



Whitepaper:

Beyond the Treadmill:

Creating a gym that members
love to be in.

This paper is prepared by  saturn

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Executive summary

Saturn Visual Solutions commissioned a piece of research with 2,000 UK-based, adult full-time and part-time workers. They were asked what types of leisure/hospitality venues they would consider to be the most boring and would avoid spending time in.

More than a quarter (28%) of the people involved in the research picked the answer 'gyms/health clubs/leisure centres' as being the most boring. This was the most popular answer by a clear margin (7% higher than the second most popular answer).

The research also asked the survey respondents what they thought made somewhere feel boring and what made somewhere feel fun.

- More than half defined somewhere as being boring if there was nothing to look at/watch or only poor-quality entertainment available.
- More than half said that a fun place was somewhere visually interesting.
- Just under half defined a fun place/experience as somewhere that encouraged them to feel specific emotions (e.g., anticipation, excitement, happiness).

Whilst the purpose of a gym is to help customers improve or maintain their fitness, their mental wellbeing is often neglected at many fitness centres.

Saturn Visual Solutions' research has revealed that this is a glaring oversight. If gym goers feel bored every time they visit, it will discourage them from visiting regularly, resulting in them getting less value from their membership and making them more likely to cancel it.

Gyms, health clubs and leisure centres that inject the gym experience with more fun and interest are likely to retain more of their members long term and therefore increase their profitability.

Introduction

The UK's gym market is constantly changing. The latest figures saw a 4.1% increase in gym members and a 10.9% increase in the number of private sector gyms. Much of this growth was driven by low-cost gyms, which now represent 41% of the UK's gyms. However, of the new fitness centres that have opened in the last 12 months, 62.5% have been mid-range or premium.

These figures indicate that the UK's private sector gym market is becoming more competitive, and that gym goers have a growing number of options to fulfil their fitness needs.

As such, gyms and fitness/health clubs need to focus on maintaining and increasing member retention.

According to research by the IHRSA, (International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association) 50% of all new gym members quit within the first six months of joining a gym.

Another [source](#) states that of those that drop out in the first six months, 23% do so due to non-use/infrequent attendance. The same research found that those who engage in a gym's group fitness classes are 56% less likely to cancel their gym membership than those who rely just on free weights, machines, and individual workouts.

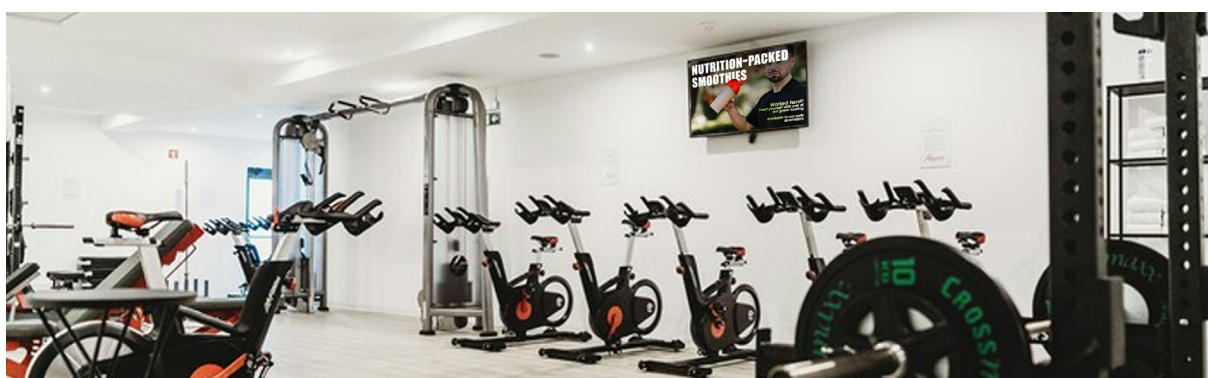
A third [study](#) indicates that **79% of people join a gym to improve their mental health and wellbeing, which includes managing anxiety or depression.**

This suggests that UK gyms need to focus on delivering value for money and mental health benefits just as much as providing quality equipment.

