



Your guide to

Making virtual workouts a reality



The concept of virtual workouts isn't new.

From YouTube workout videos to nutritional blogging, health and fitness professionals all over the world are building new online communities and creating sustainable virtual businesses.

Even before the global COVID-19 pandemic hit, forward-thinking gyms and leisure centres were offering fitness services online. Social media has been a major driver for this, since it provides a platform for reaching a wider audience and interacting with them in real-time.

While video platforms, streaming services, smart wearables have all enabled a new 'digital fitness era' (a rising trend back in 2018), the pandemic has definitely accelerated the need for more virtual fitness services – as members across the UK demand more flexible options that allow them to exercise safely.



01. OVERVIEW

Gyms and leisure centres of the future will be those that can offer a combination of face-to-face and virtual services to appeal to a wide variety of members, and deliver a consistently exceptional exercise experience regardless of whether the class is held on the premises or online.

Some good examples include:



Having originally trialled virtual workouts via Instagram earlier this year, [Gymbox](#) has now partnered with video on demand platform Uscreen to develop a proprietary virtual fitness service with a range of unique and creative classes to their members – and the ability to buy at home workout equipment.



[Halo Leisure](#) has launched a brand new range of +600 virtual workouts on their website, with the help of virtual fitness provider Wexer. Halo@Home is available for free to members for the rest of 2020, or via a free 14 day trial for new joiners – and features a class of day every day.



[Pure Gym](#), the budget gym chain, offers +400 on demand workouts via its PureGym app, designed and regularly updated by PureGym's team of trainers.

The impact of the pandemic has varied across the UK, depending on the rate of local community transmission. You might be in an area where closures are required, or it could be business as usual for you (albeit with restrictions in place).

Whatever your situation, it's important to understand the emerging need for virtual workouts – demand is growing, and **now's the time to take your business virtual.**

There are three main reasons to consider shifting to virtual workouts:

1. You're still closed under lockdown restrictions

but want to maintain business continuity and keep members engaged

2. You're open but your members appreciated your online offering

during lockdown and want to continue using these on an adhoc basis in future

3. You've recognised the new business opportunity

virtual workouts present and want to update your business model for the future.

Whatever the reason, offering virtual workouts is a great way to grow your business and appeal to both existing and new members. And if you're prevented from opening your premises again in future, then you'll be well prepared to pivot to online, and keep your business going.

This guide is aimed at helping you shift your business online and offer new virtual fitness services.

Stevenage Leisure Limited (SLL)



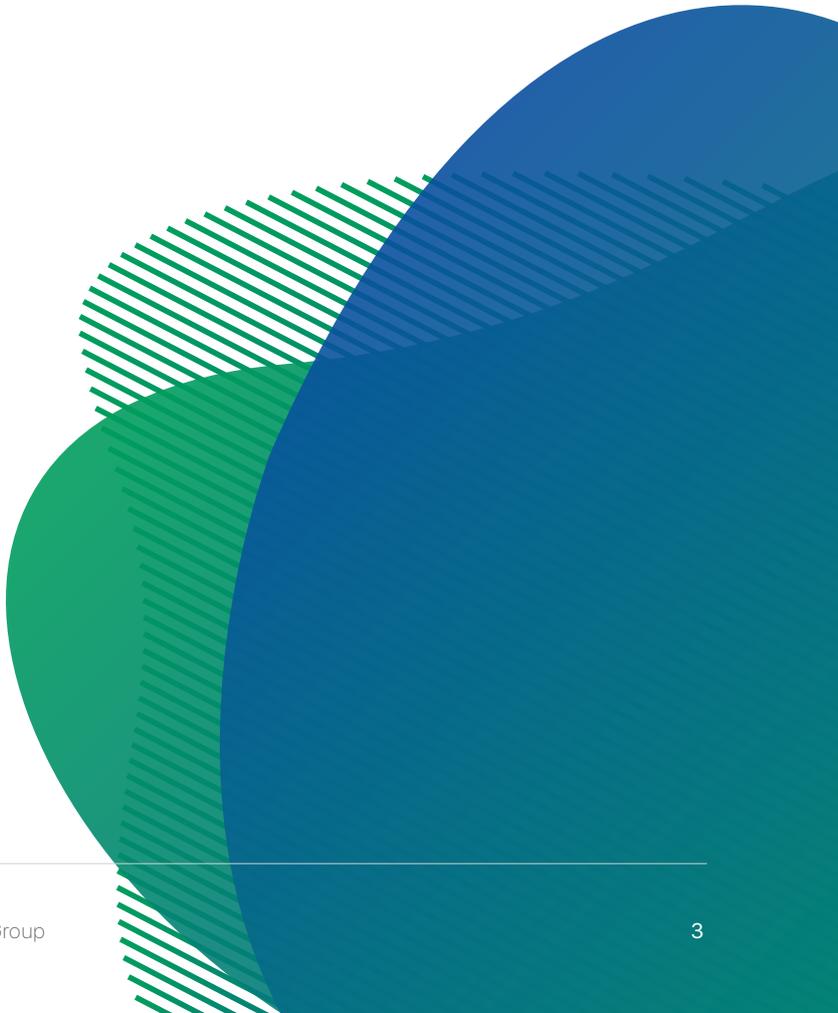
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Leisure trust, [Stevenage Leisure Limited \(SLL\)](#), operates over 23 indoor and outdoor leisure facilities across Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Rutland.

