

HOT SPOT

By Art Snyder

Long gone are those summer days when you could coast the time away, hoping business would pick up come September. Today's summers are packed with opportunity, and you also can put your time to good use with long-range planning for new sessions, promotions, birthday parties and more, to bump up those profits for months to come. See how, below.

Hollywood animation

Summer is the best of times for Hollywood, and six computer-animated movies are on tap for the next three months. Competing for consumer dollars will be *Despicable Me 2*; *The Smurfs 2*; Disney's *Planes*, an aerial Cars variant; DreamWorks Animation's *Turbo*; Epic; and Pixar's *Monsters University*.

Epic and *Turbo* are new, non-sequels and unproven, but the heavy-weight 20th Century Fox studio is behind them. The others have strong financial profiles, and they all should offer plenty of opportunity for your rink's many profit centers and several open and private sessions. See what's worked in the past with your customers, and be prepared to key in on these animated films as the year progresses.



Your rink's birthday party packages look especially good for updating with Hollywood animation themes. As beverage and fast-food companies attest, getting customers at an early age helps profitability for years to come, so

tweak those birthday parties with a bevy of animation-based choices. Based on current popularity, birthday packages named *The Smurfs Birthday Party*, *The Cars Birthday Party*, *The Little Mermaid Birthday Party*, *The Monsters, Inc. Birthday Party*, *The Incredibles Birthday Party*, *The Finding Nemo Birthday Party*, *The Shrek Birthday Party* and *The Toy Story Birthday Party* sound most promising.

It's time to turn those daycare, home-school, pre-school and K-3 children into happy, healthy customers who love to visit your rink!

PepsiCo Touch Tower fountain dispenser

PepsiCo has begun testing its "Touch Tower" dispenser, which lets consumers customize the company's many soda brands by adding lemon, cherry, strawberry or vanilla flavors to a desired Pepsi, Mountain Dew or other PepsiCo brands. (This is on the heels of rival Coca-Cola's similar, but larger, dispenser called Freestyle, previously reported in this column.) Any developments with the compact countertop Touch Tower will be reported here. You can see a Touch Tower film clip at <http://x.co/173FM>.

Cracker Jack'D marketing

The Frito-Lay division of PepsiCo has stepped up with a big national mar-



Actress Ashley Tisdale is helping to promote Cracker Jack.

keting campaign to generate consumer demand for Cracker Jack'D snacks. Leading their cause is up-and-coming actress Ashley Tisdale, who is their top celebrity spokesperson. Hip-hop artists Macklemore & Ryan Lewis have joined

the Cracker Jack'D team, too.

Among the featured Cracker Jack'D varieties are Hearty Mix, which has nut clusters and comes in Cheddar BBQ, Zesty Queso, PB & Chocolate and Berry Yogurt flavors; Intense Mix, with intensely flavored Buffalo Ranch and Spicy Pizzeria varieties; and Sweet 'n Savory Clusters, which is a salted-caramel flavor with sweet-and-salty popcorn and almonds.

The company adds that "Cracker Jack'D is a standalone brand not meant to replace the traditional Cracker Jack brand. The Cracker Jack'D line complements the Cracker Jack brand by meeting the snacking needs of (primarily) young men with a collection of intense flavors." Talk to your vending and food-service suppliers for more on Cracker Jack'D bagged snacks.

Lay's Cheesy Garlic Bread Potato Chips

After conducting a contest to suggest a new flavor of potato chip, the venerable, national Lay's snack brand has introduced its latest variety: Lay's Cheesy Garlic Bread. Yes, potato chips with the high-yum factor of cheese-draped garlic bread. Lay's is a division of PepsiCo, so ask your local supplier for marketing materials, signage and discounts to make Lay's Cheesy Garlic Bread a top-seller at your rink. Lay's also has announced that for the summer,

the company is bringing back two of its seasonal favorites, Chicken & Waffles-flavored potato chips and zesty, Thai-



based Sriracha potato chips (favored by TV's Bart Simpson, no less). Be sure to stock these chips, as well.

Keebler® Pitter Patter™ Crème Cookies

Kellogg's is synonymous with cereal, of course, but they're a player, too, with their snack portfolio. With the company's Keebler® brand, peanut butter and chocolate take center stage



with their recently introduced Keebler® Pitter Patter™ Crème Cookies. This sandwich cookie variety is both creamy and crispy, as expected, with a taste aimed at the under-25 set. Check with your supplier of packaged cookies to make Pitter Patter™ Crème Cookies a must-have at your rink this summer and beyond.

Disney INFINITY

Disney INFINITY, a new video game that allows interactive play with top Disney and Pixar worlds — *Monsters University*, *Cars*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *The Incredibles* and others — is set for release Aug. 18. Disney INFINITY will be available for all major game formats. Disney INFINITY looks to have great possibilities in rink redemption and game areas, and it should do well with drawings during school sessions. Your under-13 customers are likely ideal for this dose of Disney. For more, see <http://x.co/173JT> and <http://x.co/173JI>.

Cheez-It® snacks

Cheez-It® salty snack crackers are a staple with consumers of all ages, and that's good news for rink operators. See that your foodservice and snack areas, including vending machines and countertop displays, are well-stocked this year with top-selling Cheez-It® snack