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SPOTLIGHT ON BOWLING

Why Traditional Bowling Centers Are Becoming FECs

by Frank Seninsky and Scott Borowsky

For the past decade we have seen the continuance of the 'convergence' of different sectors of the leisure entertainment industry. Bowling has now come to the party. Traditional bowling centers (we used to call them alleys) are expanding/repositioning themselves to capture the ever-growing youth and children's markets. This means incorporating family entertainment center games, attractions (like soft modular play units, mini-bowling, bumper cars) birthday party areas, private bowling lanes, and expanded food service into the bowling-anchored facility. This means catering to mom and the kids (the new definition of 'family' that even sometimes includes dad). Many are going even further and expanding their markets to capture more teens and adding laser tag, climbing walls, go-karts, and other attractions from the FEC world of more than 260 different types. And let's not forget the 21-40 adult crowd where 'boutique bowling' can work in certain upscale markets.

Why and how did this massive change in attitude occur?

Fifteen years ago I (Frank) worked with many bowling centers to show them that the family entertainment center concept would work for them. I began working closely with two of bowling's forward thinkers: Joe Schumacker (currently BPAA 1st VP and President of Schumacker & Company) who was then running the 112 center Fairlanes Bowling chain and later brought me down to Florida with him to provide games for the seven Don Carter Bowling Centers; and Terry Brenne-man, Colony Park Lanes North and & Bowlers Supply in York, Pa. who began setting up dozens of game rooms with redemption and merchandise dispensing machines in the mix. Randy Chilton, then owner of Chilton Vending in Wichita, Kansas, introduced me to Frank DeSocio, multiple bowling center owner of JOMA Bowling Company and BPAA's Strike Ten 'leader' who was already expanding his centers for families. Sad to admit, but these concepts were ahead of the times, as league



Redemption games can be the marketing hub of any family entertainment center. This is The Tree House Arcade at the Foxwoods Casino Resort, one of the top family game centers in the United States (photo provided by Alpha-BET Entertainment, East Brunswick, N.J.)

bowlers still ran the bowling show and complained that the games were attracting too many kids, there was too much noise, and the games should be placed in a separate room and shut off during league play. That was then. Now, there are fewer league bowlers to make noise so the proprietor's can reclaim their businesses and capture the dollars that they have been missing out on.

Lifestyles have also certainly changed. Bowling initially emerged and captured the factory workers and small businessmen who enjoyed the social aspect of league bowling. For decades almost everyone smoked and drank beer and it was no wonder that the bowling alleys smelled of both and looked dark and dingy. As young children, many of us most likely sometimes bowled with the family, but as soon as we became teens, getting away from the family was the number one priority in life. Next came the 'sports bar/lounge' concept that has certainly helped many bowling centers during the past 20 or so years.

What has really made a positive impact on bowling are four additions that draw in the family and 1 that draws in the young adult crowd:

Five major additions/transformations: pizza, bumpers, glow bowling, redemption games, mini-bowling, and

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Perky's Pizza shows off their new look at Bowl Expo 2005. (Left to right) Jim Huxell, General Manager, and Rick White, Director of Sales.

now boutique bowling, the 'hip' adult concept:

1. **Pizza:** One might give credit to Bob Sullivan, the founder of Perky's Pizza (now with US PizzaWorks) for hooking up with Glenn Gable of Done-Rite Bowling and owner of several bowling centers. Done-Rite has several awards for selling the most Perky's Pizza food systems to bowling centers. In fact Done-Rite did such a good job, that the Gable family purchased Perky's Pizza. Here was a very noticeable 'convergence' of two sectors of the leisure entertainment industry coming together. With a Perky's Pizza set-up, the next logical step was to capture the family mar-

ket by packaging the pizza with birthday parties, redemption (ticket dispensing) games, and other attractions so there was much more 'than just coming to bowl.'

2. **Bumpers:** Adding bumpers that eliminated the 'gutter ball' provided children with an opportunity to have fun and enjoy bowling without feeling ashamed in front of their friends. Putting smiles on the kids' faces also made mom smile. Bowling took a great stride forward.

3. **Glow Bowling:** Transforming a bowling center into a high-energy disco-type nightclub atmosphere with the addition of glow bowling (also known as glow in the dark, black light, and cosmic bowling) attracted the teenagers back to bowling. The timing was right as life styles now dictated and permitted teens to start their three plus hour social evenings when their parents were going to sleep - around 11 p.m. to midnight. Bowling now could promote itself to the younger generation in the same way as roller skating.

4. **Redemption Games:** Bowling has been missing out on hundreds of thousands of dollars per year in additional income per center by not adding redemption games and prizes and making the games the 'marketing hub' of their operation. Progressive proprietors like Anthony Taormina of Facenda-Whitaker Lanes, Norriton, Pa., saw his game revenues increase 15 times and hold steady at that level for two years now by following the advice and design parameters of Amusement Entertainment Management. Neil Hupfauer's Main Events throughout Texas are grossing more than \$1,000,000 annually on

New Bowling Center in Iowa Features AMF Equipment

Business has been busy for Warrior Lanes in Waukee, Iowa, since this new bowling center opened July 14, according to Angie Chirpich, assistant manager. In addition to 16 lanes of bowling, the center features an arcade with video games and pool tables and a party room with an 80-person capacity. The room can be split in two to host multiple parties, she said in a recent telephone interview.

AMF sold and installed all of the center's full size bowling equipment and the setup includes 82-90 XL pinspotters, which Michael Klimpel, AMF district sales manager for the region, said are the fastest and most reliable pinspotters made. Each lane also includes automatic bumpers, Klimpel said, and glow in the dark balls. "These types of balls are becoming more and more common," he said. ♣