

## December 2020 – Newsletter #2

### Welcome to issue 2 of the Independent Gyms Newsletter!

What a difference a year makes, on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019 we held the very first conference dedicated to Independent Gyms and Studios, hosting 55 gym owners, 5 speakers and 7 leading suppliers as part of an awesome day of support, networking and discussions and raising over £1400 for charity.



Fast forward 12 months and the industry has taken more than its fair share of blows, spending much of the year in lockdown, working via Zoom, being open, closed, open, closed, open.... The lead up to last year's conference caused possibly the most stress, nerves and worry I've ever experienced, topped off with the need to stand in front of you all and open the conference, for someone with a fear of public speaking this was not easy! However, it also gave me a HUGE appetite to build on the success of that day and really start work on growing the level support provided to Independent Fitness facilities.

I'll be announcing more throughout December but for now the next conference is booked for Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2021! This time last year we sat at 732 members, we now sit at 1700 members and by the time May comes round I think we'll be passed 2000 members, assuming we'll be out of the grip of Covid come May, we're making plans for 150 gym owners to come together for another fantastic day!




November 2020 felt odd to me, the work our industry put in throughout lockdown 1.0 to prove our value to society and the NHS, along with our ability to remain Covid secure seemed to be simply brushed aside as part of lockdown 2.0. At first glance this seemed accepted until the number of 'essential' shops allowed to remain open became apparent. I won't lie, I've hit up B&Q 4 times in the last 2 weeks but none of those trips were truly essential, yet in the same two weeks I've only trained once at home and now feel slow and lethargic as a result. The double standards around sectors that can open seem to have driven a wedge into the fitness industry and the dilemma about whether to accept the closure or fight back and remain open faced us all. Whatever you chose to do as an owner, I hope we can start to reunite as an industry and continue to prove our worth once again!

As you read this newsletter, gyms in England have reopened, gyms in parts of Scotland are closed, gyms in Northern Ireland are closed for a few more days and gym in Wales are going strong! With a Covid vaccine now officially approved, I don't know about you but I'm starting to feel cautiously optimistic about what 2021 will bring!

### Coming Soon

I'll keep this brief for now but all I will say is its exciting times to come, the group research confirmed my thoughts and its now full steam ahead with developing the support around the group. Many conversations have been had and the fruits of these conversations will be revealed in the run up to January 1<sup>st</sup> Watch out for updates through December

## Community Stats – November 2020

Highlights	Top Contributors	Top Posts
 <b>1,726 Members</b> +65 in November	<b>#1</b> <b>Christopher Kirby</b>	<b>#1</b> <b>Alex Lowndes</b> Who's staying open or closing through lockdown 2.0?
 <b>260 Posts</b>	<b>#2</b> <b>Julie Barber</b>	<b>#2</b> <b>Clare Bayley</b> How to best develop an under utilised studio space
 <b>3,053 comments</b>	<b>#3</b> <b>Dan Morris</b>	<b>#3</b> <b>Dave Alstead</b> Updates on tier 3 restrictions as we move out of lockdown 2.0

## Survey Insight – Thank You!

Thank you to all those who completed the survey, I'll be dropping the highlights of the findings into the group throughout December but it's provided some really useful insights into the mix of facility and membership types, current struggles and future hopes. I'm already looking forward to repeating the survey towards the end of 2021 to see how the industry has developed for Independent Fitness facilities post Covid.

I did say that I'd be making a donation to MIND of £1 for every completed survey, I'm pleased to confirm I've donated £102 earlier this week via the just giving link [HERE](#). Throughout lockdown 2.0, gyms across the UK expressed concern over the mental health of their members, whilst that didn't quite persuade Boris to reopen our sector, the collective noise definitely helped in the recent parliamentary debate. I think it would be a huge statement to make if we made a collective effort to raise funds for MIND so I've left the page open and encourage you all to help if you can.

## Misfits Offer for Independent Gyms – 30% OFF EVERYTHING

# MISFITS

I hinted at some great value protein bars in the week: Misfits are an independently owned business with a range of plant-powered supplements. Some of you may have tried their bars already, I've had my share of samples over the last month and can confirm they taste great! Misfit launched earlier this year and are stocked in gyms and health shops across the UK. They are an alternative to traditional whey based protein bars, offering a delicious vegan option. They are the perfect snack to sell to your members offering a functional protein boost pre or post workout.

Misfits want to support Independent Gyms as we come out of lockdown 2.0 and head into the new year, they have 8 flavours of bars and are offering **30% OFF THE FULL RANGE** until 15<sup>th</sup> December. Head over to [www.misfits.health](http://www.misfits.health) and use code **INDYXMAS30** at checkout!