Having offered members Les Mills On Demand access initially, SLL partnered with Technogym to offer a digital membership option through their SLL Lifestyles app - initially this will be free with plans to charge in place once the solution is further developed. Initial member feedback has been positive.

Having more options to access your workouts will become part of the new normal, but from our experience reopening it is clear that members want that personal engagement, to return to classes and get out of the house! As a leisure provider, we need to provide options to ensure members continue with an active lifestyle by providing options in centre and virtually.

~ **Rich Gunney** | Head of CRM Software, SLL



First things first - Virtual Fitness Business essentials

Before you tell your customers and members about your online workouts, and certainly before you start marketing them online, there are some fundamental things you need to do.

The first is to decide exactly what services you're going to offer, and how you'll offer them – ideally making your virtual workouts available inside your app for members, if you have one, and then also on your website.

If your members can access your virtual workouts inside your app, just like they do when they book online, then it's much simpler for them to stay engaged with your fitness business, and much easier for you to be able to send them notifications when new classes are available.

The services you could offer might include:

- **Virtual group classes** via an online video conferencing solution like Zoom
- **One-on-one sessions** with members who prefer to workout on their own time
- **Videos with handy tips**, such as nutrition advice, cooking classes, guided meditation or relaxation session or workouts based on specific objectives e.g., weight loss, toning, strengthening, rehabilitation, mindfulness
- **Workouts on demand** – pre-recorded workout routines to share with members, where you take the time to produce and upload a high-quality video so your customers can workout with you when their schedule allows
- **Blended fitness model** – in-person workouts along with selected online services like workout plans or video chat sessions.

02. VIRTUAL FITNESS BUSINESS ESSENTIALS

Once you've decided what your online offering will be, you'll have a better idea of what you'll need to help you achieve it. Here are some of the essentials.

Technology

High-quality videos are really important in the longer term. But when you are starting out – and for live streamed classes in particular, a smartphone or tablet carefully positioned and angled may suffice.

If you are looking at making classes available on-demand, it's worth investing in a good quality video camera that can be set up at different heights and locations. Invest in a decent computer system, with video-editing software. If you are on a strict budget, there are lots of very good, free options available, here are [TechRadar's recent top picks](#). You can always assess initial demand and then upgrade your video camera equipment once you've built a regular following for your workouts.

You or your team will also need to download and get to grips with whichever video platform you've chosen, depending on whether you want to offer live streamed workouts or pre-recorded/on-demand options instead. You might also like to consider using a third party content provider rather than creating your own content, or even a combination of both. And if you already have a member app that supports streaming then you can use that to stream your classes rather than needing to learn to use another video platform – the more your members can engage directly with your brand the better!

Consider the best option for you, based on how many members and sites you have, how confident your instructors are in filming their workouts, what locations they can film in, and how regularly you can generate new workout classes for your members.

