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March - April 2013

The RINKSIDER is celebrating 60 years! Join us on Facebook at: <http://www.tinyurl.com/rink-siderFB> to share your stories from years past, post photos of days gone by, or ask a question of fellow roller skating rink operators.

2013 RSA Pre-Convention Issue.....p.13

It's time, once again, to gather the troops and head west (or east, north or south) for the annual RSA Convention & Trade Show in Reno, Nev. Attendees will be sure to gather enough professional ammo to head home and start shooting straight toward a year of fun and profits.

Service with more than a smile.....p. 11 & 15

Your employees represent your rink and cost a lot to train. So, don't hire casually – do your homework and make your applicants prove their worth before you hire them. And since the majority of rink hires are teens, there is a whole separate set of rules for making sure they serve your customers the way YOU want them to.

Capitalize on your redemption games.....p.19

Learn from the experts about embedded debit cards, point-of-sale cards and tracking game play via computer. Your play time just got a whole lot easier!

Larger rinks, FECs turning to point-of-sale systems for redemption, attraction areas

By Kathy Bergstrom

The clinking sounds of tokens and the sight of tickets cascading out in long strips for redemption games are being replaced with quick swipes of plastic cards at some roller skating rinks.

Some rinks, generally those with large arcades or that are part of family entertainment centers, are buying card swipe and point of sale systems that can replace tokens and tickets.

In centers with such a system, game players pay money up front to the operator, establishing an account number. The guests receive a card with a magnetic stripe that is linked to that number and the card then works much like a debit card. Guests swipe their cards through readers on each game rather than putting a token in the machine. Each time they play, money is deducted from their account.

The rewards earned for each game can also automatically be put on the card, if the center chooses, rather than the machine spitting out tickets.

The system can be a great tool for increasing revenue, but it's typically best suited for larger operators or arcades because of the expense of installing the systems, rink operators and software providers said. But smaller rinks

can benefit from the use of just point-of-sale systems, without the card swipe capabilities, to create marketing programs or track employee activity, they said.

Scotties Fun Spot in Quincy, Ill., purchased a card swipe and point of sale system when it expanded its skating rink to a family entertainment center in 2010, said Jan Scott, who owns

the rink with her husband Bob and son, Jeff.

Before the expansion, the skating rink had about 10 games in its arcade, and it would not have made financial sense to have the system, she said. Now the center has about 70 games. Guests can swipe their cards to gain entrance at

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At Scotties Fun Spot in Quincy, Ill., game players can load debit cards with cash and reward points.

Pro shops that exceed customers' needs win loyal skaters

By Catherine Bennett

Whether a skate owner needs wheel bolts tightened or a brake pad replaced, successful pro shops are servicing their customers' skating equipment

needs for life, no matter where the skates were originally purchased.

"We will help people with their skates," said Matthew Hinton, co-owner of Kollage Entertainment LLC, "no matter how they come in they are going to leave as a friend."



The bright, clean, organized pro shop at Orbit Skate in Palatine, Ill. offers everything a skater needs, including lifetime service.

The real trick is creating a no-nonsense business that is invested in the customers' needs, said Sandra Levin, owner of Orbit Skate Center in Palatine, Ill. Making a skater a life-long customer comes down to the pro shop owner proving they will always take care of the customer, she said.

"I'm not a fan of online shops because of how personal roller

skating is," said Levin, adding that online sellers don't offer mechanics that can fix broken skates. "As a web designer, I could have an online shop and I choose not to. If I don't know your feet and I can't see you skate I don't feel comfortable fitting you."

Buying roller skates in a reliable pro shop saves the customer from feeling unsure about their product, from disliking the product when they receive it and from multiple shipping costs, she said. Avid skaters, young and old, look to pro shops like Levin's to make sure they find boots, wheels and accessories that perfectly match the style and comfort they're seeking.

