



# The Expectations and Demands of Leisure Centre Customers

8 must-know findings from members  
on the future of health, fitness and wellbeing

# Do you know what your customers want?

The last couple of years have brought big changes to the way customers use leisure centres up and down the country. You don't need us to tell you that; you've lived through it.

Those changes didn't just affect operations and access.

Customer expectations shifted too. Their wants and needs evolved. Their demands from their fitness provider - from their local leisure centre - grew.

## Those new demands present new opportunities for leisure centre operators

Perhaps the biggest change that leisure centre members reported was the importance of health and fitness in their lives.



Over **72%** of gym & leisure centre goers believe health, fitness and wellness has never been more important

Your customers are eager to keep fit and healthy, but some have been slow to return following lockdowns and restrictions. Leisure centres can continue to play a vital role in building healthy, fit and well communities...

## ...If you can understand exactly what your customers want.

That's what Legend by Xplor set out to learn.

With in-depth, in-the-field research during December 2021, we uncovered insight and opinions directly from consumers who were members of - or regularly attended - leisure centres, gyms, health clubs, studios or sports clubs pre-pandemic on the future of health, fitness and wellbeing.

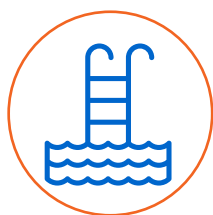
**>>> Keep reading for the 8 must-know findings that your leisure centre can use to its advantage >>>**

# 1. Pricing Has Never Been More Important

Given the rising cost of living, it's unsurprising that price sensitivity remains a top concern for leisure centre customers.

As a fitness provider who serves the entire community, you may have a larger demographic from lower income areas when compared with private gyms and health clubs, so price is always going to be a major factor to contend with.

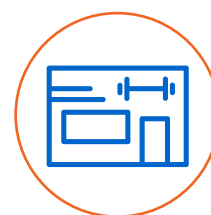
Of those surveyed:



**28%**

of leisure centre attendees

**VS**

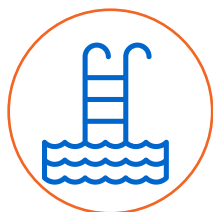


**20%**

of other fitness facility attendees

**...ranked competitive pricing in their top 2 priorities for choosing a gym, studio or leisure centre.**

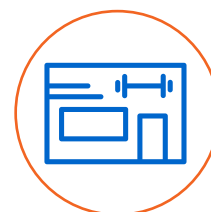
Price is also one of the main reasons lapsed members cited where they'd cancelled or not renewed fitness memberships. Of those surveyed who'd dropped at least one membership from pre-COVID, the desire to save money was the top reason for this choice, especially so for leisure centre customers:



**41%**

of leisure centre attendees

**VS**



**31%**

of other fitness facility attendees

**...said they dropped a membership because they wanted to save money (or pay less overall for their health and fitness).**

Cost has always been one of the biggest reasons for cancellations in leisure clubs; it's often one of the first monthly expenditures to go. What's changed isn't necessarily the importance of price, but rather the importance of pricing structures.

Flexible monthly payments are now the norm, and COVID-19 saw a huge rise in the number of subscription models - from Netflix and Disney+ to HelloFresh and dozens of other monthly 'boxes' delivered to homes.

Members don't necessarily want to pay less, but they do want more flexibility in contracts, membership lengths and long-term commitments. Of those who cancelled during COVID:



**...didn't want to be tied into a long-term contract.**

All those subscription models that exploded in popularity during COVID offer 30-day rolling contracts as standard, with the option to cancel (and renew) whenever desired.

It seems that customers want their leisure centres to emulate this. Looking to the future:



**...agree that fitness providers of all shapes and sizes will need to offer more flexible payment plans - like pay-as-you-go - in order to stay competitive with studios.**



## What can leisure centres do?

While price will always be an important factor, your leisure centre cannot compete - or deliver the best possible offer - by focusing on price alone.

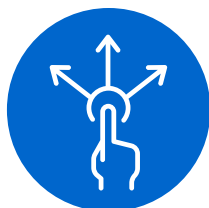
Members will always cancel because of price.

But you can stand out and deliver a better offer to your community by focusing on flexibility and adding more value (real AND perceived) to your memberships.

You could:



**Introduce  
rolling 30-day  
membership  
plans**



**Give members  
more control  
with software  
that lets them  
manage their  
own plans**



**Allow members to  
choose when their  
Direct Debit is  
collected (to help  
them manage their  
finances)**



**Look for cost  
-savings by  
streamlining  
operations rather  
than increasing  
membership fees**

Ultimately it comes down to creative, user-focused ways your leisure centre can provide more value to your customers.



