

INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY!

RINKSIDER

...in our 57th year!

Jan-Feb 2010

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With three membership levels, a bevy of personal benefits and discounts, plus marketing and promotion ideas for rinks and merchants, the American Skating Association offers "something for everyone."

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For a new twist on booking summer camps, consider the physics-education program put together by skating champion Roger Wampach and used in summer 2009 by Orbit Skate Center in Palatine, Ill.

Savvy rink owners use unique marketing tools to gain an edge

By Jim Morris

Question: How can a family entertainment center expect to grow its business if nobody knows it's there?

Answer: It can't.

That's where marketing and image building come in. Rink owners who are savvy about marketing and constantly work at it have a much better chance to survive and thrive

during poor economic times.

With today's technology, a strong marketing program involves the Internet, not only with a Web page, but coming up with cross-promotions and links from other Web pages.

Email has also become an important tool for rinks to get their message out. In fact, at some rinks email

blasts have become the dominant method of advertising.

Website benefits six Chicago rinks

Several roller rink owners and managers from suburban Chicago long ago realized that while they compete against each other for customers, they also have many common goals that they can help each other attain.

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Has your advertising stalled? One Washington State rink owner gives his marketing some gas with this van wrap. See story, page 15.



Log onto www.rinkforum.com The RINKSIDER's idea exchange!

By Suzy Weinland

For all of you roller skating center owners and operators – and industry vendors – who have asked for a way to communicate and share ideas online 24-7, RINKSIDER has listened and

delivered.

The RINKSIDER's new online forum, www.rinkforum.com, was launched in December 2009 with questions and ideas from some of the industry's leading owners, operators and business partners.

"Our goal in creating this site is to

grow the roller skating industry by helping each operator do the best job possible in making his or her rink a fun experience for customers and a profitable endeavor for the business owner/operator. Rinkforum.com is bringing industry professionals together online in a safe and open forum that allows everyone involved in the business of roller skating to pose questions to each other and share their best ideas for all areas of their rink or entertainment center," shared Linda Katz, RINKSIDER publisher. "The more healthy rinks we have, the healthier our industry will be as a whole."

The RINKSIDER invites all of you to check out www.rinkforum.com, post your own questions, join discussions already in progress, or start a new thread on a specific topic of interest in the roller skating business world. Rinkforum.com is accessible via key word searches on the internet, as well as a link on www.rinksider.com.

For more information or to share your thoughts about [rinkforum.com](http://www.rinkforum.com), please e-mail publisher Linda Katz at rinksider@rinksider.com, and be sure to check out our new, updated RINKSIDER website at www.rinksider.com.



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"Roundup" (cont'd from page 1)

"Mainly, we want to promote roller skating," said Ed Wanders, manager at Coachlite Skate Center in Roselle, Ill. "If what we do is good for roller skating, then all of us will profit."

In the last couple of years, they have actually encouraged customers to visit any of their six rinks through a Web site called MySkateChicago.com. It is one Web site that promotes activities and offers specials at all six rinks, and it has point-and-click links to each rink's individual Web site.

The idea was presented to the group by Sandra Levin, owner of Orbit Skate

Center in Palatine. And although they admit measuring the contribution the Web site has made to their bottom lines is almost impossible, they are convinced it has been a big success.

"There is no question in my mind it has been a great help," said Steve Turner, owner of USA Skate Center in Romeoville. "It has helped bring more awareness to roller skating in this area. This is a tough business with plenty of competition from other activities and the more people who know about roller skating, the better it is for all of us."

Each rink contributes to the My

SkateChicago.com on a monthly basis, sending Levin its upcoming activities and specials to post. "The site receives over 17,000 hits a month," said Levin.

"A family that wants to skate this weekend can look in one spot to find out where they might go," Wanders explained. "Generally, people seem to stay in their own area, but that's not always the case. We usually see people from other towns when we have something special here."

One example of a promotion that benefited all six rinks was when Radio Disney used each rink as an entry point for Jonas Brothers tickets when they

were performing in Chicago, according to Levin. MySkateChicago.com was the promotional tool.

While each rink is within 20 miles of each other, the competition doesn't concern the owners. In fact, each rink honors the other rinks' passes.

"We're all friends ... we sort of grew up together. So we know each other's rinks very well," Wanders added.

The group meets every couple of months at a different rink to talk about the business, what works for them and what

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Roundup (cont'd from page 36)

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doesn't, what's new and what they have heard from other rink owners.

"The important thing for all of is the more people who are skating, the better it is. There are so many other things for people to pick from nowadays, so our mission is to get them into roller skates," Turner said.

In addition to Orbit, Coachlite and USA Skate, the other rinks in the group are

rink is located and then watch the customers roll in.

One such program being used by about a dozen rinks across the country is doing just that.

A couple of years ago, Don and Susan Perkins of Roll On America in Lancaster, Mass., met Kim Snow of FunMaker Promotions out of Lakeland, Fla., at a convention for bowling proprietors in

to town and travels the area, signing up businesses near the rink. She goes into a business and tells them that if they place a display box of small cards (about the size of a business card) on their counter, each card will say, "Skate or play Laser Tag free, compliments of... with their name."

Then it gives the name and address of the rink, and restrictions, such as "week-days only," or "not good for birthday parties," etc.