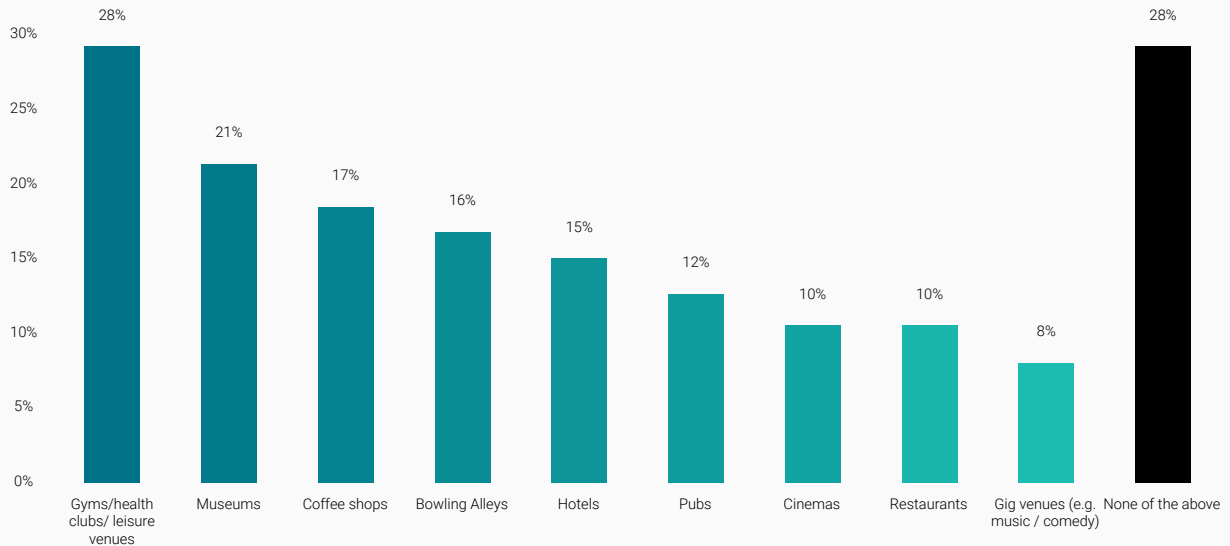
Our research

We commissioned a piece of research with 2,000 UK-based, adult full-time and part-time workers. They were asked what types of leisure/hospitality venues they would consider to be the most boring and would avoid spending time in.

- More than a quarter (28%) of the people involved in the research said 'gyms/health clubs/leisure centres' were the most boring. This was the most popular answer by a large margin (7%).
- The responses were similar when split out by gender, with 29% of women voting gyms as being the most boring way to pass leisure time, and 27% of men saying the same.

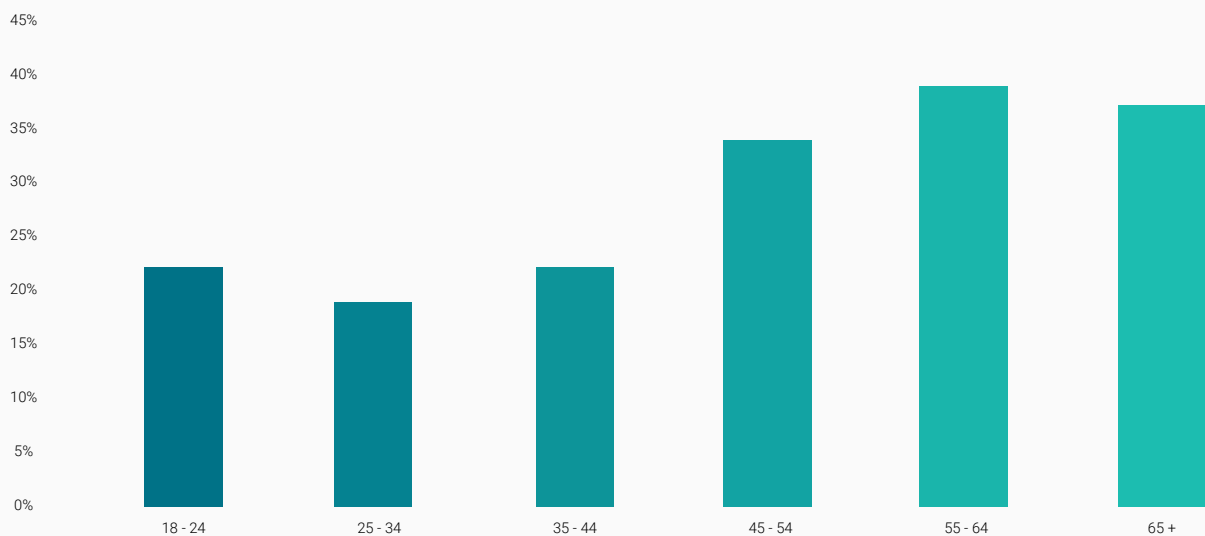


Which, if any, of the following types of leisure/hospitality venues would you consider to be the most boring and avoid spending time in? [Select up to three options]