## 2. Hygiene Remains A Key Priority

The fact that hygiene and cleanliness remain a top priority for leisure centre customers as we slowly move forward from a global health pandemic should also come as no surprise.

But don't be fooled by the easing of restrictions and the apparent return to normality, because members' views and opinions have changed for good.

Now is not the time to get complacent.

Exceptional hygiene should remain a number one priority for leisure centre operators for the considerable future. Of those surveyed:

**78%**

of fitness facility attendees agree that the MOST important responsibility of fitness providers is to take care of hygiene and cleanliness

**25%**

of fitness facility attendees rank hygiene in their top two priorities when considering joining or visiting gyms, studios or leisure centres



## What can leisure centres do?

Leisure centres will need to maintain exceptional standards at all times, continuing - and even building on - their efforts from the pandemic to keep their facilities spotless.

Regular vacuuming and a weekly wipe down of equipment is not enough to meet the demands of your customers.

You should:



**Focus operations on incorporating excellent hygiene standards at all times**



**Train teams in efficient, equipment cleaning procedures**



**Provide the equipment your team and your members need**



**Make sure your community knows about your high standards**

Keeping customers informed about your cleaning protocols is often overlooked. But members want to know what procedures you have in place - especially those who haven't visited for a while. To encourage them to return, you'll need to showcase your hygiene standards.

Making sure your members know about your hygiene procedures is also important, because of those who had a worse experience during the pandemic.

Your leisure centre will need to carefully balance the ways you maintain those high hygiene standards to make sure it doesn't impact on your customer's experience, because a hassle-free visit is another key expectation.

**42%**

cited onerous COVID procedures as having a negative impact



### 3. Members Want A Hassle-Free Experience

The challenges of the last two years were clear for leisure centres customers. Restricted access to your facilities, limited capacity in classes and on the gym floor, regular closures, time-consuming COVID procedures and more.

All that adds up to a strong desire for a hassle-free experience whenever members visit.

Of those who said their experience worsened during the pandemic:

**42%**

said COVID  
procedures were  
too onerous

**33%**

blamed the need  
to book attendance  
ahead

**32%**

identified limited  
capacity as a  
problem

No one wants barriers to entry - especially those demographics who may find attending leisure centres in person a challenge already.

You need to ensure access to your facilities is as simple and as seamless as possible, using the right technology to support your members.



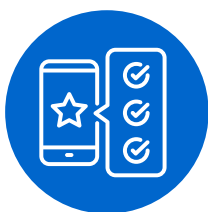


## What can leisure centres do?

When it comes to easy access, leisure centres should make sure their membership payment databases are seamlessly integrated with access control systems.

Members shouldn't need to wait for updated payments to show on their record in order to gain automatic entry, and your reception team shouldn't have to deal with payment issues when customers are trying to enter.

Friendly membership management and booking procedures are another way leisure centres can improve members' experiences. You could:



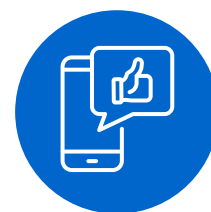
**Give members control over their own membership plans**



**Streamline and automate the online joining process**



**Make online class and activity bookings simple and effective**



**Offer members a mobile app to book classes and update details**

# 30%

of members identified a mobile app as a key service they'd be interested in from their leisure centre or gym



## 4. Proximity Is The Number One Demand

While both outstanding hygiene and an exceptional experience are extremely important to leisure centre customers, there's one priority that tops them.

Proximity.

Members want to access facilities close to home. This has always been important, but with the decline of the commute and the shift to home-working seemingly here to stay, any members who may previously have exercised close to a workplace are looking for new options. Of those surveyed:

**28%**

ranked being close to home as the number one priority

And that number increases when we dive into certain demographics that are likely to impact your leisure centre.



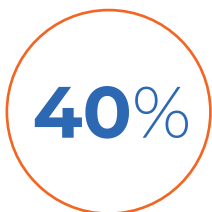
**32%**  
of women

**VS**



**25%**  
of men

**... rank proximity in their top two priorities for visiting a leisure centre, gym or studio.** When broken into age group it is weighted like so:



of those  
aged 55+

**VS**



of those  
aged 35-54

**and**



of those  
under 35

This presents a big opportunity for leisure centres to increase their reach among key demographics and in their wider local area.

## What can leisure centres do?

With a renewed focus on local area marketing, your leisure centre can attract those who may have previously travelled further afield to private gyms and studios.