"You can't be too restrictive," Snow pointed out. "The more you restrict people, the fewer people will use your rink."

Perkins said they had Snow distribute 70,000 cards at about 70 businesses around Lancaster.

"We run the promotion June through October. That's our slowest time," Perkins said. "They expired at the end of October, so we'll probably do it again next year."

Snow said it is important to have an expiration date so the cards don't show up years later.

The idea is to bring more people into the rink. "Even though you are giving away a free admission or game of Laser Tag or something similar, once you get the customer in, he or she will spend money," she said.

"We average about \$11 for every person who comes into the rink," Perkins added. "So you can see how important it is just getting them to come in, especially during slow times."

Snow said, "The more (activities) the rink has to offer, the more it can make from this promotion."

On the back of each card is a place for the skater's name, birthday and email address. Once a person uses a free coupon, his or her name and email address go into the rink's database for added promotional opportunities.

The best businesses for the program are small retail establishments, such as convenience stores and locally-owned restaurants and stores. Customers will keep going back because they know they'll get something in return.

Growing birthday business

Victoria Tharp of Skate-N-Fun Zone in Manassas, Va., is building birthday party business through online bookings and schools.

"Our admissions and skate rentals have been up, but our birthday party business has been a little bit slow," she said. "We are trying to turn that around."

One indication that party business is starting to come back is Skate-N-Fun's online booking.

"From April through October, we booked over 60 parties online," Tharp said. "What that tells me is more people are using computers and they are accustomed to doing business online. That's why it is so important to have a good Web page."

She also is trying to book more parties the old fashioned way – through schools. "I think a lot of rink owners have become complacent," she said. "We've decided to send somebody back to contact schools and try to get more party business."



Kim Snow, owner of FunMaker Promotions, places promotional cards for rinks in local businesses.

Funway Ultimate Entertainment in Batavia, Lombard Roller Rink and Fleetwood Roller Rink in Summit.

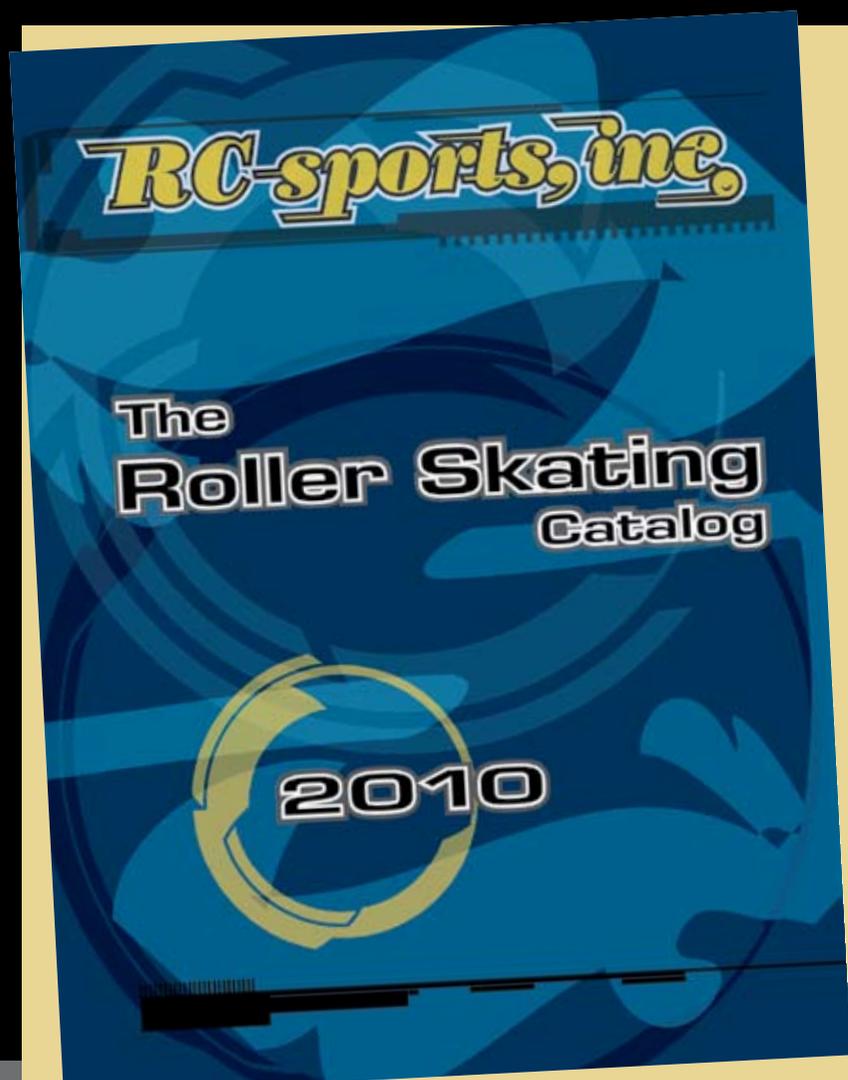
Coupons generate business

The concept seems simple enough: print up coupons, distribute them to businesses all around the area where a skating

Las Vegas. They soon realized the service Snow was selling to bowling establishments would work just as well for family fun centers.

"We've been using her service for two years and it has worked out very well for us," Don Perkins said.

Here's how it works: Snow comes



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