Younger respondents were less likely to think that gyms are boring, with this figure reducing to an average of 21% of all 18–44-year-olds. This compares to 37% of respondents aged over 45 years old saying the same.

Respondents who selected 'gyms/health clubs' as being boring and somewhere they would avoid spending time (by age)



What is the fun factor?

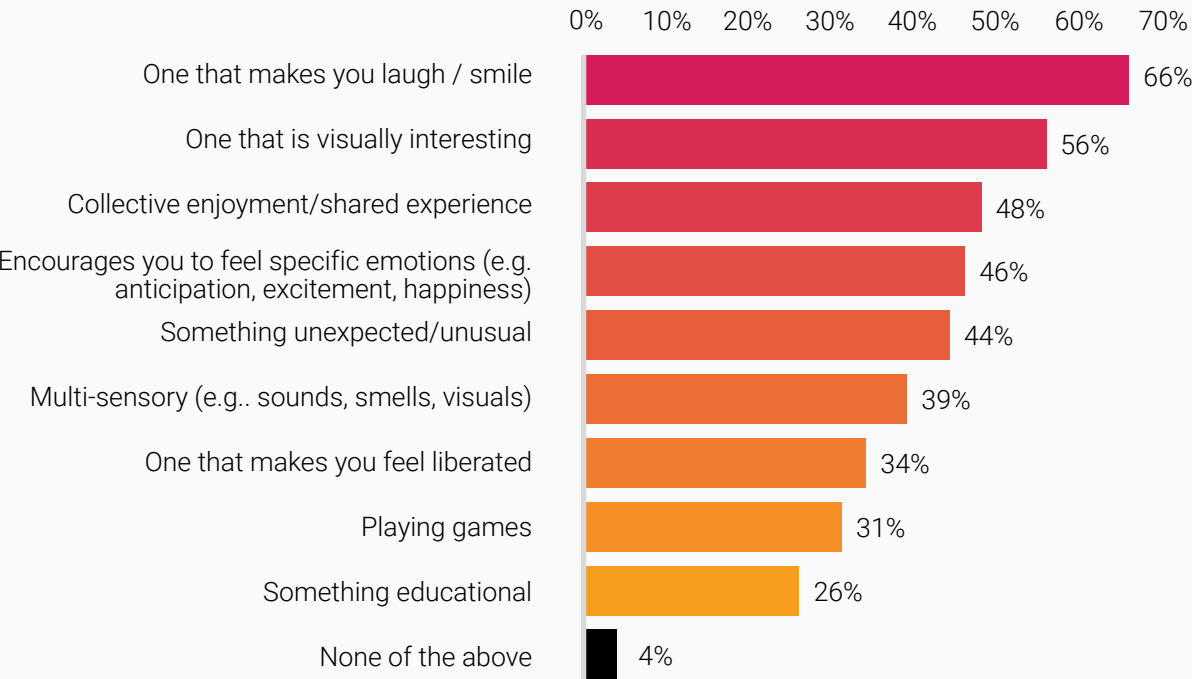
Although the concept of 'fun' is subjective, given the potential financial rewards, it is important to explore the distinction between what most people believe a fun experience is and what they think it isn't.

Saturn's research explored the difference between people's perceptions of what made somewhere feel like a fun and, conversely, a boring experience, and how they would be likely to respond to a place that felt boring.

This information can subsequently be used by gyms to alter their customer experience to make it more fun and therefore profitable.