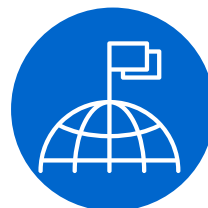
To do that, you'll need to promote the benefits of your location. You could:



**Send leaflets to all local neighbourhoods to remind them of your proximity**



**Highlight any local bus routes (or other public transport) to show how easy it is to reach you**



**Map out walking and cycling routes from key target areas - with estimated travel time - to encourage more active journeys to your location**



## 5. Online Classes Are Here To Stay

Over the last two years, almost all forms of structured fitness have declined. Members turned away from leisure centres, gyms and studios - for obvious, unavoidable reasons - and took up new, unstructured ways to exercise, socialise and keep fit.

Of those members we surveyed:



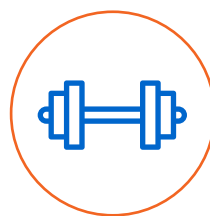
**64%**

walked more often



**30%**

ran more often



**30%**

did more weights  
and exercises at home



**18%**

went bike riding  
more often

...along with a wide variety of other activities.

Live and on-demand online classes were also a hit during the pandemic, with 11% and 14% of members doing more of both.

But given the popularity of online classes, they're not going anywhere.

Although more and more members are returning to leisure centres and more structured fitness, over half still expect online classes to be an option. Of those we surveyed:

Attendance has remained stable to date with online classes, whereas as restrictions have lifted, other types of activities have begun to drop off. They haven't picked up again at the time of this survey.

Expect this to change, as more structured forms of fitness return to popularity, but it's clear that for the time being, an omnichannel approach is still important. That's the best way to support customer demands and fit alongside other types of workouts.

**51%**

expect both in  
person and digital/  
online classes on an  
ongoing basis



## What can leisure centres do?

Don't turn off those webcams and streaming providers yet.

Your leisure centre should continue to provide a digital fitness offer wherever possible. If you haven't already, the end of restrictions doesn't mean you can forget about it. Members want online exercise options.

You could:



**Stream your current  
live classes online**



**Partner with live  
and on-demand  
workout  
providers**



**Provide a space in  
your leisure centres  
for members to  
participate in their  
own digital  
workouts**



**Use your mobile  
app to deliver  
on-demand  
content to  
members at home**



## 6. And Centres Should Prioritise Integration With Wearable Tech

Although members spent money on online fitness during the pandemic - and will continue to demand that digital offer from their fitness provider - that wasn't their biggest investment.

Neither was home workout equipment.

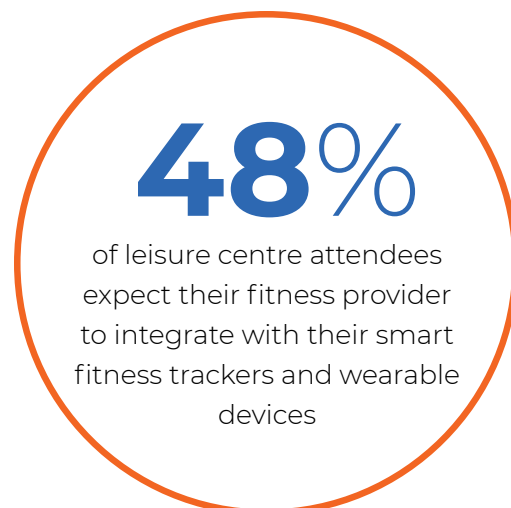
The biggest spend for members since the start of the pandemic was on wearable technology. On smartwatches and fitness trackers. Of the 31% of members who have paid for additional fitness services or equipment:



**...bought at least one tracking, fitness and community app.**

And now, those members want to use the technology they've invested in. They've seen how it works, made a habit of tracking their exercise programmes, and expect their leisure centre to support them in this respect.

With smart technology such an integral part of our lives, leisure centre customers expect to see the same connectivity when they train, whether that's seamlessly connecting their phones, tracking their steps or recording their heart rate.



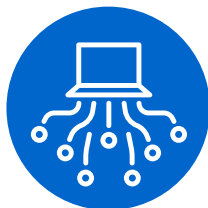
## What can leisure centres do?

Leisure centres should look at how they can continue to deploy more technology into their operations, from mobile apps to smart equipment.

You could:



**Upgrade existing equipment for newer models with in built connectivity**



**Explore software upgrades to equipment to connect them to user devices**



**Show members how to use the tracking features of existing equipment**



**Partner with technology providers to offer wearable devices in your centres as an added-value option for members**

**25%**

of leisure centre attendees are interested in more connected, smart gym equipment

## 7. It's Time To Go Beyond Fitness...

The last two years haven't just been a challenge for our physical health. Mental health has become an increasing priority for us all, something that we all pay far greater attention to than ever before.

