

Unique laser game offers excitement, generates redemption profits

By Catherine Bennett

Imagine ducking under and hopping over multi-colored lasers, momentarily pretending to be the hero in a mission impossible, breaking into a top-secret building for private information. This unique laser game has been installed in dozens of family entertainment establishments and several roller skating centers in the U.S. Called Lazer Frenzy - or sometimes "laser maze" - it is a product of Creative Works, a company specializing in family entertainment attractions.

"You have to dodge the lasers," said Timothy Marks, co-owner of Fun Warehouse in Myrtle Beach, S.C., "You are crawling through this room, but you are under the gun because the clock is counting down. You have to touch the check point button and the faster you do that the more points you get."

While it is a larger attraction, Marks said he categorizes Lazer Frenzy as an arcade game because it is set up to spit out tickets based on each player's success, and these tickets are redeemed for game-counter prizes.

The Lazer Frenzy idea is not a new idea, said Armando Lunati, Creative Works' creative experience broker, but has been around for about a decade. However, a decade ago it wasn't feasible to put an attraction as costly as Lazer Frenzy in fam-

ily fun centers. Over time, as technology has become more compact and affordable, Armando said owners of these centers have found the attraction attainable.

Lazer Frenzy's price tag ranges from \$30,000 to \$40,000, depending on the desired size and complexity of the attraction. On average, business owners that invest in the Lazer Frenzy attraction are able to make back what they paid for it in 6-8 months, Lunati said. He said he has seen a business get back what they paid for it in 30 days, but some have less luck and don't start profiting until after the year mark.

"Some of the big perks with our Lazer Frenzy is we have created 'Z towers,'" Marks said, "and what they allow you to do is rearrange the components in your maze without having to do any reconstruction or hard modifications. All you need is a screwdriver."

At Fun Warehouse, Creative Works installed a 42-inch monitor outside the Lazer Frenzy that links video footage from inside so passersby can see what players are experiencing at that moment, Marks said. This is one way to promote the attraction, urging customers to test their stealth in the maze.

"The video monitor always gets people's attention," Marks said. "And one other thing we do for our clients is host tournaments."

On scheduled Friday or Saturday nights a manager will put an attendant at



A dazzling laser display highlights the Lazer Frenzy product.

the attraction to help the flow of traffic and make sure the tournaments are running smoothly. The goal is to race an opponent through the maze and reach the end the quickest without touching any of the lasers. Marks said this is the only time Lazer Frenzy needs an attendant.

To give the Lazer Frenzy room an additional purpose, Marks said he will convert it into a glow room and allow customers to host birthday parties inside.

Bob Hansen, owner of Skateland in Savoy, Ill., said where he put his Lazer Frenzy in relation to traffic made all the difference in the attraction's success. He also

found that making it part of a package deal with other similar games urges customers to see what Lazer Frenzy is all about.

Hansen relates package deals to what customers at Disney World want in their vacation experience. He said when any amusement park fanatics go to Disney World they want to see it all. Of course, they aren't going to ride one or two rides, he said. This is how family fun centers must treat their attractions as well. In addition to having an attraction package Lazer Frenzy is included in, he also offers customers a birthday package where they can experience this active game.

Laser Blaze science field trips generate new fans for laser tag

By Connie Evener

When there were two phone calls on the same day asking about science field trips at Louisville's Lazer Blaze, Jack Turner saw an opportunity to increase revenue and attract new business. So Weber put together a presentation on the development of laser technology, beginning with the discovery of infrared light in 1800, on through contributions by Marconi, the inventor of radio, Einstein's theory of photons, and the eureka moment of George Carter, III, who invented laser tag.

The kids always cheer when Turner tells them Carter had just watched "Star Wars." Then they get the grand tour of the ILTA Laser Tag Museum, which Turner provides space for in his restaurant, First Contact. He gives a verbal pop quiz at the end and free passes to kids with the right answers. They love it, and so do their teachers.

The cost, \$16 per person, also includes a round of laser tag and mini-golf, plus the full pizza buffet lunch. The average group size is 90, mostly elementary and middle school.

"From my standpoint, the beauty is that when they come back to use those passes, they bring the family with them, so it's an expansion of our market" said Turner. "Providing an educational field trip helps us to give something back to the community. And it broadens their knowledge of what laser tag actually is."

Lazer Blaze is the last original Carter-designed Photon arena in the world. The second to last disappeared with the rest of Hurricane Katrina's debris in 2005. Among the exhibits are a collection of spin-off toys and games and equipment that have many people waxing nostalgic.

Laser tag is retro? No - and yes - said Turner. It has progressed technologically by leaps and bounds, but people are remembering the toys, activities and places of their sci-fi immersed youth fondly.

"That's one factor that's causing the revitalization of the laser tag industry right now," said Turner. "So many of those people are now of child-rearing age, and they're bringing their children to Lazer Blaze because they remember having so much fun here when they were kids."

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