Choosing the right technology for delivering virtual workouts is important. It's worth remembering that if you choose a platform that supports advertising, like Facebook or YouTube, then you could find your competitors advertising directly below your workouts.

If you choose a video conferencing solution for your live stream workouts then you'll need to remember that members could mute their audio or turn their video off during the class, which could make it difficult for your instructors to communicate with members and check they're following the exercises correctly. Think about trialling a few different options and starting with smaller numbers, then once you and your instructors are more confident, you can expand your class sizes.



The 'space'

You need to consider where your videos are filmed. Good lighting is essential and ideally there shouldn't be too many distractions, i.e. it shouldn't look like an instructor is doing this out of their living room where everyone can see what's in the background. If the same space is doubling up as an office, ensure desks are away from the camera angles.

Try to create a professional setting, one that has plenty of room for a range of different workouts. If possible based on restrictions in place, make use of studio space in your facilities.

Make sure the camera or webcam provides a good view of the instructor and whatever is in the background. Some video conferencing solutions allow you to create your own background, here's [how to do it on Zoom](#).



Your website

If you run your own business website, start creating pages that showcase your new virtual fitness services. Include high-quality photos, customer testimonials, and clear call to actions with details on how to book.

When you're ready to take your online offering live, make sure you link to the new pages directly from your homepage.

Halo Leisure



[Halo Leisure](#) a social enterprise and registered charity located in England and Wales, has launched a brand new range of +600 virtual workouts on their website and app, with the help of virtual fitness provider [Wexer](#). As part of its retention and recovery strategy Halo is offering [Halo@Home](#) free of charge to members for the rest of 2020, or via a free 14 day trial for new joiners. In 2021 this will be offered as a member upgrade option or a standalone purchasable product.

The website features a class of day, and a teaser of all classes available so members can easily scan and choose their workout. The class finder facility allows the user to search for a workout based on duration and type (mind/body, weight loss, strength/conditioning or kids for example).

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During lockdown #1 we started to share our own exercise content and that from partners on our website. With videos hosted on our YouTube channel, hours viewed were up an impressive 20,614% on the previous month in April 2020 alone. A customer survey indicated that 70% of our members would be interested in combining on site with online workouts. To meet this changing customer behaviour we introduced [Halo@HOME](#) to encourage our customers to work out from their front room or back garden when they couldn't make it into their Halo centre.

By mid-November 2020, over 2,100 members have created an account and are enjoying online sessions. In October the platform was accessed 3,157 times - with strength and condition classes being the most popular, followed closely by weight loss sessions. The next step in the development of our digital offer is to increase the depth and breadth of our own content from our own instructors with more live streaming of group exercise classes. Feedback has been positive especially from those who have yet to reactivate their membership due to shielding, self isolation or they are just not in a position to return to in centre exercise. Halo@HOME is keeping them connected to the Halo brand and more importantly supporting help people to be more active more often.

~ **Cathy Fletcher** | Marketing Manager, Halo Leisure

Marketing your virtual workouts

This is about positioning your business as an expert at what you do – both in-person and online. A teaser live stream session is one way to do this: the goal is to show people that you can provide something of value without giving everything away for free.

The quality of the videos you offer is essential; the more professional they look, the better the impression you'll make on potential customers.

Offer valuable content online to connect with your audience

Create and share quality content that showcases your offering and any specialities of your business (e.g., a particular style of workout). Make some of it freely accessible online to gather interest and build trust, for example:

- **Short-form videos** that demonstrate the best way to perform exercises for maximum results.
- **Write regular blogs** around a range of different topics. This thought-leadership is a great way to boost your professional authority and demonstrate your businesses' fitness expertise.



