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GYM OWNER

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CEO OF

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SO51FITNESS – AN ECO-FRIENDLY GYM WHERE WE CONVERT YOUR WORKOUTS INTO WATTS

SO51Fitness was established in 2017, initially offering group exercise classes. I set up as a sole trader and specialised in pre & postnatal fitness, running buggy-fit and circuits classes in a hired studio. I quickly realised that there was a gap in the local market for a smaller boutique-type gym offering—something that would provide high-end service and equipment but in a smaller and more personal setting. I wanted to create a space that was unintimidating, with a real community feel. An opportunity came up to rent some space within an existing business so I grabbed it without a second thought and got to work immediately. It took exactly ten weeks from the day I signed the rental agreement to opening the gym! The initial outlay for the equipment felt pretty high, so I did a lot of the decorating and aesthetics myself to save money—laying rubber flooring, painting, and wall art. I guess that is also the personal touch that marks out SO51Fitness as a labour of love, rather than just another corporate gym. Membership grew quickly, and just over 12 months later I made the decision to relocate to my own premises. The business continued to grow and as it did so, it felt even more important to make sure that even a somewhat bigger and less cosy SO51Fitness stood out in the market. I needed to find something that would make us really unique...



I was born and raised in Shoreham-By-Sea outside Brighton, one of the first towns in the UK to adopt the blue box recycling scheme, and perhaps that's one of the reasons why I was aware of environmental issues from a young age. I started researching how a gym could be more environmentally friendly and started SO51Fitness on its green journey by banning the use of single-use plastic bottles in May 2019. I devised a series of "punishments" to be meted out to members if they were caught (usually burpees if I was on shift!). The next step was the purchase of an array of green plants, carefully researched for their air-purifying properties; then I switched to chemical-free cleaning



products. But that still didn't solve the problem of our power-thirsty equipment. Did I dare trade out all the equipment that I had bought just to be eco-friendly? Well, I've never done things by halves... I was aware that eco-friendly kits did exist in the marketplace somewhere so I researched it, tracked down another gym that had it, then contacted their supplier to see myself. SportsArt had some of the nicest looking kits I had ever seen, created to the latest technological specifications—and one particular selling point: rather than plugging them into the wall so that they could use power from the grid, these machines harnessed human muscle power to put energy back in again. SportsArt offers a number of ranges but I knew immediately that I wanted the Eco Powr-Line range. Up to 74% of the energy created by our members during their workout is converted into utility-grade electricity and sent back into our local grid to offset energy consumption. SportArt also offers a software ecosystem that can be purchased to support the kit, enhancing the benefits of their ECO-POWR™ products. SA WELL+™ includes energy production tracking, a leaderboard display, asset management, and a user app to track individual workouts and lifetime watts produced.

Members of SO51Fitness can scan themselves in on the CV kit with a QR code and track their workouts in real-time. Their stats are uploaded onto our big in-club screen, where we can collectively watch our workouts turn into watts and send them back into the

local grid. Since installing our new green kit in September last year we have been running monthly challenges using the leaderboard—from Boys vs Girls to Beat the Trainers (where the total number of watts generated by members had to top the collective pot generated by the team of SO51Fitness trainers)—it creates a real buzz in the gym and is a fantastic way to keep members engaged and motivated.

Obviously, the move to an eco-friendly gym hasn't come without its challenges. Not everybody wants to buy into greener living or is motivated to by the idea an energy generation leaderboard. However, as I was once told, it's better to encourage lots of people to do it imperfectly than for one person to do it perfectly. The "it" in this case is taking steps towards a more sustainable lifestyle - even if that is via a running machine.

Right now, I'm wondering whether sustainability is going to seem more and more important as many are finding time during the COVID-19 lockdown to rethink many habits that had become ingrained. Perhaps more people will start re-evaluating their lifestyle following the pandemic. As a business SO51Fitness has had to adapt and rethink many of its day-to-day strategies, and I'm learning quickly too. You can now purchase SO51Fitness indoor, outdoor and online memberships, and I'm always on the lookout for new ways to encourage good health and strengthen the community we have built.

The thing that really gives me hope for the future of fitness is the eco-factor. This has already shown itself to be a

fantastic strategy to help SO51Fitness stand out and be different, and interest has grown steadily, with more than ever people becoming more environmentally conscious. But the COVID 19 pandemic takes this to a new level. As the UN's environment chief, Inger Andersen, put it; nature is sending us a message that if we neglect the planet, we put our wellbeing at risk. An eco-gym is more than a marketing strategy: in the light of the pandemic, it seems like the clearest way forward. Planetary health has to be at the heart of personal health. The crisis has forced so many of us to stop in our tracks and become more creative in how we manage and think about our wellbeing. The fitness industry is still under partial lockdown, so we should all be shifting and adapting—but once it is over, if anything, I think the SO51Fitness will come out stronger than ever before. The coronavirus is another reminder that life is short and we only get one body to live in—and one planet to live on. We need to treat both well.

