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RINKSIDER

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July-August 2013

Going cashless?.....p.9

Increasingly, rink customers are paying without cash, even the youngest ones. What does that mean for your rink? Find one operator's take on the new trends in technology that affect everyone's business.

Maximizing summer profits.....p. 17

From summer daycare to special seasonal promotions, two rinks on opposite ends of the country share their secrets for maximizing profits in the summer months.

Circle America to fight childhood obesity.....p.21

One skating family is making a big statement in the fight against childhood obesity by skating over 9,000 miles and covering 25 states. Read about their uplifting effort, and find out what you can do to help.

Benefit skates for Boston community.....p.33

Four New England rinks are doing what they can to give back to their communities following the Boston Marathon tragedy by hosting a joint skating fundraiser.

Snack Bars: Better offerings, menus and strategies lead to bigger profits

By Kathy Bergstrom

A roller skating rink's snack bar represents an avenue for generating significant revenue, yet many rink operators squander that opportunity, contends Mike Holtzman, a food service expert.

Holtzman is president of Profitable Food Facilities, a consulting firm in Poway, Calif., that has worked on 370 food service related projects nationwide helping to maximize efficiency and profits. Clients have included water parks, country clubs, stadiums and other facilities.

Products and pricing

Rink snack bars "struggle because they're

sitting there doing popcorn, candy and potato chips," Holtzman said. "The majority of what they serve is all \$1 items. You've got to serve tens of thousands of them to make any money."

The key to increasing profits is stocking the menu with items that have higher profit margins, promoting those items and driving traffic to the snack bar.

When looking at the menu, Holtzman said each item should not have more than a 30 percent cost of goods. That's why he recommends avoiding low-cost items like candy bars.

Here's why: If a rink buys its candy bars for 50 cents each, the candy bars shouldn't sell for less than \$1.50 each and probably closer to \$1.75, he said.

Two concession workers cost roughly \$10 per hour to employ, including payroll taxes. That means the snack bar must sell 20 candy bars per hour just to cover payroll if the rink charges \$1.50 per candy bar. Lower the cost to \$1 per candy bar, and the snack bar must sell 40 per hour just to cover payroll.

Instead, Holtzman said rinks should sell items at prices starting at \$3 and higher. Foods to consider are soft pretzels, churros and nachos, which can be sold for about \$3 and have a cost of about 75 cents.

To satisfy sweet teeth, rinks can sell treats such as shaved ice and smoothies, which also can

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Three rinks with unique offerings draw lots of happy customers



Customers of all ages enjoy the Dimecade at Classic Fun Center in Sandy, Utah, where games cost one to ten dime-sized tokens.

By Suzy Weinland

Classic Fun Centers in Utah are traditional skating rinks "that have evolved with other activities," according to third-generation rink owner Jim Henderson, who runs the Sandy, Utah, location. Classic Fun Center boasts three, very unique locations in Sandy, Layton and Orem, all suburbs within 30 miles of Salt Lake City.

Layton was the first to open in the early 1970s. Orem followed in late 1970s, and Sandy opened in 1980. Orem and Sandy also have adjacent waterparks, which are owned by Henderson

and promoted along with some of the roller skating packages.

According to Henderson, like most rinks around the country, Classic does well in the winter, when it's cold and people want to be indoors. In the summer, however, everyone wants to be outside. So, he and his crew decided to build a couple of water parks to grab some of that summer market. "We did it so we could keep the staff year 'round, and to have something to do in the summer."

He explained that both parks are small scale, but very functional, catering to the 2 to 12 year olds, with a kiddie pool, four smaller slides

and some water features. "It blends well with what we're doing on the skating end - it's very complimentary."

Classic Sandy started out as a 25,000 square foot facility in 1980. In the '90s inline became very popular, due to the prevalence of skiing in the area, according to Henderson. "Inline skates became the number one gift, our birthday parties became booked to capacity—30 parties on a Saturday—and we just couldn't hold anymore. So we added 25,000 sq. ft. to the building." The other locations also added more space, and the

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What are your best-selling snack bar items?



