

Appoint a marketing manager and watch your revenues soar

By Kathy Bergstrom

An investment in a marketing director is an investment in your business, say the owners of two Atlanta area roller skating centers.

While it's scary to hire an employee solely for marketing, rinks should recoup the salary costs in increased business.

Jeff and Ava Couey, owners of Sparkles Family Fun Centers in Kennesaw and Hiram, Georgia, hired Tara Henry to be the marketing director for the rinks about four years ago.

Jeff Couey's family has been in the roller skating rink business since 1959, and other family members own two additional Sparkles Family Fun Centers.

The Coueys expanded and remodeled both of their rinks, including the addition of multi-level play centers and laser tag.

With the improvements, they decided it was time to have an employee dedicated to marketing the rinks and coordinating group sales.

They weren't sure where to turn when they ran into Henry who had worked at United Skates of America in New York and had relocated to Georgia. She stopped in to see the rink, and the Coueys found their new marketing director.

Since expanding the rink and hiring Henry, Ava Couey said the Kennesaw rink has gone from about \$600,000 in annual revenue to about \$1 million, while the Hiram rink's revenue has increased from between \$800,000 and \$900,000 annually



After remodeling the rink and adding attractions, Sparkles Family Fun Centers in Georgia hired an employee dedicated to marketing the rink and coordinating group sales.

to about \$1.1 million.

Couey admitted it's a scary prospect to commit to hiring an additional employee. But "I would never want to go back. We wouldn't be where we are without it," she said.

In a market like Atlanta, a rink marketing director should command an annual salary of between \$35,000 and \$40,000, and many marketing directors also are paid

with a bonus system, Ava Couey said.

Her husband is now considering hiring an additional marketing employee who would handle outside sales.



It's difficult for a rink owner, who has so many other responsibilities to devote as much time as is needed to marketing, Ava Couey said. That's particularly true for a large rink that has added attractions, she said.

"We don't feel like the business would be where it's at without marketing," she said.

Henry works on bringing in new business as well as enhancing any existing programs. She also comes up with new programs, whether it's events for Girl Scouts, moms clubs or Christian groups. "Basically my job is to fill every night," Henry said.

She also handles advertising for both

rinks and will help out with other tasks, although she doesn't run any sessions.

Henry spends a lot of her time on the social networking Web site Facebook promoting events. "I do a lot of research on the Web to find new groups that don't currently come to us or may not have thought of us as something their group would like to do," she said.

Having activities besides skating helps broaden the center's appeal to new groups, she said.

"You can only go back to the well so many times, so I'm just trying to find new people to get in here," she said.

At United Skates she had a lot of luck drawing Girl Scout groups but didn't find the same success in Atlanta. Then she came up with the idea for a camp-in, and the rink drew more than 200 participants.

Her biggest success has been a tiny tots program, which brings in toddlers to use their ride-on toys on the skate floor. That helps build new customers, which she estimated the rink could keep for the next 10 to 12 years.

"We all know that the skating rink business is chaos," Henry said. She believes that marketing employees can pay for their salary with the new business they bring in.

A full-time marketing director could take a rink that earns \$500,000 in annual revenue to \$1 million in a few years, she said.

But the rink must be updated, she warned.

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