It's a great time to stock up on protein bars for the studio especially with January around the corner. We love the team at Misfits and can't wait to continue working together in 2021. Watch this space!"

## Get to know: Rob Harris @ Progress Gym



### Q: Tell us more about Progress Gym and how the gym came about?

Like many gym owners, I fell in love with training at a young age - the physical results, the confidence it gave me and the people I met changed me. This passion led me to study for a BSc and an MSc and subsequently my PT qualification so I could carry out my desire to share the impact of weight training. I then spent 6 years working as a self-employed PT within Fitness First, in the Midlands. Over time my frustrations grew around various aspects of Fitness First and other gyms, such as equipment being out of order for long periods, no influence on the type of kit in the clubs, clients generally being ignored or even just the wrong music for the environment. I thought to myself: "I reckon I could have a go at doing better myself" and started working on setting up own gym, after a period of time I decided it made much more sense to take over another gym instead. I looked at 6 gyms which led me to buying the equipment and memberships off an existing gym. I really liked the range of equipment it had including multiple leg presses, 3 Squat Racks and heavy dumbbells. This meant I didn't need to spend much on equipment in the early days, therefore I could focus on the Members experience and general décor to improve the gym. We opened as Progress Gym on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2010 and celebrate our 10 year anniversary in a matter of days. We now have two facilities, within 20 metres of each other – Progress Gym and Progress Performance, for Olympic lifting, Powerlifting, functional training and group exercise

### Q: Are you members only gym or PAYG or both?

We have a range of options. We try to not make it difficult for people to choose to spend their money with us! They range from day passes to a year up front, student, DD or card, contract, or month to month, however we have recently streamlined and merged some memberships into our 'Progress Concession' membership (Student, Off Peak, Senior, Corporate etc. I was fairly reserved with pricing for the first 6 years, perhaps not confident in where our value sat, but since reading books by Thomas Plummer it gave me clarity around pricing and we increased our fees to what we know is a fair reflection of the service we offer. We currently sit at about 850 members with only 5-10% not paying via direct debit.

### Q: How did you respond when lockdown 1.0 kicked in?

We immediately made communication with our Members a priority with, daily social media communications, simple Instagram workouts and weekly Member emails. Once it became clear we could open our Gym Shop we used that as a Covid friendly touchpoint for those who wanted to purchase supplements or even drop by for a take away coffee. We had time to finish off our 1000sq ft mezzanine in the main gym, we refurbished machines that were tired and deep cleaned whilst the gym was empty. Initially, I was hesitant to take the grant money or bounce back loans but my accountant was pretty insistent and I'm glad I took her advice, the grant money was used in the gym, but I've kept back 20% for the tax payable on it.

### Q: Have you done anything different in Lockdown 2.0?

Second time round less than 1% of Members have cancelled- a finite end date definitely helped that. The work we put in through the first lockdown meant we had a lot less to do in terms of refurbishes or maintenance. A few months in to being a gym owner I read the book 'The E Myth', by Michael Gerber, which talks around the premise of how business owners get caught up *working in the business but not on the business*. We were spinning plates in terms of procedures and policies in the gym so this time we focused on work behind the scenes to help allow the business to run better. From a practical perspective we had a more organised online class timetable including various workouts like mobility, circuits and spin. We looked at the class stats and offered bikes to the Members who historically took part in the most spin classes, there was no charge other than them keeping their membership live.

**Q: Have you made any changes to your business model as a result of lockdown and Covid?**

We're now considering a dedicated online membership for those Members and non-members that are not comfortable coming back, or heading straight into a gym with no exercise history. This will revolve more around accountability in the first instance but hopefully engages new visitors that will upgrade to a full gym membership in the future. Other than that, we've not changed the gym model in essence but we've bolted on logistical procedures for the short term such as maximum capacity, a booking system for all workouts and enhanced cleaning and hygiene. The booking system has proven useful in that our members generally found that booking sessions ahead meant that they were conscious of sticking to the booking.

We are launching a dedicated small group training via Progress Performance in January 2021, one of our team members has worked in Kuwait and London offering SGPT and has the skillset to make this work for us. He will be heading up the January launch, focusing on groups of 2-4. This product will deliver programmed and structure content. Instead of it simply being another class. Initially, this will be for current Members, with capped numbers so we can deliver a premium experience.

**Q: What are the biggest challenges to your gym at the moment?**

In a strange way I believe that's me. I feel I'm playing catch up on the more business focused skillset and experience, we now have 16 team members who need support and attention. My knowledge around the product itself is high but I'm working improve my knowledge of HR and mentorship to develop the team and push the business on. I have been relentlessly reading about mindset, appraisals, empathy etc.

