sending them targeted emails makes them personal to that group. Think about the messages you want to send

and the group who would find them most beneficial. Use customer profiling to understand these groups and ensure each message speaks directly to them.

7 SEND YOUR MESSAGES AT THE RIGHT TIME

They say timing is everything. This is certainly the case when choosing when to send your emails. A study by MailChimp found that Tuesday and Thursday sees the highest volumes of email traffic, so avoiding these days will give your message more of a chance of standing out from the crowd.

The beginning of the day (9am-10am) and evenings (6pm, with a spike around 8pm) tend to yield the best open and click through results. It's also important to get your message opened as soon as it's delivered. Delays tend to mean a big drop-off in open rates and action being taken, so make your subject lines irresistible.

8 CALL TO ACTION

Emails without a strong and clear call to action may as well not be sent. After an engaging subject line and attractive content, a call to action is vital. Often this will be a 'click here' button to take the recipient to a landing page on your website.

Don't wait until the end of your message. Use a call to action throughout the email to keep prompting the reader to act. Don't confuse messages with different calls to action. Focus on one and wrap your email around the action you want your customer to take. Use trigger words such as 'shop now', 'buy', 'download' and 'save now' to get your customers tapping or clicking the link.

9 RESPONSIVE DESIGN

To ensure your emails open as you expect on mobile devices, aim for a maximum width of 600 pixels. Apple recommends buttons should be no smaller than 44x44 pixels. Single columns that contain body text and other content will ensure the majority of your message will be instantly visible.

Place all calls to action towards the top of your message, so even if resized they will still be seen. Avoid lengthy pages that require lots of scrolling, as this doesn't translate well when viewed on mobile devices.

10 DON'T FORGET THE LANDING PAGE

Often overlooked, the landing page your emails link to is arguably the most important component of your campaign. According to marketing specialist MarketingSherpa, landing pages are effective for 94 per cent of all companies in the business-to-consumer and business-to-business markets.

Your landing pages should focus on the products you're promoting. Lots of white space keeps the page uncluttered and enables you to use bold images and other graphics. Make it obvious what your offer is and how the visitor can obtain it. The landing page should reinforce the content of the email you sent.



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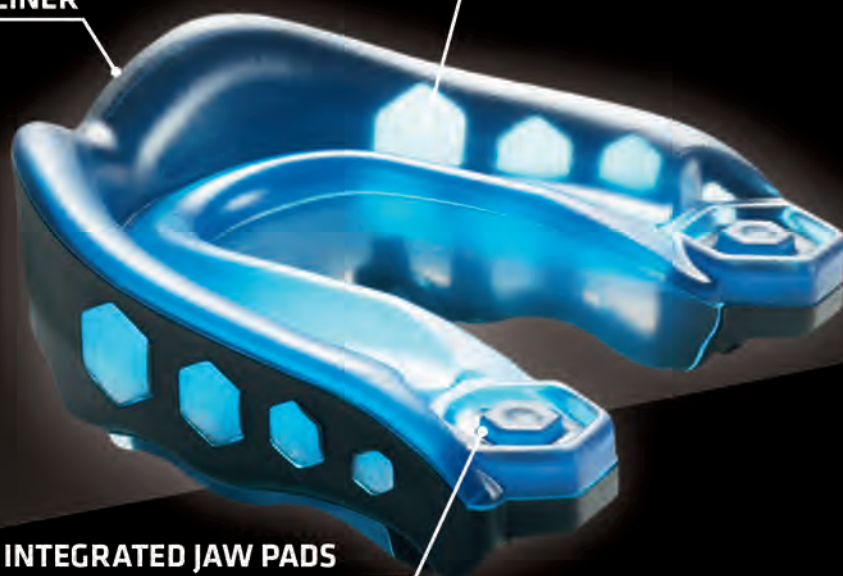
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*“The nearest
I got to a
holiday last
year was a
day in IKEA
with my wife”*

UNDER THE COUNTER

You can tell the holiday season's started when the sun gets high enough in the sky to shine through the cobwebs in the stockroom window and leaflets for cheap cruises to Orkney outnumber final demands in the Premier Sports letter box.

Both situations occurred last week, followed, as always, by someone coming into the shop and saying: "It must be great being your own boss - just taking off to the Seychelles or somewhere whenever you like."

Just where the idea came from that working for yourself is one long holiday and if you're not actually on the beach in the Maldives you're keeping your jabs up to date for a fortnight in St Lucia, I can't imagine.

TIRESOME OFFENDER

My neighbour, whose job in a council rates and valuation office would have me bleeding from the eyes and ears within an hour, is one of the most tiresome offenders. He's forced to take six weeks holiday whether he likes it or not and has just returned orange faced and wild eyed with diarrhoea from a cut-price idyll in Lombok.

"I suppose you'll be off on your travels soon," he shouted over the fence, as he gave me the postcard he had been too mean to mail. "It's all right for some."

Oh yes? The nearest I got to a holiday last year was a day in IKEA with my wife, Doreen, looking for a walnut veneer corner unit for the lounge and half a day taking the cat to be spayed.

Previous time off, a horse drawn caravan trip through rural Ireland, ended on the second day when the horse went berserk and galloped with the caravan and two screaming children into the sea outside Wicklow.

The one before that ended equally unexpectedly when a package hotel in Tunis was raided by police at 3am and turned out to be a thriving brothel. A fact that, for some reason, had not been mentioned in the brochure.

It's comforting to find I'm not the only one to feel let down by foreign travel. Some recent letters of complaint to Thomas Cook included: 'No one told us there would be fish in the sea - the children were startled', 'The sand on the beach was whiter than in the brochure' and 'In India, we were disgusted to find almost every restaurant served curry'.

Of course, there's a serious point to all this, which is if you leave someone else in charge of your business for any length of time, don't be too surprised if something awful happens.

For instance, my cousin Pullings, a self-employed timber merchant, once returned from a week playing flat green bowls in Skegness to find someone had stolen the trees he intended to sell to pay for the holiday. You would have thought someone would have noticed robbers walking off with trees, but apparently not.

I once returned lightly tanned and reasonably optimistic from a few days in Llandudno to find a water pipe had burst and ruined three boxes of badminton shoes. My assistant, Norman, had heard the noise of rushing water, but assumed his tinnitus was playing up.

There was also a letter from revenue and customs casting serious doubt on my tax returns and a bill from the vet for the dog's pacemaker.

Like me, Norman has never been particularly interested in seeing faraway places with strange sounding names. Last year his wife, Enid, arranged a holiday to a destination Norman only knew as 'Abroad'. He was relieved to find it was the Norfolk Broads.

TAKING A BREAK

Now Norman, who's idea of a good holiday is to spend a week in his shed repainting his garden gnomes in the away strip of Aston Villa, is trying to persuade me to take some time off this summer.

"You need a break, boss," was the official reason, but I've a feeling the dates he's suggesting coincide with the annual visit to the shop of the women's skittles league to try on their new sweatshirts.

Doreen has hinted we could join her sister and husband on a coach tour of Portuguese aromatherapy centres, but my feeling is it would be wise not to go too far afield this year as I'm still waiting for a date for my allergy test after a nasty experience with some pickled eggs.

At the same time, I reckon I do deserve a break and the local garden centre has a set of gnomes I think would look super in the colours of the now legendary Leicester City.

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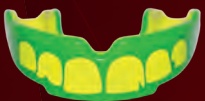


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