

FITNESS PROPOSITION

Right and far right: Those who want personalised attention and an integrated health programme in a six-star environment can now tap their membership cards at Gravity, Fitness First's first upmarket fitness-focused private club concept. Below: Active Hive's Minus Calories is a 30-minute programme where participants exercise on an elliptical which is kitted out with infrared light and ionised air, to enhance the workout for the individual



Upping the fitness game

Some gyms are providing niche experiences for their members, from executives who want a more integrated concept to seniors who need equipment specially catered to them.

By Cheah Ui-Hoon

UNFIT Singapore residents are fast running out of excuses not to exercise as fitness centres up their game with new services to cater to almost every need. From aerial yoga to muay thai, Cross-fit to gyrotics, fitness providers see a growing demand for niche services beyond the basic weights and elliptical trainers set-up.

Based on a 2011 National Sports Survey, 42 per cent of Singaporeans engage in exercise at least once a week, which adds up to a growing demand for gym memberships and bespoke services.

Those who want personalised attention and an integrated health programme in a six-star environment can now tap their membership cards at Gravity, Fitness First's first upmarket fitness-focused private club concept. Seniors who are 55 years old and above can now also find centres with equipment catering specially to their capabilities.

As Simon Flint, CEO of Fitness First Asia, points out, Singapore is a regional hub for innovation. "The market expects it, and is used to it," he says, explaining why the fitness company chose Singapore to launch Gravity, where members are charged a one-time fee of S\$3,000 and pay S\$600 a month.

"We wanted our first venture here because Singapore has a concentration of senior executives. We've got a good footprint here, and the market was asking for it," he adds, noting also that given the proliferation of other fitness choices in Singapore – some of which are very specialised – people are constantly looking for innovation.

After fine-tuning the concept in Singapore, the company will target a similar demographic in other cities such as Hong Kong and London.

Gravity hopes to provide a variety of niche experiences all under one roof but its key differentiating points are how the two-storey space on the 38th and 39th floors of CapitaGreen Building integrate private club facilities like a meeting room with video-conferencing capability with the gym, and also integrate physical fitness with holistic wellness solutions.



"We need to stay relevant and current," says Mr Flint about Gravity's standards and quality of experience.

Staying relevant is also what gyms like Innervate and Active Hive are doing. While Innervate is broadening their client base by designing Cross-fit activities for children and seniors, boutique outfits like Active Hive are targeting a very specific market with just one machine, but providing a holistic way to health.

"We've a big emphasis on family, which is why we have a kids programme and the Silver programme," says Innervate co-founder Moses James. Participants go through a range of activities and work out in groups, once they go through the basic course. "Cross-fit is about functional movement, which is why it's very good for both age groups," he adds.

Active Hive meanwhile is banking on technology to speed up weight loss and help clients take their first step towards higher impact activity once they reduce their weight. "What our machine does is to burn 500 calories in half an hour, instead of spending hours at the gym for

the same result," says co-founder Agnes Tay. Minus Calories is a 30-minute programme where participants exercise on an elliptical which is kitted out with infrared light and ionised air, to enhance the workout for the individual. "Besides the programme for members, Active Hive also offers super food and juices at its centre because the whole idea is healthy living and losing weight healthily," says Ms Tay.

The best fitness proposition that Singapore is seeing this year though are the active centres for seniors above 55 years old. One of them is the S\$2.2 million Gym Tonic project launched by the Lien Foundation involving 13 centres with more than 2,000 senior citizens. Pacific Healthcare has also launched five senior activity centres – some with gyms – and another seven more this year.

The Gym Tonic project uses HUR strength training equipment from Finland – pneumatic gym machines that provide customised health training – and are also equipped with smart IT systems that capture data. Gym Tonic is led by local aged-care IT & technology company, PulseSync, and backed by research by Finnish university Korkkola and interRAI, an international healthcare assessment system.

"With the data we've captured in our pilot programme last year, we can do a bit of benchmarking," explains Ken Tan, founder and managing director of PulseSync. "Then we have an idea of the potential of the elderly and what kind of intervention we need for them to reach it."

Gym Tonic's approach is to use exercise as "medicine" – which is a sound philosophy as prevention is definitely better than cure.

Exercise and fitness continue to be a healthy proposition, with rosy economic prospects as well. "In Singapore, the gym membership penetration is at 6 per cent compared to the 16 per cent in Europe – so there's still room to grow," concludes Gravity's Mr Flint.

Find out more at gravityclub.com, innervatecrossfit.com, activehive.co/about.html, and gymtonic.sg.



Private club-gym

HIGHLY personalised and holistic – that's what Gravity wants to be. Singapore, with its pool of high powered executives, is where the company is rolling out its top-of-the-range fitness and private club concept, as a prototype for other cities in the world.

"It's a new brand meant to address the needs of members who are looking for quality integrated programme between fitness and wellness," says Simon Flint, CEO of Fitness First Asia.