So it stands to reason that members are thinking beyond traditional fitness and looking to leisure centres like yours to deliver a more holistic offer.

Of those we surveyed who had paid for a new fitness service during the pandemic:



Many more tried free versions or joined in with online videos that focused on meditation, breathing and mindfulness.

Those members are now expecting more.





## What can leisure centres do?

'Wellness services' is a very broad term, which gives your leisure centre huge opportunities in a number of directions.

There are several new classes, activities and facilities you could trial to see which resonate most with your members.

You could:



**Bring a breathing coach onto your team to run workshops**



**Create a week-long mindfulness programme to help members relax**



**Set aside space in your leisure centre for quiet contemplation and reflection**



**Introduce meditation classes to your timetable**

**31%**

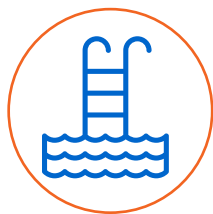
of leisure centre attendees would like to see mediation classes offered

## 8. ...And Extend Your Offer To Increase Revenue

Wellness services are just the tip of the iceberg when exploring member expectations and demands for the future of your leisure centre.

That may seem daunting, but it shouldn't. Turn those expectations around, and you've got a customer base that's actively looking for new services, new facilities and new opportunities.

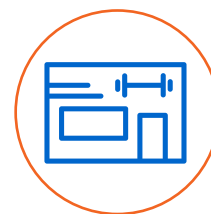
You're looking at chargeable services that are in demand by members. One clear example is massage therapy. Of those surveyed:



**43%**

of leisure centre attendees

**VS**



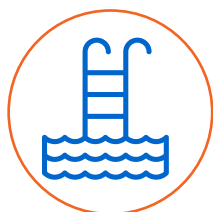
**40%**

of other fitness facility attendees

**.... would like to see massage services offered by their fitness provider.**

If you have the space at your centre to convert one or two rooms into dedicated therapy rooms, then it's worth the time and effort. A range of massage therapy options - each chargeable - could help you give more to your members and increase your revenue.

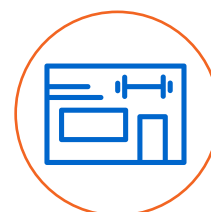
Spa facilities and treatments are another avenue to explore. This could be beauty and relaxation that tie in with your massage and wellness offer, but it could also include more substantial changes to your centre.



**42%**

of leisure centre attendees

**VS**



**35%**

of other fitness facility attendees

**... would like to see spa facilities at their fitness provider.**

Saunas, steam rooms and jacuzzis are all in demand - along with any kind of relaxation or 'chill-out' area for members to unwind. If your leisure centre can devote budget and space to these kinds of enhancements, customers will flock to your offer.

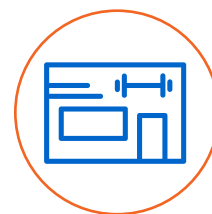
That holistic improvement also extends to rehabilitation and recovery services, which again, are in demand.

Of those surveyed:



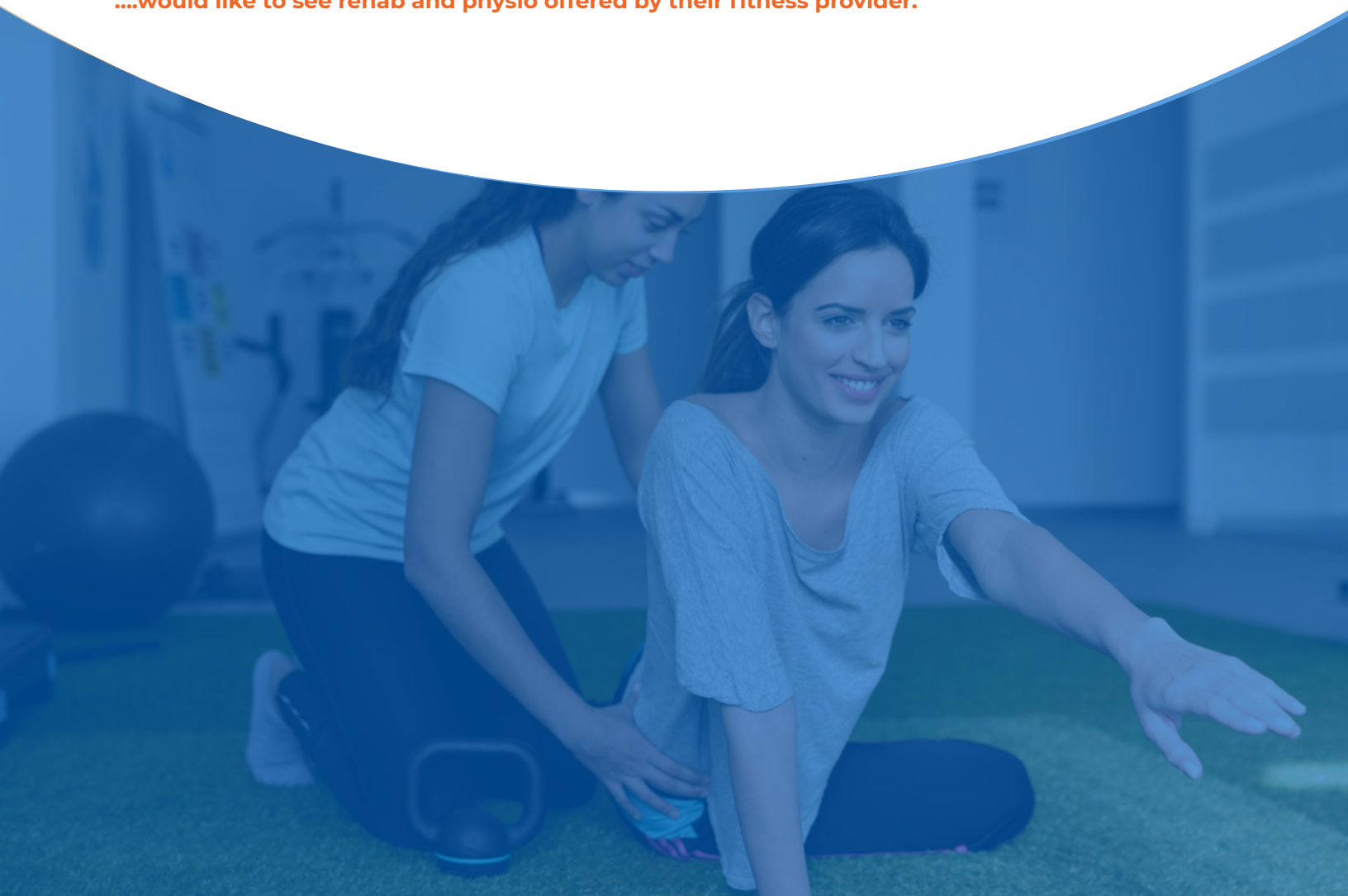
**30%**  
of leisure centre attendees

**VS**



**24%**  
of other fitness facility attendees

**....would like to see rehab and physio offered by their fitness provider.**





## What can leisure centres do?

Don't be afraid to explore new services and see what opportunities might arise from them.

With recovery and rehab, for example, if you can find the right team members to provide these kinds of services, then you may be able to forge new health referral partnerships in your local areas, securing a steady stream of new members.

All you'd require is the right physiotherapist or qualified PT on site - and the right [leisure management software](#) to help you track progress - and then you could reach out to health authorities.





## Maximising Value For Your Customers Is The Key To Success

The findings are clear. It's time for leisure centres to look beyond conventional approaches to fitness if they want to meet the expectations and demands of their customers.

It's time for you and your leisure centre to move beyond the traditional attraction of gyms, pools, sports and the usual line up of fitness classes, because your member's needs and desires are moving beyond them too.

It's time to enhance the health, wellbeing and wellness of everyone in your area by:

- ☒ **Focusing on exceptional hygiene**
- ☒ **Enhancing your members' in-person experience**
- ☒ **Delivering online and on-demand options too**
- ☒ **Integrating more smart technology**
- ☒ **Exploring a range of wellness-based services**

Your customers are demanding it, and your leisure centre can capitalise on that demand.

Leisure management software like [Legend](#) can help you streamline and manage your operations, supporting new services and delivering a better experience for your members.

**[Find out how Legend can help you meet the demands of your leisure centre customers](#)**

### About Legend

Trusted by leading leisure operators of all sizes, Legend offers a complete all-in-one leisure management solution with software, membership payments and support services all powered by one platform. Streamline complex operations, achieve growth, drive retention and run your leisure facilities with ease. Keep a competitive edge with a feature-rich, cloud-based solution that provides a complete 360° customer view.

[Request a Demo](#)

### About the research

On behalf of Legend's parent company, Xplor Technologies, Untangld conducted an online survey of 1,065 respondents during December 2021. The sample for the study was nationally representative and defined as people who were members or regularly attended gyms, health clubs, studios, leisure centres or sports clubs pre-COVID.