

Lululemon is targeting \$1 billion in sales from its men's business by 2020 after a 250% growth in the market in four years, while small companies are addressing the burgeoning antenatal sector.

New yoga tribes

When a host of male celebrities including Matthew McConaughey and Robert Downey Junior were pictured in yoga poses a few years ago, the tide for the female dominated activity began to turn. Sensing a shift in attitude, instructors Adam O'Neill and Robert Sidoti set up the Broga brand of classes in the US in 2009 to appeal to men, and have since trained more than 500 instructors, who have in turn set up franchises around the world. The classes are reportedly more intense than standard yoga, with more focus on chest and arm strengthening, and with some poses renamed (for instance, child's pose is called chill-out pose).

Web-based fitness site Grokker is also now offering men's tutorials. Its CEO Lorna Borenstein said men are adding yoga to their exercise routines as a cross-training tool for flexibility and improving recovery time. "Men are a little late to the party, but we're seeing more men who find time to do yoga together a few times a week," she says.

The number of men taking up yoga in recent years is rising rapidly. In the US, women outnumbered men by about four to one in 2012, but this had shrunk to three to one by last year. A new study published by Yoga Journal and Yoga Alliance found the number of practitioners in the US had grown from 20 million in 2012 to 36 million this year. The number of male yogis has risen from four million to 10 million – an increase of 250%. This offers a sizeable market of male 'yogis' that might be interested in buying yoga-specific rather than general activewear to practise in.

"We have the sense that this is a global trend," Mr O'Neill tells us. "Women have been enjoying the benefits of yoga for the past 40 to 50 years, but originally (if you go back far enough) yoga was developed by men for men. Now, with growing public awareness of the dangers of stress, sitting and obesity combined with the male celebrity testimonials about the personal benefits of yoga, the value is starting to become clear to men in all walks of life."

While Mr O'Neil recommends the Bhujang line by the Yoga for Men brand for clothing and gear – "the Legend yoga mat is hands down the best on the market for men" – Canada's Lululemon also spotted the opportunity a couple

of years ago. The focus on the men's business might have been, in part, an attempt to diversify following the embarrassing recall of 17% of pants in 2013 after they were deemed see-through. In the wake, the business restructured and retrenched, with the departure of senior staff including CEO Christine Day and chief product officer Sheree Waterson, while new CEO Laurent Potdevin filled the senior management team with fresh faces.

Good reception

The new styles were successful – the ABC men's pant launched in 2013 was billed as "fashionable, athletic comfort-wear". Menswear sales reflected the focus, growing 16% in 2014 and at a higher rate through 2015: 19% in the first quarter, 31% in the second and 24% in the third, which it reported in December.

"This performance was and continues to be attributed in large part to our sweat category, the anchor of the men's business," explained Mr Potdevin to investors. "That said, all men's categories including our no-sweat and post-sweat offerings are performing well."

Throughout 2015 it introduced new fabrics such as Intersec and PrimaTech for the category, as well as technical tops in its Rulu fabrics and seamless construction and minimised or removed the logo from some styles to make the branding less obvious.

It also started experimenting with store formats that might appeal more to men, including a men's only store in New York and a dedicated area in Vancouver. "We've been very excited with playing with different formats, whether it's standalone stores, increased square footage in some of our current stores or some expanded formats," said Mr Potdevin.

However, he admitted that women will continue to be an important focus – even on the men's side: "The format that we're most excited about is the expanded store where both men's and women's are co-located, as our female guest still shops a lot for him. Our male guest does have a lot more permission to come into the Lululemon collective – but she still shops a lot for him."

In October, Lululemon appointed Lee Holman as creative director, uniting both men's and women's under one design strategy. It is now

aiming for \$5 billion in revenues by 2020, with \$1 billion of this to come from men. "We're building upon our current momentum and making the shift from playing defense to playing offense," added Mr Potdevin. "With this game plan, we're setting a clear course to sustainably and profitably grow both within North America and in our global markets."

By the start of this year, there are estimated to be 10 million male 'yogis' in the US alone.

 Lululemon

Maternity yoga

Another area of growth, although one in which small brands dominate, is the maternity sector. With many healthcare practitioners recommending pregnant women attend antenatal yoga classes to help with flexibility, there has been a surge in interest from women who would not ordinarily practise.

