

STEVE WRIGHT

Kath Hudson talks to the UK MD of SCIFIT about the company's medical heritage, pushing the boundaries of R&D and developing truly inclusive kit



Q When and by whom was SCIFIT® established?

SCIFIT's parent company Sinties™ was formed in 1987 with its roots in the home medical market, selling its fitness and rehab kit for people with disabilities. The company entered the commercial fitness and rehabilitation market in 1993 and the SCIFIT® cardiovascular line was formed two years later.

Q What's SCIFIT's philosophy?

Our philosophy is to meet the needs of a wide range of individuals. We aim to do this by providing excellent quality products, programmes and services in conjunction with innovative fitness technologies and programmes.

Q What's your USP?

Accessibility. We ensure our products can be used by everyone: those who are deconditioned, overweight or recovering from injury, the ageing population, or elite athletes whether disabled or not. The PRO2®, for example, is three machines in one: you can use it as a total body ergometer, an upper body ergometer or a recumbent bike.

Our products are particularly suitable for special populations due to their accessibility, comfort, full adjustability, ease of use, low start speed and minimal increments of increase in resistance levels: we offer 200 levels of resistance. They also include motivational aspects – the Fit-Key™ (see p75) – and, with the

exception of the treadmill, are self-powered, which makes our products energy-efficient.

We believe that a large number of currently inactive individuals will become active if given the appropriate education, programmes and equipment. The ageing population and the high cost of treating illness are becoming a major motivating factor for the promotion of wellness.

Q What are your core products?

These include SCIFIT's PRO Series, as well as our commercial line of bi-directional bikes, treadmills and elliptical walkers.

Q When did you join the company?

I joined in 2006, when the UK subsidiary was formed to grow the international arm of the company within the UK and Europe. We run the UK and European operations; in the UK we sell direct and in Europe we use distributors. We've formed a close partnership with gym80 in Germany, for example.

Q How much autonomy does the UK office have?

As a wholly-owned subsidiary of the parent company, they have overall control. However, once we've agreed budgets and targets at the beginning of the year, we can implement our own plans, ideas and partnerships in order to grow the business and achieve those targets.

Q Did the company modify its products for the commercial sector?

It was more a case of adding to the range. The ergometer and upper body ergometers were the staple products, but we needed to exploit the key

WHO'S WHO?

CEO: Larry Born
President: Denton Smith
Vice-president operations: Randy Yost
Vice-president international sales: Bo Young
Vice-president sales & marketing: Ken Pearson
Vice-president sales (US domestic): Corey Disler
UK/European managing director: Steve Wright

features of our range and the innovative fitness programmes. We've also enhanced the look of the product over the years, and this continues to be an ongoing project for our R&D team.

Q What are the innovative fitness programmes that you mention?

Fitness equipment incorporates four standard fitness programmes – manual, heart rate, hill and random. We've added two more to that list. The first is the constant work programme that works on wattage, allowing wattage output to be set at a certain level. If the user slows down, the machine will increase the resistance to keep them working at the wattage they've specified.

The second is iso-strength, a strength training programme within a cardio machine that works on an isokinetic basis – exercise with an accommodating resistance at a fixed speed. This is an excellent interval training tool combining strength and cardio, and is a safe and effective way to increase strength and stamina. Bi-directional resistance doubles the effectiveness of the exercise, allowing the individual to train longer and promote reciprocal muscle work, ensuring correct recovery periods.

We've linked all this in with our Fit-Key technology. In the UK, we use a basic key that can be pre-programmed as required by the customer. The keys can be used in all of our machines, linking a variety of programmes and machines together. This is great for group exercise, allowing a small number of people of varying abilities to work together over a set period of time. This will become USB technology later this year, enabling a far greater choice of programmes and updates.



All-inclusive SCIFIT has IFI Stage 2 accreditation and works alongside the IFI as an R&D associate

Q Do you have plans to unveil any new products or developments this year?