03. MARKETING YOUR VIRTUAL WORKOUTS

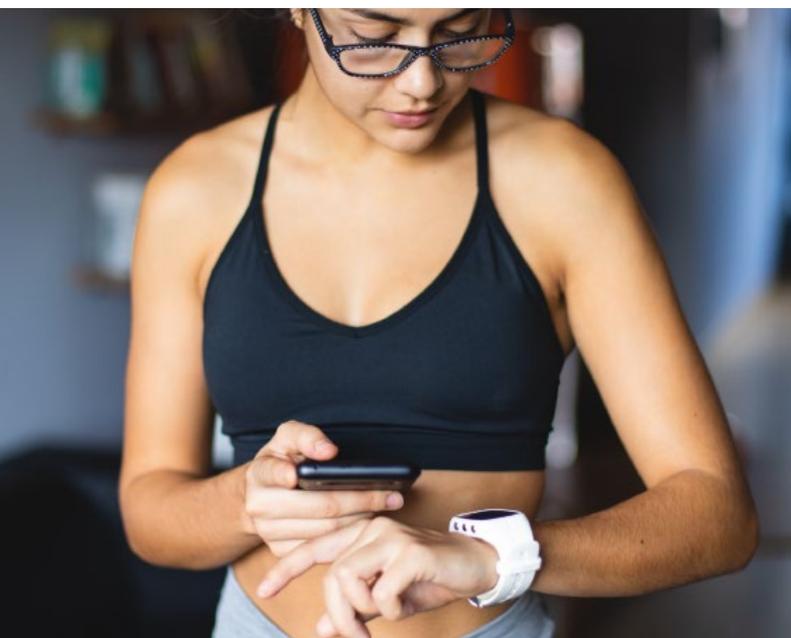
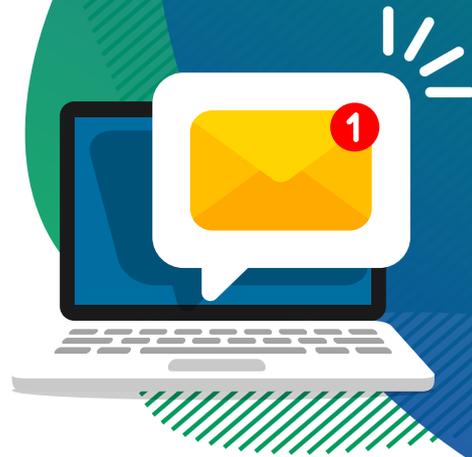
Use email marketing to nurture your existing member relationships

Email marketing is perhaps **the most effective way** to build and strengthen connections with your audience.

Design and draft emails for your members and send them using either the communications tool in your management software or using email marketing services like [Mailchimp](#) or [Constant Contact](#).

Examples of types of emails you can send:

- **Newsletters** with a round-up of recent blogs or articles you think your members may enjoy
- **Special promotions** to encourage take up of membership or attendance of a particular event
- **Follow-up emails** after an online session with a recap of everything that was covered in the virtual workout.



Away from email marketing, if you have an app, make use of push notifications and direct message functionality to reach members who may not see your emails.

Remember that your existing members are your best advertisers. If you can turn them into fans of your virtual workouts, they'll market you and your business effectively and for free!

Social media marketing

Here's where to let new and existing members know what's happening. Once you know what virtual workouts you'll offer, start to drop hints and teasers on social media – with clear branding for your business – about what's coming soon and how to get involved.

Social media is your biggest supporter when it comes to getting the word out. Most of your potential customers will be on one platform or another, so find out where most of your members browse and start building your community there. Engage with them frequently, share your content and showcase your achievements.

Promote your virtual workouts both before and after the sessions, encouraging members to provide feedback on their experience. Keep talking to your members to get their feedback – and if you get some great suggestions, look at how you can update your business model to accommodate these.

You can also make use of paid advertising to targeted audience groups on social media (e.g. to friends of those who follow you, to people in the local area who are interested in workouts or to audiences who follow similar profiles).

A branded Facebook group for virtual members can be a great method for building relationships in a way that's convenient and still personable. Get your existing customers to join the group and encourage them to tell others about it. Get discussions going among the members; it makes what you're doing more visible and creates a sense of community.

Make use of [Facebook Live](#) or Instagram Live to give followers a taster of your virtual workouts – ensure your video isn't just a sales pitch. Put your money where your mouth is and host a short teaser workout.