UK-based FittaMamma was founded by Deborah Hazeldean after she found it difficult to find suitable workout clothing when she was pregnant. "Exercise is a key lifestyle factor for many women and when they become pregnant they want to continue to stay fit, expecting to maintain this aspect of their identity and enjoy the benefits of staying fit for themselves and their baby. Yoga is ideal – it's a gentle introduction to pregnancy exercise for women who lead a more sedentary lifestyle and for women who regularly exercise, yoga can be a positive addition to their routine, building strength and flexibility, preparing for birth and helping to alleviate stress and anxiety."





A new study in the Obstetrics & Gynecology journal confirms many yoga poses are safe until late in pregnancy.

 FittaMamma

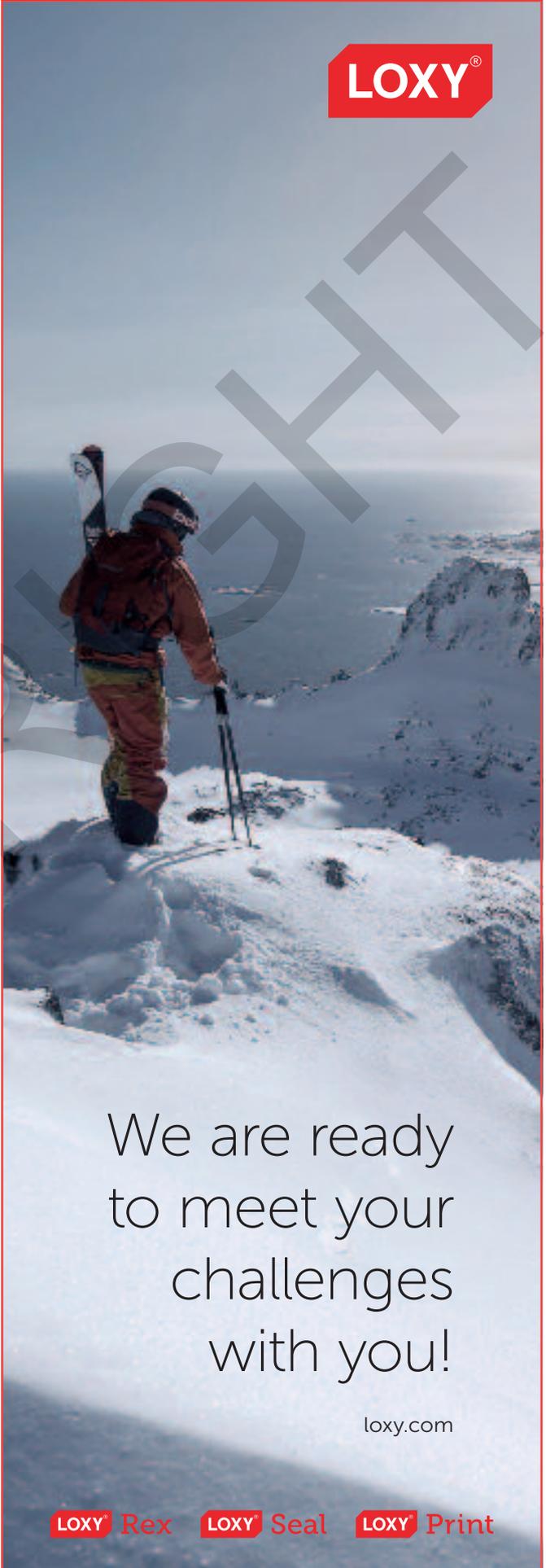
As well as offering staples such as tops and pants, the company has developed a resource beyond the clothes, with advice around trimester-specific workouts, different styles of exercise, nutrition and health.

“Our core range is made from cotton/elastane with moisture wicking content but we are developing a more technical range in a polyamide/elastane fabric aimed at women who want to maintain higher intensity workouts.”

UK-based Maternity Fitwear was also established to address the gap in the market. “Our products must ensure that the bump is supported and that the product is flexible while it is being worn. Plus, the product is comfortable and can be worn post pregnancy too,” explains its director, Susan Patrick.

In the US, Fit Maternity and Mountain Mama are addressing the gap left when brands such as Nike and Reebok discontinued their maternity ranges. Lululemon doesn’t offers an antenatal collection as it claims its pants are stretchy enough to cover a bump. “We’re actually quite happy if the main brands bypass the sector!” adds Ms Hazeldean. “Pregnancy is a temporary change in a woman’s body and I guess the bigger brands don’t feel it merits their attention.”

The Yoga Journal found the market growth shows no sign of abating; it expects eight million to try yoga for the first time this year in the US. With 37% of yogis having a child in the household that also practices, it seems a new generation is not far behind – a fact some of the bigger brands might begin to address in the coming years. 



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