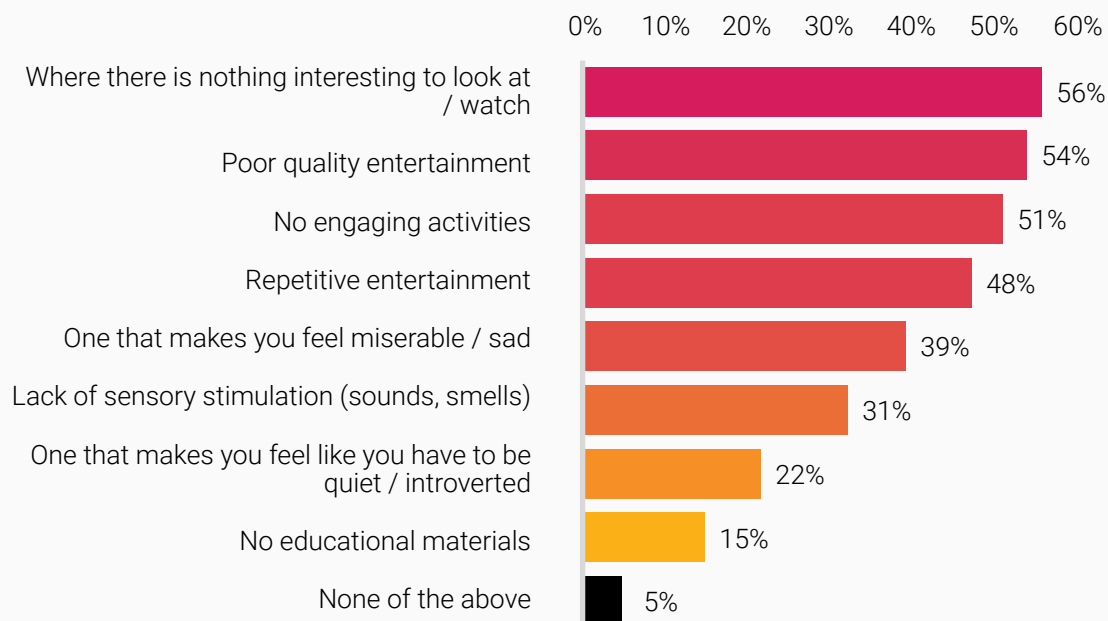
Generally speaking, the survey respondents felt that a fun experience was something that prompted them (and the people around them) to smile or laugh and was visually interesting.

What makes something feel like a fun experience? (tick all that apply)



On the converse side, when asked what made something feel like a boring experience, respondents said it was when there was nothing to look at or watch, the available entertainment was poor quality or repetitive.

What makes something feel like a boring experience? (tick all that apply)



Respondents were asked if they avoided spending time in boring spaces when outside of the home. More than half (53%) said yes - this figure rose to 66% for those aged 18-24, and to 61% for the over 65s. Furthermore, a quarter said they were 'not sure' (as opposed to saying they would not), suggesting that **more than three quarters of people may avoid places they perceive to be boring.**

Respondents were also asked how long it took them to start feeling bored to the point where they felt they had to entertain themselves (e.g. using a mobile phone).

- 25% said 60 seconds or less
- 15% said 1-2 minutes
- 13% said 3-5 minutes
- 19% said longer than five minutes

NB: 11% said they wouldn't entertain themselves, and 17% said they weren't sure

These results suggest that more than half of people (53%) are likely to lose interest in a gym and think of it as being a boring place within 5 minutes, if it's not actively stimulating or entertaining them.

Solutions

The UK's private sector gym/health club industry is growing, but it is also evolving.

Fitness centres that fail to deliver obvious value for money and improve members' mental health as well as their physical health, may struggle to compete against other gyms that offer more for less.

Our research indicates that there is a clear financial benefit to create stimulating environments in gyms, so that members engage more and return often.

Key principles highlighted for improving gym spaces are:

- They should be visually interesting.
- They should stimulate users, making them laugh/smile, feel excited, and/or anticipate a positive experience.
- They should feel lively.
- They should foster a shared, positive experience, helping to create a sense of community and tackle 'gymtimidation'
- They should be unpredictable.



Whilst this is a long list, it is entirely possible to deliver all of these elements in a cost-effective and repeatable way if digital signage displays and a good content management system are used.

This is because digital displays are dynamic and create a vast amount of 'airtime' which can be used in a variety of ways.

Even a single well-thought-out display can go a long way if it utilises strong, engaging content.