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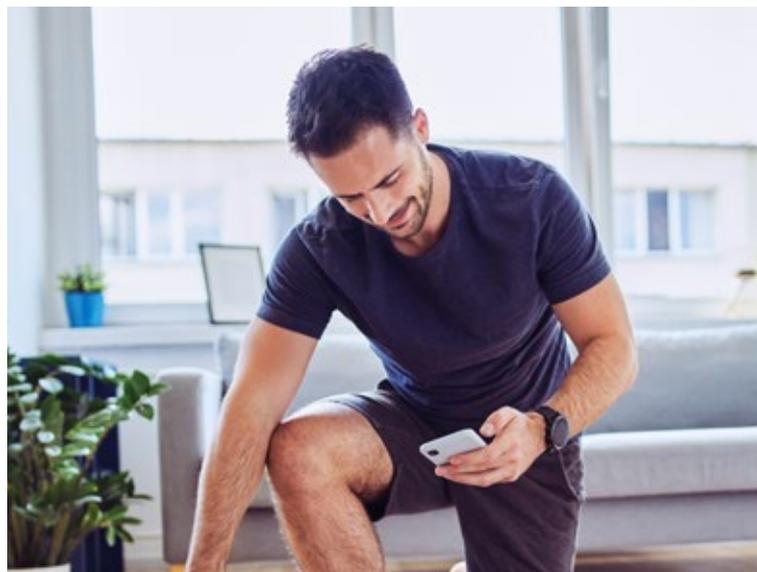
Include a verbal call-to-action (CTA) in videos or your virtual events

For example: "Thanks for coming to our workout! I hope you enjoyed it as much as we did, and if you're keen to see more, head over to [your website] where all our virtual workouts are on offer."

Offer exclusive discounts

Rather than offering generic deals to everyone, share them exclusively on selected platforms. Create a sense of urgency around your offer by limiting the number of seats or when the offer ends.

Remember to be specific with your promotions. In other words, you're not just saying "I'm a virtual gym/leisure centre providing online workouts" – focus on specifics. For example: Limited time only: Get 10 online workouts for only £40 — that's a 20% discount!



Word-of-mouth advertising

People trust what their friends and family tell them much more than any advertising. So the first thing you need to do is ask your existing members for testimonials. There are several ways to do this:

- **Get quotes** you can use on your website.
- **Create a case study** based on one particular member and their success.
- **Ask your existing members** to mention your new online workouts on their social media.
- **Don't be afraid to ask for referrals** from your members – if they've seen success with you, and they love what you've been offering online already, they'll be happy to help you promote it.

Make it worth their while by setting up a loyalty program – you could reward members who get friends to sign up for one of your workouts with a free workout session.



Gymbox



[Gymbox](#) is a fitness and lifestyle brand, operating 11 clubs across London, with a focus on combining exercise and entertainment – including live nightly DJ's, London's most unique and creative classes and top of the range fitness equipment.

Having quickly pivoted to offering Instagram Live classes following the first lockdown, Gymbox has now partnered with video-on-demand platform [Uscreen](#) to develop a proprietary virtual fitness service – '[Out The Box](#)'. A digital fitness service focused in true Gymbox-style on redefining home workouts with a mix of on-demand and scheduled creative classes.

Gymbox is just getting started on Out The Box. The platform will be developed beyond classes with richer features providing personalisation, rewards, performance tracking, creating community amongst members, providing a range of fitness programmes designed to both complement their in-gym classes and cater to those needing at-home workouts only.

Understanding that there's really only one chance to get it right with their digital fitness offering, the fitness operator has softly promoted Out The Box to members initially. Uptake has been positive but the aim is to create a product with a wider reach. Gymbox needs to be happy that the product is right to do this.

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We're renowned for our unique class timetable, which is created by our very talented studio team and it's built solely by us for us so you can't get the content anywhere else – we don't want to offer the standard on-demand content you can find elsewhere so we are focusing on what makes us different, the creative classes. People like coming to us, specifically for our unique classes, live DJ's and our top of the range equipment. With Gymbox they're getting something that they can't get anywhere else and we need to transfer this online as well.

