

FEATURED INTERVIEW WITH NOMAL WIJAYARATNE

Chairman, Quantum Fitness

What is your background and the goal of establishing quantum fitness?

I established the company back in 1998. If I tell you a bit about my background, I lived in New Zealand since I was 10 years old and lived there for around 23 years and then came back in 1998. What motivated me to come back was that I was keen on getting involved with the government on economic development as a graduate in Economics. In the process I set up this business. Quantum fitness was originally started as quantum teleshopping which we used to run commercials on television about innovative products. I am quite related to the fitness side more because I was involved in Sports. Gradually we added towards the fitness side and in 2006 we changed the name to quantum fitness from quantum teleshopping.

What do you think about the market size of the Sri Lankan fitness equipment industry?

Market size in Sri Lanka is still at the infant stages. The size of the market really depends on people's education and emphasis on the importance of fitness. Primarily even doctors are suggesting for people that they should balance their lifestyle with fitness and as the pace of life becomes much faster, people get into more fast

foods. Through this, the level of fitness that is required becomes much more important.

How could you compare and contrast the trade between equipment for home users and fitness centres in your company?

The comparison between commercial fitness and home fitness is that in commercial fitness the equipment is much more expensive. That is because it is made for 16 hours of use per day whereas home fitness is done based on an average of four people at a house and they are expecting that they are going to make use of it on a daily basis making them last at least for five years. So that is the primary difference, but other than that even the home fitness equipment carries exactly the same features and functions as commercial fitness equipment.

What has been the trend pre and post Covid on the trade of fitness equipment?

Covid gave us a huge boost because a lot of people had the fear regarding immunity which they emphasised on the need of fitness to boost their immunity up. At that point even the World Health Organisation (WHO) was advising people on the need to stay active and not only good nutrition and sleep is required but also the level of fitness. That gave us a good boost at that time. But post Covid, unfortunately it mixed with the crisis in the country so it is really the crisis that is more highly impacted to us post Covid.

Which equipment is considered to be the most popular out of all?

The most popular equipment in the world is the treadmill because everybody knows to press a button and start walking, and the most important fitness requirement is considered to be cardio. Cardiovascular is basically working on your heart. Doctors



generally advise walking about six kilometres a day. So as a result, a lot of people get drawn to treadmills. But if you look at what is the area of the body that people tend to work out the most, it is the abdominals. If you were to advertise abdominal machines, it tends to have a higher return on the advertising.

What is considered to be the fastest moving good in terms of sales at Quantum Fitness?

The fastest moving product for us is the 'elliptical trainer'. It comes at an entry level pricing and we distribute it through Softlogic, Singer and some of the other retail chains. So they tend to have the fastest turnover.

What short, medium and long term strategies could be implemented to gain competitive advantage in the industry?

Short term again is really depending on the product quality, brand, location and after sales. Those are the factors to boost competitiveness in the short term. In the long term it is about engaging with the customer's interest. We have a product called 'I-Fit' which helps people to meet international personal trainers virtually.

How has the local currency devaluation (and the overall economic downturn) affected your business?

It has had a huge impact. In our case we have actually been doing constant promotions to ensure that we mitigate the price increases, but the fact is that still there is a market segment that knows that fitness is an important element in their life.

What advice do you have for someone planning to set up a home gym?

I would recommend that the first piece of equipment should be facilitating your cardio which is treadmill or an elliptical or a bike and then to improve it with some strength training which are some accessories like dumbbells, stretch bands and a multi-gym. If you prefer vibration training, there is a product called power clip. Vibration training increases the effectiveness of any traditional fitness workout by first activating all your muscles and then once you do it, increases the effectiveness by about 25%. Then once you do the workout it helps to do your cool down and the others with vibration training. If you are in a hurry you could just do like a 45-50 minute workout in 10 minutes. As it is a high intensity workout I always think to myself to take five per cent of the value of your vehicle/s and invest that amount in fitness. It is always good to buy good quality equipment where you would really enjoy the workout which encourages you to workout that makes it effective.

What do you see as future opportunities for this industry?

Future opportunities are quite great and I think it is generally the private sector and the government should be aware of it because if you did have a good fitness program it reduces the chance of illness. It really helps to increase the productivity of the people. Sri Lanka spends about US\$5 billion on health care and I know from my own personal experience of my parents when they got into a workout program their medical bills came down by about 90%. So as a country, if that amount of money can be spent and utilised for something more useful like education, I think that is really the fundamental opportunity of growth in the industry.