The RINKSIDER posted a question on our Facebook page, asking readers to reply with their top snack and beverage sellers. Here were some of the responses:

Darrin Johnson - Broken Arrow Roller Sports (Broken Arrow, Okla.): Funyons, Flamin' Cheetos, Extreme Airheads, Blue Sourstraws and Sour Skittles

Mike Swartzentruber - Columbia Skateland (Dover, Ohio): Pizza, hot dogs, popcorn, pickles, and milk shakes

Allison Bellinger - Roller Sports Skating Rink (Taylors, S.C.): Pizza, nachos, pickles, Coke and Icees

Michelle O'Need - Skater from Florida: We go to Palm Beach Ice Works in West Palm Beach. They go overboard trying to offer healthy choices, they have even tried selling wheat grass juice lately. If I ever find

the right people to get a rink open in Jupiter, Fla., I would like to model the snack bar after theirs with yogurt parfaits, hummus, deep dish pizzas, popcorn, and energy drinks.

Juli Little Sams - City Skate

Center (Painesville, Ohio): Our top five snack bar items are Takis, individual deep dish pizzas, Gatorade, Flavor Ice popsicles, and Sour Punch Straws. We also sell a lot of nacho cheese and jalepenos, which top more than just nachos!

Four New England rinks hold benefit skates for Boston

Four of the largest skating centers in New England - Interskate 91 North, Interskate 91 South, Fun America and United Skates of America (Providence) - simultaneously held benefit skates on Sunday May 5th to benefit *The One Fund Boston, Inc.* in its efforts to raise money for victims affected by the tragedy on April 15th during the Boston Marathon. Together the four

centers raised just under \$2,000, which was donated directly to the organization.

"We felt as though we had to do something, and wanted to give members of the community an opportunity to help as well," said Kevin Baker, president of Interskate 91 South. "As Governor Deval Patrick stated so well, 'at moments like this, we are one state, one city, and one

people.' This [was] our chance as a community to prove it."

Rob Gould, spokesperson for Interskate 91, said, "It was great to see the community jump on board and back the cause. There was definitely a positive energy flowing through the rink that Sunday. It was a great way to let the community get involved and give back with us."

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Snack Bars (cont'd from page 1)

be priced at \$3 to \$4.

Most kids visiting a rink have more than \$1 in their pockets and probably have a \$10 bill, Holtzman said. "Will candy sell? Yes, but if you don't have it, that's the beauty of a captive market," he said.

If a skater has \$5, he'll buy shaved ice or smoothie if there's no candy available. "That's how a captive market works. You don't have to have candy in order to make money. In fact, you'll lose money with it if that's all that you serve," Holtzman said.

Rinks starting from scratch should consider investing in equipment such as a deep fryer for French fries and a conveyor style oven for pizzas, Holtzman recommended. That also requires installing a hood ventilation system.

While the initial investment would be about \$30,000, rink owners would recover the cost quickly, he contended. The pizza ovens allow rinks to sell individual pizzas for

around \$6 each and have the ability to make large pizzas for birthday parties.

Menu displays

Once a rink determines its menu, being creative with display is another tool for increasing profits.

Rinks should stay away from the typical lighted signs with removable letters, Holtzman said. It's little more than a list of items with prices and doesn't help rinks direct customers to the most profitable choices.

Instead, he recommended laying out a menu using a software program like Microsoft Publisher and reproducing it on a 3x3 board.

By designing their own menus, rinks can feature the most expensive items in larger bold type or in boxes. They also can design combinations, such as a pizza with a drink, at a lower price than if the items were sold separately. By doing so, the rink creates a value for customers while also driving up the

snack bar's average sale per ticket, Holtzman explained.

Less expensive items should be displayed in a smaller type face, so skaters are less likely to choose them, he said.

The menu boards cost roughly \$100 to make and will have to be remade if prices change, but they should be durable in the indoor skating rinks.