~ **Marc Diaper** | CEO, Gymbox

Adding virtual membership packages to your business model

Well-designed virtual membership packages will not only help boost your profits and generate growth, but they'll also help your members get better results.

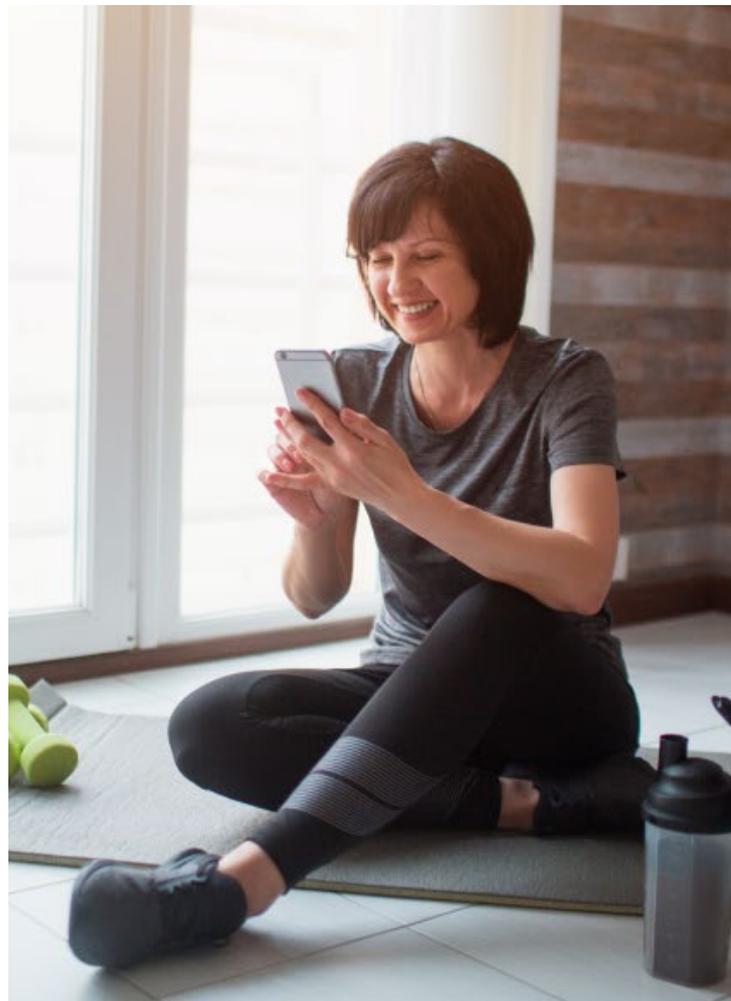
There are three key things to consider:

1. Identify what you can offer – think about what your members are seeking and why they should come to you. This could be a specialist offering only you can provide, or anything else that sets your services and brand apart from others (e.g. particular style of workouts, star instructors etc.)

2. Build a features list – this is what's included in your package. Tailoring them depends on what online services you plan on offering, and the specific needs of your members, but a basic one could include:

- **Access to exclusive content** on your website or app
- **Nutritional advice** or a tailored nutrition plan, and
- **One-to-one support** with their favourite trainer via video conferencing.

3. Create your online package – describe who your packages would be ideal for, what kind of results they can expect, your features list and how they'll benefit, the price and a specific call-to-action.



Effectively pricing your online workouts

If your premises are closed, you may decide that offering your virtual workouts for free is a great way to maintain close contact with your members, and still deliver them value for money for their membership.

If you've decided to keep billing your members during closures then offering virtual workouts and other value added services are a great way to retain members and avoid the risk of them cancelling their membership.

Either way, once you've established your virtual workout programme and have built a substantial following amongst your members, you could decide that it makes sense to start charging for these services.

Think of your online offerings as a value-add to your existing face-to-face fitness services – this is a great way to cater to your members changing needs and still give them an option to engage with your gym or leisure centre if your premises are closed, and make them feel like they're getting more value for their money.

Pricing your online workouts can be tricky because you need to take several different factors into account, including:

- How much your members already pay for their membership in the gym or leisure centre
- Your reputation and experience
- Your ongoing expenses and overheads
- Your capacity – how many members you can handle in a class
- Which virtual workouts you're planning to offer.