"Anyone who buys skates with us gets lifetime service," Levin said. "We tell them to come in after they've skated three times because they break down a little--there is nothing worse than having skates that don't do what you want them to."

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Skate Court endorsed by USA Roller Sports

By *Connie Evener*

Last December the USARS Roller Derby National Championships in Fresno, Calif., were played out on Skate Court floors, as will be next July's National Rink Hockey Championships in Albuquerque, N.M. Nicholas Johannes, owner and inventor of Skate Court and Ice Court, is understandably thrilled to have his floor chosen for competitions by USA Roller Sports, the organization that oversees official roller sports for the Pan American and Olympic Games.

Fifteen years ago, Johannes switched his mechanical engineering focus from low emission and race car engines to floors for ice hockey. In 2003 at an RSA show, Johannes got an earful from rink operators complaining about having to re-coat their wooden floors: the sanding, the dust, the chemical odors, the expense, plus the loss of income from

having to close down for days to complete the work.

Johannes chewed it over. "I thought, instead of putting a plastic coating on a wood floor, why not make the floor plastic in the first place? Better yet, make it with a plastic hard enough that it doesn't wear out." Johannes set to work with silver medalist figure skater and coach, Edrick Stewart, to find out what factors combine for a great skating surface.

Fast forward ten years. Now, said Johannes, "We are the only company in the world that designs floors specifically for roller sports," noting that Skate Court is relatively inexpensive because it is plastic. And those plastic floors can now be found all over the world, from Japan to Italy to Australia. And in the U.S., they're fast becoming the be all and end all for roller derby teams.

The plastic tiles that make up a Skate Court floor are maintenance free. They have

what Johannes calls "a relief profile," an embossed surface that wheels grip, rather than slide across. There's also a pattern of slits, added in part to release air pressure to dampen the noise. Those narrow cuts also go through the tile at an angle, creating what Johannes refers to as "capillary action." Which means that water, say from a wet mop, doesn't go through. But if liquid is forced through, the dampness can evaporate. "A rink with a Skate Court floor in Dallas had a two foot flood, and the floor was full of mud," recalled Johannes. "They just hosed it down with a high pressure hose and it was just like new."

A Skate Court tile is suspended above the floor by a system of "force bridges" on its underside, which makes the floor flexible – and forgiving. The impact of a wrist or knee hitting the floor is toned down. Rather than the clunk you'd get on, say, a concrete floor, you get a bounce, which makes for fewer

injuries, Johannes said.

The tiles snap together very tightly. "If you look at the floor from the side, you won't see it's a tile floor because you can't see the seams, so there's no clicking sound or vibration," said Johannes. That tightness makes the floor "monolithic," one single piece that can be anchored and thus prevented from shifting because of the constant counter clockwise circles skated on it.

And while Skate Court tiles snap tightly, they can also be un-snapped, providing a benefit particularly appealing to not just USARS, but Roller Derby Teams across the country. The entire floor can be dismantled and set up elsewhere. For rink operators, he noted, this portability factor means that if they want to move from one building to another, they don't need to worry about leaving their floor behind.

For all the details, check out the Skate Court link on www.icecourt.com.

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Point-of-sale systems (cont'd from page 1)

most of the attractions at the center, including go-karts, laser tag, bumper cars and bowling.

The skating rink and play structure at Scotties don't have card swipes, but customers can pay for entrance to those attractions through the point of sale system.

"They can load cash on it, and the cash can be used anywhere," Jan Scott said. "It keeps control of your cash a lot better," she said, because the money is restricted to three point-of-sale locations and the snack bar.

Scotties paid an upfront cost of about \$100,000 to buy and install the system, including the card readers, and also pays an ongoing support fee.

The business hasn't completely eliminated tokens for its games and still has about 10 "pusher" games that take tokens in addition to accepting the cards.

Game players also have the option of receiving tickets or having their rewards loaded onto the debit cards.