Gravity was developed from a survey of 2,500 senior executives in Fitness First's membership base. "Ninety five per cent of the respondents told us that they were interested to explore more exclusive propositions. They'd be willing to pay a premium for personalised fitness and healthcare," he says.

The US\$9 million club and gym is designed like a private club, with private working spaces, meeting room, top-of-the-line equipment and experienced trainers. It also provides its members access to a suite of wellness practitioners like nutritionists and craniosacral therapists.

"It's about peak performance for the executive who wants to get the most out of every day, and the way we've designed the space is to give it an intimate feel, even for group exercises," says Mr Flint. The aerial yoga classes will be held next to the infinity lap pool group classes, where there are also some equipment for those training for a triathlon.

"We've really paid attention to extra details, even to the extent of creating our own signature scent and providing Ayurveda-based toiletries, so that there's a six-star hotel standard environment," he adds.

A restaurant on the top floor of the building, with views of Marina Bay and serving healthy Mediterranean cuisine, will further cater to members to have healthy cuisine or meetings with guests when it opens in October.

Members pay a joining fee of S\$3,000 and S\$600 in monthly fees, but membership will be capped at 999, Mr Flint explains, so that personal attention isn't compromised.

Why does he think Gravity will be a success in Singapore? "We believe that the people who will be our members are competitive by nature ... so we'll also be designing personal challenges for them to achieve their goals or to see where they stand in their peer group. It's about engaging members," he notes.

To indicate how serious Gravity is about personal wellness, it has even tied up with a health services provider, Sprim, to conduct trials and tests, and to publish its findings based on member participation of specific trials and outcomes.

"We want to be an incubator of new technology and fitness methodology; such cutting-edge developments will then be shared with the Fitness First brand which may in turn have the effect of elevating the standards of the industry as a whole," concludes Mr Flint.

Gravity is located at CapitaGreen, with access via a private lift. For more information go to gravityclub.com

Helping the elderly stay active



A DIFFERENT FOCUS

Above: The Gym Tonic project by Lien Foundation involves over 2,000 seniors in 13 centres – helping to design appropriate exercise protocols and benchmarks for them. The project targets those who are frail and idle, and those with high risk of falls. Left: Pacific Healthcare, which runs Pacific Activity Centres for seniors, aims to encourage them to stay functional and independent, and engaged with the community

AS the population ages, some private gyms are gearing up to serve a growing clientele who can no longer bench press or go for high-intensity spinning classes.

Innervate is run by the same people behind CrossFit Singapore, one of the pioneering CrossFit centres in Singapore. But co-owner Moses James says he and his partners set up Innervate to target the over-55 demographic as the strength and conditioning programmes are tailored for participants' capabilities.

"We had to set up Innervate because the training focus is different, even though the coaching and exercises are the same. Over here, the emphasis is on rehabilitation and strength building, and injury prevention," says Mr James.

Besides general CrossFit, there is CrossFit Defence, CrossFit kids/teens and CrossFit Silvers.

Elsewhere, there are community-based programmes such as the Gym Tonic project by Lien Foundation. It involves over 2,000 seniors in 13 centres – helping to design appropriate exercise protocols and benchmarks for them.

The project targets those who are frail and idle, and those with high risk of falls, says Ken Tan, one of Gym Tonic's project leaders. "We put these three groups of elderly to exercise, and track their progress with technology – looking at muscle strength and balance. The reason we focus on strength training is that it gives the fastest outcome and result," he explains, adding that motor skills and nutrition will subsequently be looked at.

Another project by Pacific Healthcare aims to encourage ageing in place, by helping them stay functional and independent, and engaged with the community.

There are five Pacific Activity Centres for seniors, with another seven under renovation, at the new HDB flats from Woodlands to Choa Chu Kang. Each centre has its own community-based programmes, and most will also include the HUR machine from Finland. The HUR machine is a revolutionising machine-based exercise because it uses compressed air instead of deadweights, and can therefore be tailored to the individual's capabilities.

The project is to support ageing-in-place as it serves those who have downsized to studio apartments," explains Kelvin Ng, vice president of Pacific Healthcare's Eldercare Services.

Pacific Activity Centres were set up with consultation from the community, he stresses, so that each centre will provide programmes that the residents want. They pay only S\$10 a year, and the centre earns income through the rent of 45 per cent of its space to health-related commercial services like chiropractic or TCM clinics.

Mr Tan points out that this is a concept that has been around for a decade, but previously, only at rented HDB flats and run by Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs). Now, it is serving the studio apartments which house seniors who have downsized but are still financially independent. Each centre would serve about 50 studio apartments, he adds.

"While the government hasn't given us subsidies, our rent is lower and 55 per cent of it must be for non-commercial activities," says Mr Tan.

Understanding that the elderly need a different fitness approach is an important first step – all in the realisation that active ageing is the only way for the future.

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