

Laser Tag: Trends, sales, projections and tips for operators who want more

By Suzy Weinland

The Rinksider interviewed International Laser Tag Association's Eric Gaizat to get the scoop on what's happening in the laser tag industry. Here is what he shared:

RS: What are the newest trends in laser tag?

EG: Laser Tag is being added to existing facilities or being included in upcoming Family Entertainment Centers. Equipment is becoming lighter, brighter and more versatile in game play. We're seeing rinks even shrinking the size of the rink floor to accommodate laser tag attractions if expanding is too costly or difficult.

RS: What do laser tag arena's or laser mazes offer the customer?

EG: Laser tag arenas and laser mazes offer different types of experiences. A laser maze (different type of attraction) is done on an individual basis but people compete for the highest score. Laser tag is a chance for individuals or teams/groups of people to compete with other teams/players in a surreal video game-like environment. Laser tag also offers a great birthday party experience and has an excellent marketability for anyone around ages six and older.

RS: What benefits are there for a rink operator to add either of these to their facility?

EG: There is no "cost of goods" for laser tag other than the occasional repair. A well laid-out attraction can have a high throughput, which means more revenue. Having a well-marketed laser tag attraction also means offering a higher level of appeal to your market versus your competition. Laser tag is a whole different level of excitement when compared to most other attractions. A laser maze generally uses a small footprint and has a fast throughput, and it can recoup startup costs quickly.

RS: What are sales projections overall for 2013, and how did laser tag sales do in 2012? Would it be a smart investment to add laser tag to a roller skating venue?

EG: The laser tag industry has had an impressive run the past few years. Even in a slower economy, we are reporting more openings and far less closings than in pre-



Laser tag is a big hit for birthdays and special occasions with kids of all ages.

vious years. In fact, in 2010, the industry grew by 4.5 percent and 2.9 percent in 2011. In our discussions with operators, on average, most facilities are up between 5-8 percent annually over the past four years. This shows us that regardless of a slow moving economy, people still want to be entertained, and apparently laser tag is part of that selected entertainment. A small 2,500 square foot, 20 player laser tag system could realistically offer a skating operator \$100-150,000 in generated revenue per year depending on how they run the attraction.

RS: Do you have any figures on how many roller skating rinks/FEC's with roller skating have laser tag?

EG: According to our database of locations, there are 545 FEC's with laser tag attractions and 68 skating facilities with laser tag attractions. If it is predominantly a skating facility, we list the location as a skating location and if they have three or more major attractions they are listed as an FEC. Some of these FEC's may actually include skating rinks.

RS: How many rinks added laser tag in the past 2-3 years? How do U.S. rinks fare vs. globally in wanting to add laser tag?

EG: In 2009, we recorded six roller rinks that opened with or added laser tag in their facility. In

2010 there were 10 rinks, in 2011 four rinks, and in 2012 (as of The Rinksider's print date), four rinks. North American skating market is about 95 percent of the worldwide market for skating centers using laser tag.

RS: Who are the top laser tag manufacturers and distributors?

EG: Some laser tag systems obviously have more flexibility and diversity and make more sense to add to smaller attractions than others. The top laser tag suppliers to the skating industry are:

- Zone Laser Tag has 17 locations
- Laser Storm* has 15 locations
- Laser Blast has 11 locations
- Lazer has 11 locations
- LaserTron has 4 locations
- 7 Miscellaneous locations

*An interesting note, Laser Storm as a company actually went out of business in 1999, so the fact that they still have a good share of the skating market after all these years speaks to the operator's ability to keep their systems going despite their supplier being absent.

RS: Would you please give our readers a few choice tips about choosing a laser tag supplier?

EG: As far as looking at suppliers, no matter who the operator is looking at, the best three tips we can offer is:

1. Don't fall for the hype - there are pros and cons to every system. Contact us. We'll be happy to go over the good and bad with every laser tag system out there.

2. Play the gear - if it's too complicated to understand or half the packs don't work for another operator, then you should know that before you buy. If you like a certain supplier, we can help you find a location close to you that has that same gear so you know what you are getting yourself into.

3. Talk to existing operators - no one has the best scoop on your potential vendor than people already using the gear. Again, call us and we can get you in touch with a variety of operators, not just the ones the suppliers WANT you to talk to.

The ILTA has a wealth of knowledge and resources to help the aspiring laser tag entrepreneur, along with a variety of services, manuals and benefits that can increase an operator's chance for success and increasing their revenues. On top of that, the ILTA also offers a training service to help rink staff run the attraction much more efficiently and effectively. For questions, contact Eric Gaizat, Director of Membership Services, info@lasertag.org, www.lasertag.org, 317-786-9755.