If they choose tickets, they feed their tickets into the ticket counting machine, and then swipe their cards, and the tickets go onto their account. Game players then take the card to redemption counter to pick their

Pro shops (cont'd from page 1)

Part of this lifetime service includes selling customers' used skates when they are ready to buy a new pair. A customer can either make money on the pair of skates they are letting go, or put that money toward a pair they have their eye on, Levin said.

Hinton also accepts trade-ins. "They can give me lightly used skates and brands that sell," Hinton said. "If people have a balance with us and give us their old skates we pay the balance off."

If Hinton doesn't resell the used skates, he gives them to eager skaters who cannot afford a pair of their own. He said it shows all customers that they are invested in caring for not only their customers, but for people.

Most pro shops have a binder of ready-to-order products available for customers to thumb through. While this is a necessary part of selling skates to eager customers, Hinton said, "Customers want the availability of a person, unless you know what you are looking for in the book.

"With us you get more information. It's more hands-on. I try to keep in-stock different brands that you can touch and feel while we are telling you about them."

Hinton and his brother David spear-headed Skater's Pro Shop, which shares a building with Hot Skates Roller Skating Center in Woodlawn, Md. The shop recently celebrated its one-year anniversary. Hinton saw great potential in creating a pro shop for the public. He and his brother decided to make the entrance to the pro shop directly off of the parking lot so that customers wouldn't feel they had to come through the rink if they were only there to shop.

"The customers come in and talk to us in person," Hinton said. "There is always someone there, so we are not just a book sitting on a counter." Another perk to having a separate entrance from the rink is that Skater's Pro Shop is open when it's too early for customers to purchase rink admission.

As long as the customer can feel the skates, try them on and give them a test run,

prizes or save them up for another visit.

There are benefits and disadvantages to the system, center operators say.

For a small operation with fewer than 20 games, the cost to install a system with card readers at every game is probably cost prohibitive, said Marcus Mayer, director of operations for CenterEdge Software. CenterEdge, based in Roxboro, N.C., writes facility management software for entertainment centers that includes point of sale systems.

To buy the cards themselves will cost between 10 cents and \$1 per card depending on the quantity purchased. Card readers can run about \$300 per reader, he said.

A turnkey solution for a point-of-sale system, including software and hardware, but excluding card readers, could cost a skating rink between \$15,000 to \$30,000 if purchasing a system outright, Mayer said. But CenterEdge also offers a leasing option for a monthly fee that makes the cost more affordable, he said.

For the new breed of skating centers that include family entertainment centers, the cards can be a valuable tool, Mayer added.

The card swipe capability eliminates

keeping the pro shop as part of the indoor rink displays is effective, Levin said. When a customer is serious about finding a pair of skates that suits them, Levin sends them out on the rink floor to give them a whirl.

"After we fit the skater's foot they'll



Skater's Pro Shop Co-owner Matthew Hinton helps size a young girl for skates. The pro shop is adjacent to Hot Wheels Roller Skating Center in Woodlawn, Md., and has entrances from inside the rink as well as from the parking lot.

go out and try it," Levin said. "It really cuts down on the returns. We've only had two returns this year and one was because the skates were a Christmas gift."

Great customer service does not exist without honesty, Hinton said, which is why when he sells a skate he starts at square one, asking many questions about the customer's needs. This way he can show his customers skates that make sense for their wallet and usage.

"I'm not going to sell a high price skate to someone who doesn't need it," Hinton said. "For a new skater, even though the adult might be 30 years old, they don't know that skates can go as high as \$1,000. We educate them and put them on a skate that is equivalent to their skating ability."

But in order to make sure every customer is truly receiving all the important information about the products they seek,

the need for tokens and the time associated with managing them, he said.

It also allows owners more flexibility in pricing games, instead of being limited to one or two tokens, Mayer said. Centers can even experiment with prices to improve the profitability of each game, he said.

Another advantage is what's known in the industry as float. In the token world, people typically will spend all the tokens they have until they're gone, Mayer explained.