Digital display deliverables

Digital displays can deliver excellent outcomes for gyms and health clubs, engaging and entertaining gym goers. They attract, engage and delight gym goers. Here are just a few examples of how this technology can be harnessed:

Optimising equipment and space

The clever placement of digital displays, showcasing helpful content can boost fitness equipment use and optimise the use of floorspace.

Already, gyms like David Lloyd Clubs use digital signage with engaging content to share workout tutorials, motivational messages, and class schedules.

Interactive displays are also being employed by some gyms, that give members a chance to take part in interactive challenges or access on-demand virtual trainers.

And digital displays can aid floorspace zoning too. Gyms such as Gymbox offer yoga, meditation, and stress-reduction classes alongside traditional fitness areas, using interactive digital signage to deliver these without additional staff costs.



Encouraging class attendance

Digital displays enable gyms to highlight specialised classes and show class previews, enticing members to try something new.

Class countdown timers can also be displayed, encouraging gym goers to consider classes on top of their standard workout, helping them to get more value from their memberships.

Promoting value add initiatives

With attention-grabbing content, digital displays enable gyms to promote a wide range of value-adds. Some examples of initiatives that could be amplified include:

- Apps to give members tailored workout plans and class booking.
- Flexible membership terms such as the ability to use more than one site, or no cancellation policies.
- Spa-like 'recovery' zones.
- Loyalty programs rewarding frequent visits or achievement of fitness goals.
- Personal trainer profiles & tips.
- Injury prevention tips (e.g. stretches) – and nutritional/seasonal advice (e.g. hydration tips for training in the summer/winter).
- Gamification – creating healthy competition between members.



Creating community

Nurturing a welcoming, friendly environment is vital for gyms that want to encourage return visits and positive word of mouth.

To aid this, digital signage can boost the promotion of social events, such as group runs, charity fitness challenges and mixers - building a sense of community and helping members develop their fitness club friendship circles.

Specialised offerings for specific demographics, senior fitness classes for instance, are also perfect for digital display promotion, along with any concessions.

At the same time, health club social media communities can be brought to life and boosted via on-site displays. These can promote club social media feeds and encourage people to contribute/comment and show off their achievements, as well as helping people to find 'training buddies'.

Finding new members

One obvious use of digital displays within a gym setting is to encourage wider membership by highlighting referral schemes.

Displays offer a simple way to boost awareness of referral rewards and 'invite a friend for free' sessions, amongst the existing members.

Selling merchandise

Far more engaging than static advertising, digital signage can be used to promote merchandise to gym-goers.

It may even open another revenue stream, if suppliers are willing to pay to have their products appear on digital displays. Other local businesses with a health focus may also wish to advertise this way.

Food and drink offerings are ideal for digital advertisement. Not only can digital displays draw more members and visitors to food and beverage areas, but they can also boost the sale of specific products - particularly when content is designed to promote health benefits.

Summary

In an increasingly crowded market and set against competition from online and 'at home' fitness brands, gyms need to engage with and captivate members more than ever.

Our research suggests that creating a sense of fun, wellbeing, community and dynamism can significantly boost membership engagement and retention. Clever use of digital signage technology and great content can help to achieve this, whilst also providing an attention-grabbing promotional tool for merchandise, events and onsite food/drink offerings.

Digital signage solutions can foster community by amplifying positive social media posts, encouraging group interactions and providing talking points. They can help to boost motivation and reduce feelings of intimidation amongst new gym-goers by providing a welcome distraction.

The best way to get the right balance between costs and benefits is to work with a consultancy experienced in creating exciting digital touchpoints and content, and in working with different-sized businesses with varied budgets. This will ensure that your gym gets the right hardware in the right place and with the right content.

Next steps

Saturn Visual Solutions is a digital signage consultancy with 25+ years' experience in the leisure industry helping to make customer experiences engaging and fun.

We have worked with a host of businesses, of varying sizes in the leisure sector.

We use this collective experience to create fun, interactive visitor experiences, and to look for ways to improve the financial standing of our clients – e.g. through increasing the volume and profitability of merchandise/food and drink sales.

We offer a range of complementary digital signage services to help leisure and fitness businesses install and manage digital displays with ease, whilst also getting the best possible results from them.

To learn more about how Saturn can help your gym business, **contact us on 0161 222 0706 or email sales@saturnvisual.com**