Promotion and strategy

Once rinks alter their menus and improve their display, they still must develop strategies to drive customers to the snack bar and manage the increased traffic, Holtzman said.

One effective approach is providing snack bar vouchers with admission or skate rentals. If a rink typically charges \$10 per skating session, it could raise the price to \$12 but include a \$2 snack bar voucher

That guarantees that the skaters will

visit the snack bar, and they're likely to spend more than the \$2 voucher, he said.

Another important strategy is to have two cash registers at the snack bar, which will allow a manager or another staff person to jump in and help ring orders during busy times. One worker can typically handle about \$50 in sales per hour, he said.

Having the flexibility to add staff to the snack bar decreases the likelihood that customers will be turned off by long lines.

It's not always easy to figure out how to best make your snack bar profitable, but rinks that do their homework can take their business to new level, Holtzman said.

"I'm still learning stuff at every single facility I go to about how to do it a little bit better," he said. It's not always easy to figure out the best approaches, but once you do, "it really can be a great little cash cow."

Three rinks (cont'd from page 1)

group decided they wanted to start offering activities in addition to roller skating.

First added were inflatables and bounce houses because of the shared target age group with skating. Then PlaySmart systems were installed in each rink in the late '90s to early 2000s. "We tried to make it unique by giving each location's play system a theme. Orem is a space station, Layton is a pirate cove and Sandy is a jungle."

At the Sandy rink, the "jungle" goes over one of the two skating floors. That floor is a 12 ft. oval with a "roadway" theme, complete with ramps, rails, cones and signage. Henderson explained that the original skating floor was purposely kept separate, and all of the added attractions are housed in the newer part of the facility.

Recently, Henderson and his crew removed a portion of the inflatables and added the "Blast Zone" where kids can shoot foam balls from air-powered cannons. That and laser tag are a big hit, especially with the boys, he said.

Classic is very family-friendly, opening at 10 a.m. year 'round to cater to the preschool crowd and their moms. "We allow scooters during the day. We have a Mom's Club that has been very successful," said Henderson. Guests are allowed to bring their own scooters or three-wheeled toys, or they can rent one of the rink's 50 Razor scooters for \$3.

And if that wasn't enough fun, Classic boasts a "Dimecade" that uses dime-sized tokens to allow guests to play older games, such as vintage Pac Man or Skiball, for one token. Other games play for anywhere from two to ten tokens, said Henderson. "Remember those little nickel arcades that popped up in the late '80s? We decided to create something to compete with those, but didn't want to go that cheap, so we had a smaller token made - about the size of a dime," he said. "It's just a way to separate your arcade and make it more unique."

As for promoting all those attractions, Classic has a range of membership cards that make it easy for kids to call the rink their second home during the summer. Summer Dollar Days is a \$15 membership card that allows the card-bearer to come in throughout

the summer and do each activity for \$1, and it includes \$1 food specials for cardholders only. There also is a \$49 unlimited summer membership pass that covers admission to the skating rink and every activity in it, skate rental, and waterpark admission - all summer long.

"We really push the \$15 pass. It's the one that really works for us at all three locations - we get a little membership fee out of them and keep them coming back all summer," said Henderson.

Sk8 City

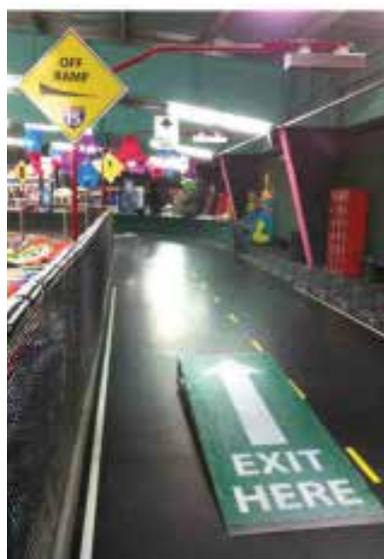
Mark Carpenter is not new to the roller skating industry. The operations manager of Sk8 City in Pooler, Ga., started out working at Savannah Skate Inn at age 13. When he was 32, and owner of the rink, he sold it and moved to Yukon, Okla., where he managed a small rink before moving on to become manager of Jelly Beans in Raleigh, N.C.