We're developing protocols for our PRO2 All Body Exerciser for VO2 MAX testing, as well as introducing our USB Fit-Key technology. For the US domestic market, SCIFIT and Performance Health Systems launched the bioDensity™ isometric training system at IHRSA 2009, which signals the company's first venture into the strength market. It's aimed at isometric training – pushing and pulling a stationary object from different angles – and uses a computer to measure the progress.

SCIFIT BY NUMBERS

Head office: Tulsa, US
Year-on-year growth: 20 per cent internationally
Number of offices: Two (US and UK)
Number of employees: 56
Countries to which the UK office distributes: Germany, Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria, Cyprus, Greece, Slovakia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Russia, the Netherlands and Norway



New trend In the future Wright sees people using the Fit-Key to book equipment so they can train together

Top choice The REX recumbent treadmill, with its swivel seat, is popular in the medical/rehab sector and in residential homes



► **Q What was SCIFIT's big break?**

In the UK, it was achieving IFI accreditation – initially at Stage 1 and more recently at Stage 2. Now we work with the IFI as an R&D associate. This got our products out into the UK and enabled us to expand on the exercise protocols that have made SCIFIT a success in the US. We've recently been awarded Medical Certification on eight of our rotary products, which has enhanced our profile and product offering right across Europe and within medical facilities in the UK.

Q What does it mean to be an R&D associate?

Along with other fitness companies, we attend meetings with the IFI two or three times a year and are involved at a very early stage in IFI developments, or redevelopments, of equipment standards. We're currently discussing the IFI Stage 3, which I think could be a reality by 2012. Audio output is a topic under discussion at the moment.

Q What are your most popular products?

In the UK, the most popular products continue to be the Stage 2 IFI-accredited

PRO1 Upper Body Ergometer, PRO2 Total Body Ergometer and the ISO7000R Recumbent Bike. The PRO1 Sport is becoming popular among independents and sports clubs – boxing, for example – as a specific upper body exerciser, and the REX™ (recumbent elliptical) and Rehab Treadmill are popular in the medical/rehab sector and in residential villages/homes.

Q Who are your customers?

Local authorities for the IFI products; medical and rehab facilities (Lincoln Hospital, Core Exercise Clinic in Enfield); sports performance centres such as those focusing on football, rugby and boxing; residential villages/homes (Hazel Court in Swansea); independent gyms that want to differentiate themselves; and the education sector (Arbour Vale School, and SEN School in Slough).

Q How would you describe the market at the moment?

The market appears to be cautious, which is actually quite positive for niche suppliers like us. Operators are tending to be more thorough when researching what equipment best suits their facility and the populations they wish to attract. As suppliers, we need to react to this and ensure we're offering suitable and specific solutions that cater for the operators' needs and steer away from the 'one size fits all' principle.

Q What trends do you predict for 2009?

Despite the understandably cautious approach, we believe that operators

will be looking for unique solutions that allow them to differentiate themselves from other clubs.

Daily activity monitoring will continue to grow as the convergence of fitness, medical and rehab continues, with the requirement for accurate recording. I also see a growth in the 'club within a club' principle where, using the Fit-Key as a model, people can book three to five pieces of equipment and train socially together.

Q What are your plans for the next 12 months?

My aim is to continue to grow at our current rate within the UK by implementing new ideas and solutions through our existing product range. I also want to accelerate growth across mainland Europe, using Medical Certification as the launch pad.

Q Where would you like the company to be in five years?

I'd like to be the leading supplier of specialist cardio equipment throughout the UK and Europe.

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

My old rugby coach said to me that achieving goals – winning – is much more fun than just taking part!

 **kath hudson**
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FAVOURITES

Book: *It's Not About the Bike* by Lance Armstrong, and *Touching the Void* by Joe Simpson
Film: *Pulp Fiction*
Music: R&B
Place: Cornwall
Food: Cantonese
Season: Spring
Leisure activity: Rugby, golf, running and skiing