Customers are more likely to leave some money on their cards with plans to return and play at another time, he said. If the card gets lost or the customer doesn't return, the money is retained by the center.

The cards help Scotties Fun Spot run its redemption counter more efficiently because employees no longer have to count or weigh tickets, said Jeff Scott. During a recent school outing, "we had 50 kids at our redemption counter and it was unreal. I could have never done that with scrap paper and pens."

The system also automatically tracks inventory of the redemption prizes, he said.

Centers also can use the cards for marketing and data collection, and some of

the employees need to be fluent in brands, product details and repairs. Look for employees who are passionate about skating if they aren't already knowledgeable about skating products, Hinton said. This way they will be excited and willing to learn.

"My brother Dave is a former manager of a skating rink and we both have extensive backgrounds as skaters and in the skating business," Hinton said. "We look to hire others who have a working knowledge of skates, but they don't, per se, need to be the greatest skater in the world."

When Hinton's customers come to a decision on purchasing new skate accessories - bearings, pom-poms, shoelaces, light-up wheels - he and his staff will install them free of charge.

It's important that pro shops catering specifically to roller skating stock up on specialty items, said Brad Armstrong, owner of Roller Kingdom in Reno, Nev., because these are the types of things customers want and cannot find at major sporting goods stores.

It isn't easy competing with retail chains in any market, but rink owners can pull a card that keeps customers coming back

those capabilities are available through a point-of-sale system without the card swipes. For instance, CenterEdge offers point of sale systems that can handle tasks like birthday party reservations, employee schedules, season passes and QuickBooks integration.

Rinks can offer their customers the chance to become members and receive a card. The center can then track their spending habits and target promotions to them.

Scotties Fun Spot has created a VIP program, and customers who reach a certain spending level get a discount on games, Jan Scott said.

The system also allows the center to reduce the price of its arcade games during typically slow times. That flexibility wasn't available with the token system, she said.

Jimmy Chapman, an owner of Coast to Coast Entertainment, which operates three family entertainment centers in New Jersey, said his centers have point-of-sale systems and issue gift cards that customers can spend at the centers. Cards also are used to track employee activity, such as: clocking in, which areas employees are working in and who is running the cash registers.

for decades—freebies. Armstrong said when anyone comes into his rink and finds a pair of skates they want to purchase, they are going to walk out with their skates and a punch card worth up to \$65 of free skating. Incentives, like a punch card, make the cost of buying skates more reasonable, he said.

Levin has a similar deal that gives skate-buyers seven free admissions to Orbit Skate Center with the purchase of skates.

"We sponsored a contest where we challenged the three teams of adults that were beginner skaters to a contest and the winner walked away with a \$1,200 cash prize," Hinton said. "That was sponsored by the pro shop itself. We help the skating rink in our building with their promotions and they help us with ours, it's a hand-in-hand thing."

When skaters make a lengthy trip to purchase skates at Orbit Skate Center, Levin gives them a discount. Twice per month Hinton displays a new deal for his customers, one being a skate bag for kids filled with the gear they need at a collectively lower price. Once a year Levin will lower the cost of gift cards, selling \$20 for \$10 a piece.

During the Christmas season, Levin uses dozens of leftover skate boxes as easy gifts by filling them with gift cards and skate catalogues. This way, recipients of the gifts can get the style, color and size they want.

"We pride ourselves in taking care of our customers," Armstrong said. "One thing we'll do is write our customers' initials on the insole of the skate so when they bring them back we will know we were the ones that sold them and then be able to help them with those skates."

If a child loses a nut on his skate, fix it, Armstrong said. If another skater needs a bearing cleaned, make it look like new.

Every few weeks an Iowa family takes a road trip to Orbit Skate Center and stays in a nearby Motel 6, Levin shared. They don't go anywhere else, she said, because the staff built a relationship with that family and took care of them.