At a skating reunion in Pooler a few years ago, he happened upon an opportunity with Sk8 City, and began working there when it opened in October 2012. He is now happy to call Sk8 City home.

Sk8 City boasts an 11,000 sq. ft. floor, a softplay area and inflatables room and a laser maze, which is very popular, according to Carpenter. The rink also rents out to a Zumba class six times a week. The class uses either the skating floor or the party rooms, which have partitioned walls that can be moved to adjust the size of the room.

The biggest "added attraction," however, is the adjacent full-service restaurant called Sk8 Wings. "It has a separate entrance from the outside, but you can order a real cheeseburger from the rink snack bar," shared Carpenter. The restaurant serves both American and Indian cuisine, including an all-day Indian buffet on most days, wings, cheeseburgers, and the like.

The rink also offers private party packages and catering to events within the rink. Gulf Stream, a huge corporation that builds airplanes, is based near Pooler, so Carpenter works with them to rent out his facility for their corporate parties. He also works with local Girl Scout troops, offering a \$14.99 package that includes admission, skates and



Classic Fun Center in Sandy, Utah features a highway-themed skate floor complete with off ramps and overpasses.

a couple of slices of pizza per scout.

Sk8 City is located in a complex with an IMAX Theater and Frames n' Games Bowling. Carpenter has a good business relationship with the manager of Frames n' Games, and the two help promote each other's venues. For instance, Sk8 City includes in its birthday party package materials a \$5 off coupon to Frames n' Games for the birthday child. In return, the bowling alley allows Carpenter to post fliers promoting his summer skate camp. And they both exchange PTO fundraiser fliers.

Inside Sk8 City, a "huge projector" on the wall is used to promote all night skates and other in-rink activities. Additional TV monitors on the walls throughout the rink advertise area businesses, for a fee. "We have an automotive shop, a Japanese restaurant and other neighbors right around us who advertise."

Carpenter's advice to other rink operators who may be trying to figure out how to expand beyond just roller skating is, "If you have a huge facility, it sits idle at times. Get involved in Zumba, rent it out for corporate events. And being in the business as long as I have, I would have to say always target the 7 to 14 year old age range."

Mammoth Lakes

Touted as a "premier mountain resort," Mammoth Lakes is a California town surrounded by beautiful mountains and hundreds of lakes. Within this destination for skiers, fishermen, boaters and the like, is the Mammoth Lakes Multi-Use Recreational Facility, owned and run by the town of Mammoth Lakes.

The 17,000 square foot facility includes a concrete, outdoor, regulation-sized hockey rink. It originated as an ice rink several years ago, but was used for roller skating for the first time last summer, according to John Connolly, the facility's recreation supervisor.

After drawing only 1,000 skaters all summer last year, Connolly said they are changing the schedule a bit this summer. "We're in a town where there are a lot of outdoor activities. We had a big schedule with roller hockey, public skate sessions... but it didn't work out." This summer they are open Thursday-Saturday, 6-10 p.m., June through August.

As they work out the kinks with the roller skating, Mammoth Lakes' facility still showcases wheeled sports by offering skateboarding with moveable, wooden mini-ramps. Connolly said they allow skateboards on the rink floor at the same time as the quads and inlines, which they rent out. "Some people don't like the fact that we allow skateboards at the same time."

But that hasn't stopped locals from booking birthday parties and retro-skating parties for \$100-\$150 a pop, or local school children with IDs from stopping by for a \$2 admission (including skates). And the popularity is growing. Connolly shared that roller derby groups from both Lake Tahoe and Las Angeles are going to come to Mammoth Roller Rink and hold an exhibition game this summer.

In addition to the roller sports, there is arena soccer, broomball, street hockey - sans skates - as well as table golf, ping pong, and other activities inside the rec center to keep all ages of children hanging around through the summer and beyond.