Organisational development is also on my agenda, I have no problem coming up with ideas but bringing them to fruition isn't easy so I'll be taking time to work on procedures to make the business run smoothly. I have an awesome team at Progress and couldn't be happier although I sometimes wonder if they are mugging me off with their enthusiasm! I really am fortunate to have so many enthusiastic fitness advocates onboard that are able to 'pass the magic' to our Members.

**Q: Favourite Part of Being a Gym Owner?**

For me it is all about being able to help people be healthy and happier. What a wonderful 'product' us gym owners are able to stand in front of. We send people back out to take on the world, stronger, healthier, energised and at the same time more relaxed and de-stressed. Fitness, done properly, has no negative side effects. Through fitness we can help our Members and the wider population achieve their hopes, dreams and goals. This also extends out to seeing someone with no exercise history being introduced to movement. Many times, the last exercise someone did was PE at school 40/50 years earlier. Seeing the light go on in someone's mind about what they can do once they get started is amazing!

**Q: Least Favourite Part of Being a Gym Owner?**

Paying VAT is just frustrating. We are more than happy to contribute tax towards the economy but the impact we can have on the health of the nation should speak volumes to the government. Nationwide incentives and support should be made available to encourage more people to be active and healthy. Ironically, our VAT bill could pay the wages of two more team members who would then go on to help motivate even more people.

Other than that, it's the occasional dropped dumbbell.... We have been proactive on the gym floor from day one so we don't really have too many issues around or damaged equipment.

**Q: Who do you look up to for inspiration, guidance, mentorship in the industry?**

More recently, Thomas Plummer has been a huge influence for me. He has written some of the most impactful books around The Business of Fitness, providing valid and important information. He is super intelligent and invested. it's surprising how long it took me to find out about him or how many other gym owners still don't know about him. Around 'hands on' education I've got a lot of time for Andy McKenzie of Combined Strength, along with Dan John who just keeps it simple around training. Mark Cole has been a big influence on the PTs who work inside Progress.

**Continues on page 5....**

I've also become a big fan of The Fitness Business Podcast, it's over 320 episodes deep now. I only found it in June this year and after one episode I had to go right back to the very first one and listen to them all! That podcast has cost me a small fortune in book recommendations.

I've looked for a business mentor and spoke to a few, including Nick Mitchell and Mark Coles, for their ideas to no avail. It's beginning to look like it's more so business mentorship I'd be looking for and luckily I've found that in a good friend who I use as a sounding board each month.

**Q: How do you see Digital platforms influencing the fitness industry in the coming years?**

I can see two areas of development around digital moving forward, nutritional accountability will be one, tracking macros, calories and general movement or steps seem forefront at the moment so devices and platforms to facilitate online or remote personal training will become more apparent. Then with the huge increase in home equipment as a result of lockdown, I can see more people being open to training at home, whether that is as their only method of exercise or as an addition to the gym in a blended model of membership. The right platforms for delivering those home workouts via the gym will be key.

**Q: Where do you see the fitness industry heading in the coming years?**

We need to become more of a priority to those looking in from the outside. We have to be at the forefront of strengthening and enhancing the health of the nation, we were close to a breakthrough at points through lockdown but government fell back into their previous lack of understanding. Medication is needed to help people, so it would seem, but we can improve and maintain the underpinning health and fitness. This all carries over to people's relationships and productivity in the future. We also have a massive issue with the government and their reliance on BMI as a measure. We're fat, not 'over weight' and need to talk about the issue instead of beating around it. We sugar coat obesity which in the end we all pay for in higher taxes to cover the burden on the NHS. Having said that, as an industry we are only as good as our worst facility, the government will judge us as a group and look at those who act unprofessionally and judge us together. Whilst many gyms are acting in the right way, there are still too many gyms trying to 'stack em high' and delivering a worrying level of service. As an industry there needs to be minimum standards we aim for and better regulation at the same time, though that will take some upskilling to achieve.

I can see some Members staying home or supplementing their gym workouts with home workouts now they've experienced the convenience. At the same time I see the increase in home workers meaning there will be an increased need for human interaction and the gym will become their release and change of environment.

**Q: What's next for Progress Gym?**

We have several new bits of kit arriving by the start of 2021 with Sorinex Racks and Ivanko Dumbbells en route from USA. Hopefully the kit will be worth it for the frustrations of dealing with this US based manufacturer. Then, as we move into the new year, we launch our Progress Group Training product. As mentioned for those who want structured and progressive workouts, in a small group environment, without the price tag of one to one PT. We'll also be adding to the team, class timetable and hopefully creating a membership waiting list. 2021 is looking good for Progress!

If you would like to features in our newsletter email us @ [info@indepdentgyms.co.uk](mailto:info@indepdentgyms.co.uk)