The pricing model you choose is entirely up to you, based on your business type, needs, and goals – including profit margins. Keep in mind that you'll need to compete with pure play digital fitness services too.



Waterside Hotel & Leisure Club



Located in Didsbury, Manchester, [Waterside](#) welcomes members with a friendly and supportive atmosphere and boasts an impressive range of facilities – including a spacious modern gym, 100+ classes a week, swimming and spa facilities.

Waterside was quick to move to offering virtual classes online during the first lockdown; taking advantage of the livestreaming functionality available within the Waterside member app to offer members classes free of charge. Virtual classes are also online and as a library for members to access on-demand at their own convenience.

As we had the Waterside app we could quickly move to offer our members virtual classes both on-demand and livestreamed when we needed to close. Getting set up was as simple as an instructor using their tablet or smartphone to deliver a class virtually for members to access via the app or our website. We offered this for free during the first lockdown, as well as regularly connecting with members on social media.

We've had fantastic feedback from our members who have been impressed with our virtual classes. Many members were excited to be back with us in person in July. But we definitely found it was worthwhile to keep live streaming and building out our digital offering to cater to all needs. Over a third those who chose to freeze when we reopened opted to pay a nominal £5 monthly contribution to access our virtual classes.

We'll be launching a full virtual membership option very soon at a £5.99 monthly rate. Initially, we'll offer this to any member looking to cancel, as well as to our lapsed members from the past couple of years. It's vital that we get the quality spot-on first though – we're investing in upgraded recording equipment – as well as adding other perks, such as discounts across our facilities, for virtual members.

It's really important to be flexible at this time, having virtual options available both stand alone and as part of our standard memberships allows us to cater to all needs and preferences. It also makes our business more resilient to changing operational requirements and closures.

~ **Kim Power** | Member Relationship Manager

Going virtual with TSG

At TSG, we're here to help you take your business online and start offering virtual workouts.

Our business management software solutions have a range of features that can help you build a sustainable virtual business alongside your on-premise services, including:



Customer management: Everything you need to manage your members all in one place. Easily keep track of your customers' information including their bookings and payments.



Online bookings: Giving your customers the freedom to view your workout schedule, book and pay for their next session – all from their smartphone.



Customer communications: Engage and stay in close contact with your members – by email or SMS. Segment and target members with engaging content. Alternatively, our communications experts can do this for you, creating tailored customer journeys for your virtual offering.



Native app: Available on Apple iOS and Android, the app carries your branding and allows you to reach members with push notifications and personalised messages. As well as facilitating bookings and self-service membership management, you can stream live workouts to members wherever they are.

ANGUSalive



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ANGUSalive, located in Scotland, has seen a huge rise in both new members registering and booking online as a result of the pandemic. Since they re-opened sites in September, new online member registrations have more than doubled (up 260%), and online bookings are up 123%. Now more than 80% of classes are booked online whereas pre-lockdown this was only 20%, freeing up employees to spend more time with members in the centres.

We've been pleased to see members embrace self-service options by booking classes online; allowing our team to focus on engaging and providing a fantastic service to our members during their visits.

~ **Iain Stevens** | Senior Manager



Conclusion

Offering virtual workouts and taking your business online opens up substantial new opportunities for growth.

Online workouts are great because they give both gyms and leisure centres the ability to keep operating, even if premises are closed – and recruit new members who may not have tried your fitness services before. You can also use many strategies to automate your processes, which means you can work with hundreds of members at any given time.

Gyms and leisure centres have long since been a source of inspiration to their members and a vital part of the local community. No matter where and how you decide to operate, remember to support your community, build strong customer relationships and reward their loyalty.

**Keen to find out more
about how we can help
you go virtual?**

Contact us

About TSG



We are a global provider of business management software, payments, and value-added services to Health & Fitness, Childcare & Early Education and Boutique Fitness clients. Our ambition is to empower passionate people with end-to-end business management solutions that enable you to spend more time growing your business.

Our solutions in the UK include:



Get in touch to learn more about our solutions and for help going virtual:

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