

# holm hofmann

Kath Hudson talks to the UK business development director for milon, one of Germany's leading health and fitness suppliers, about broadening its reach under new ownership – with the UK one of its main targets



**Intelligent technology** The smart card stores a user's personalised programme

## **Q** What's the company philosophy?

To offer sophisticated exercise concepts that help clubs be successful. With our gym circuit, people achieve results quicker, which has a positive impact on retention. There are currently 1,300 milon circuits in clubs across Germany, with almost one million users; many of these clubs have a 95 per cent retention rate.

## **Q** What's milon's USP?

Our name originates from the legend of a Greek Olympian, Milon of Kroton, who did the same exercises each day with a growing calf on his shoulders; by the end of the year he was carrying a full-grown bull. We use the same philosophy of repetitive, concentrated training.

People love the milon circuit, because it takes 35 minutes to complete and only needs to be done twice every seven to 10 days to guarantee results. We've just won the FIBO Special Award for most effective exercise concept to retain existing members and acquire new ones.

We've also taken the exercise concept of eccentric loading – used by elite athletes and experienced weightlifters – into the mainstream. When you use our equipment, the weight coming back is 20 to 40 per cent heavier than the weight pushed out. The system is also very precise and users can increase weights by 1kg at a time.

The equipment is made in Germany and is extremely reliable. A service team of seven is all that's required there to do one installation a day, and service the 1,300 existing circuits in a 72-hour response time.



**Circuit sessions** Laps consist of a structured mix of cardio and eccentric loading resistance training

**Q What equipment does the circuit comprise?**

The standard circuit has eight stations of strength endurance and CV kit, consisting of three cross-trainers and three bikes. It's designed to work all the main muscle groups to give you a full body workout. All it requires is a minimum of 42sq m (450sq ft) floorspace. Each exerciser does an individualised 35-minute programme which is stored on a smart card.

**Q Why do you think the circuit is so effective?**

The main consumer benefit is that the machines are so easy to use: all you have to do is insert the smart card and, in less than two seconds, the machine adjusts itself to your personal settings – weights, seat, handle and lever positions.

Results are guaranteed based on the right combination of rest period (30 seconds) and six intervals of strength endurance training (60 seconds) plus two four-minute CV sessions per lap. Each training session is then logged on a dedicated PC, which runs milon's exercise documentation software, m1.

A study we carried out with the German Sports University of Cologne proved that the eccentric loading made

our system 30 per cent more effective than training with conventional weight stack-based resistance machines.

**Q How are the individual programmes created?**

Staff training is really important as the circuit is a precision tool that has millimetre settings on the range of motion and seat positions. The trainer, who sets this up and programmes the card, has to get it right. We usually spend a week or two on-site completing training.

We've also just launched the first bodyscanner in Zurich – a 60-second, 3D laser scan of the body's dimensions. This data is stored on the smart card,

with the programme created automatically and the machines setting themselves up with 99 per cent accuracy. The data can also be used as a visual 'before and after' tool, showing people how they have progressed over a certain period of time.

**Q How do UK and German clubs differ?**

In Germany, joining a club isn't just a lifestyle choice. People expect value for money. In a good club, you can expect someone to interact with you on the gym floor every time you visit, and make sure you're using the machines correctly. You don't have to buy extra personal training, which I think is the main difference between the two models.

British clubs look nice, but I have a feeling UK consumers will increasingly think about what they're getting for their money. The recession will force people to make tough choices, as it did in the German recession of 2001. They will assess the value of their membership fee against the results they're seeing.

**Q What could the UK health and fitness industry learn from Germany?**

In a recession, clear positioning is key. Clubs need to decide who they want

**COMPANY BY NUMBERS**

**Head office:** Emersacker/ Stuttgart, Germany, with subsidiaries in UK and Switzerland. Distributors in Holland and Belgium  
**Annual turnover:** €30m in 2008, but the company had a 500 per cent growth rate from 2001 to 2006, and is now growing at a rate of 50 per cent a year  
**Number of employees:** 90



## WHO'S WHO?

**Owners:** Mario Goerlach/Hubert Haupt  
**Managing director & finance director:** Johann Huber  
**Managing director of milon software:** Dean Groening  
**Business development UK:** Holm Hofmann  
**UK sales manager:** Ewald Schliep

**Fitness boost** Exercisers will reap the benefits doing no more than two 35-minute sessions every 10 days

► to attract and where they want to be. German clubs specialised and became experts in their field, and they also work very closely with the medical profession. Educating members is, for many clubs, a top priority – for example, offering free nutritional, weight loss and sports physiology seminars run by well-known experts. More and more clubs try to reach out to the wider community – to people with special needs, or with back and joint problems, for instance.

If you reach for this different section of the market – people who haven't had gym membership before – you find they are often a bit older, or retired, so they have more time and more disposable income, and will be more loyal rather than flitting from club to club. At the moment, however, gyms in the UK are still chasing the same consumer segment all the time.

The German market could learn as much from the UK market, though, because it's very professionally run here and there are clubs with some very well-qualified fitness staff. Plus some clubs are beautifully designed with a lot of attention to detail.

### Q How do membership levels compare?

The population of Germany is around 82 million, compared to 60 million in the UK, but the penetration rate

is lower in Germany: it's only 8 per cent, compared to 12 per cent in the UK. There are 5,000 health clubs in Germany, against 5,800 in the UK. In Germany, 80 per cent of clubs are run by independent operators – a slightly higher number than in the UK.

### Q Which overseas markets is milon in now?

We've sold to Benelux, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Switzerland. The UK is a very important market: we think the milon circuit is a particularly good product for this market as it offers an efficient use of floorspace, accommodating 40 people per hour. Also, members are more pushed for time here!

We've just delivered the first circuit to a fully-fledged health club – the Marlow Club in Buckinghamshire. That's a very exciting project because the

team is very dedicated and so excited about the project, and that excitement has been passed on to the members.

### Q What trends do you predict for 2009?

There will be more consolidation and consumers will demand higher quality and value for money. From talking to clubs, I anticipate that there will be a re-emergence of strength training, inspired by young men wanting to look like Daniel Craig!

The medical fitness market will further develop, buoyed by the government-led Change4Life campaign, and the medical fraternity and fitness sector will work closer together.

### Q What are your plans for the next 12 months?

At least another five or six projects in the UK by the end of the year, and then steadily grow the business over the next five years. Hopefully we will get to the same place in the UK as we are in the German market now.

### Q What's the best piece of advice you've received?

There's a German saying: "Don't swim where all the fish swim."

**kath hudson**  
[healthclub@leisuremedia.com](mailto:healthclub@leisuremedia.com)

## FAVOURITES

**Book:** *Budding Prospects* by TC Boyle

**Film:** *Meet The Parents*

**Music:** Walker Brothers

**Place:** London

**Food:** Sushi

**Season:** Summer

**Leisure activity:** Playing music and triathlons