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Light up your rink on a small budget.....9

The "cool factor" impresses both kids and parents. Just ask the Hedricks of Forum RollerWorld in Texas. Get the look with a little DIY spirit and inexpensive, but effective, lighting.

Entertain and market with video .....15

One Georgia rink doubled its Friday nights by adding large video screens and flat-panel TVs to show live video of skaters, week-end sporting events, slide shows of birthday parties and customer photos.

What can RSMC do for your rink?.....21

Introducing the new Roller Skating Marketing Council, a determined and concerned group of industry vendors who have come together for the growth of roller skating centers.

## Texas FEC uses classes, 'trainers,' bounce houses to attract kids



Little tikes at Texas Skatium build confidence by using 'trainers' made of PVC pipe and wheels while learning to roller skate.

By Diane Walker

Located just outside Dallas, Texas, in Garland, is Texas Skatium, the family entertainment center owned and operated by Jeff and Patty Craft.

Texas Skatium has been family-owned and operated since 1989. The Crafts pride

themselves in having a staff that awaits each and every customer with a smile on their face.

The Skatium has recently been remodeled inside and out. With 33,000 square feet, up to 1,100 people can easily find a fun activity to participate in with their friends. The Crafts have refinished the floor, and

added all new games and skates. The rink's sound and video system is state of the art and has a large projection screen.

### Classes and 'trainers' make confident skaters

The Skatium offers classes to those who want to learn how to skate. The classes are very popular, with 30 to 40 being held during the school year and 20 taking place during the summer months.

No time to take classes but still want to have fun skating? The Skatium has the answer. The Crafts added 40 'trainers' to the rink one year ago to help beginner or less-confident patrons skate a little easier.

"People have told us that they drive across town to use the trainers," said Jeff. "They (trainers) are not used in the classes, however, because the point of going to class is to learn how to skate."

Jeff hears all the time from patrons that they heard about the trainers from a friend. First time guests are coming from all over to use them, and they are a big reason why patrons keep coming back. "The biggest complaint I hear is that there just

continued on page 32

## Get tech savvy to promote your rink successfully

By Jim Morris

*"Rink owners are missing the boat if they don't stay in touch with their customers. To do that, you have to communicate with them. And how do you do that? You start using all the Internet and texting tools you can."*

-- Terry Eady, Owner, Hot Wheels Skate Center, Daphne, Ala.

High Tech is here, and as Eady said, skating and family fun center owners who do not stay up with today's methods of communication are missing out on many potential customers and the revenue they represent.

That's why he and a growing number of rink owners have begun using such tools as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, tXt-blast, email blasts or different variations on these services that they have come up with on their own.

For example, Eady uses the free tXtBlast.com Web site to send text messages to his customers, while Michael Couey's marketing staff at the Sparkles Family Fun Center of



Three generations of Coueys stand in and around the Sparkles Roller Rink Skate car. In the car are: (Back row, L-R) Jacob Thompson, Clint Couey and Michael Couey; (Front row, L-R) Brittany Dean and Carrie Couey. Standing in front of the car (L-R) are Jeff Couey, Ava Couey and Leita Couey.

continued on page 34



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**Roundup** (cont'd from page 1)

INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

Kennesaw, Ga., sends out those regular text messages themselves.

While both establishments, along with many others, continue to use tried and true methods of communication, such as handouts and flyers, the new, high-tech

open at 8, but they could come in at 7 and get an extra hour of skating. We had about 150 take advantage of that. And as our VIP List grows there will be even more.”

He promotes the VIP List on MySpace, Twitter, Facebook and on his

tremendous.

“All you have to do is mention Mickey Mouse and they run over to get in line to sign up,” he said. “That way we have their email addresses so we can contact them to let them know about specials

and MySpace. She also uses Constant Contact and plans to pick up tXtBlaster.

If you think that's a lot of time to spend each day on your computer, St. Germain-Frank sees it as time well spent to constantly keep getting the word out about her rink.

“You have to pay attention to keep up on these services, because they are on the upswing,” she said. “These are the best ways to promote your business, at least until the next slice of bread comes along.”

Of all the services she uses, all she pays for is Yahoo's on-line Yellow Book page – about \$75 per month – and Constant Contact. If you browse with Google or Microsoft's Bing, you not only find a link to the rink's Web page, but links directly into the various pages on the rink's Web site.

She is also using Yelp.com, a site you can visit to find out about businesses in your area. It has directions and reviews and a description of the business.

“A business owner can pay for a more-enhanced listing, but I choose to go the cheap route – free,” she said.

Also free is the rink's participation in Facebook, Twitter and MySpace, although she has heard some of these services might charge businesses in the future.

“Right now I am concentrating on Facebook and Twitter. They seem to be doing the best job,” she said, noting the number of “friends” of Cal Skate of Milpitas on Facebook crossed the 1,100 mark in less than four months.

“One of the things that's important is to keep these pages fresh,” St. Germain-Frank said. “That means you have to go in and change your pictures and your copy quite frequently.”

“If you put something interesting or unique on there, it will get noticed and draw a response.”

Recently, she composed a Facebook page, asking for feedback – “Let us know how we are doing.”

She uses Facebook and Twitter to send out promotional messages, such as, “Hey! Wear a red shirt to Cal Skate Milpitas Friday night and get in free!”

“So when we get 20 or 30 kids show up in red shirts that night we will probably be getting 20 or 30 kids in the rink who might not have come,” she said.

Once they are in the rink, they spend their cash – which Yogi Berra says is just as good as money.

For examples of rink internet sites, check out these for Hot Wheels Skate Center in Daphne, Ala.:

[www.hotwheelsdaphne.com](http://www.hotwheelsdaphne.com) Rink Website

[www.txtblaster.com](http://www.txtblaster.com) Text Blaster

[www.constantcontact.com](http://www.constantcontact.com) Email

Blaster

[www.myspace.com/hotwheels-daphne](http://www.myspace.com/hotwheels-daphne) Myspace

[www.twitter.com/hotwheels-daphne](http://www.twitter.com/hotwheels-daphne) Twitter

[www.facebook.com/hotwheels-daphne](http://www.facebook.com/hotwheels-daphne) Facebook



**Hot Wheels Skate Center owners Terry and Jennifer Eady fill their Daphne, Ala. rink through cell phone text blasts and online VIP lists.**

methods are paying big dividends for almost no financial or time investments.

### Blast those tXts to connect with kids

“If you look, almost every customer who comes into your rink these days is carrying a cell phone. Young kids, teens or parents, it doesn't matter. That's their method of communication,” said Eady.

As he was beginning to see all the cell phones, Eady realized the way to reach the customers – even as young as eight years old – was through their cell phones.

“That's how they communicate and get information these days, so every rink owner should be looking at that. If you don't, you are behind the times,” he said.

“You've simply got to do it in this day and age. With the economy the way it is, you have to look at what works today. What always worked for your rink in the past might not work today. And that's where all these methods of reaching today's customers come in.”

He pointed out that once he and his wife, Jennifer, learned how to use these new high-tech tools, it has been easy and not very time consuming to take advantage of tXtBlaster, Constant Contact, Facebook, MySpace and Twitter to send messages out to those who have signed up at the rink or on the rink's Web page. All are free, except Constant Contact, which is \$20 per month.

“I send out about two text messages a week, usually to promote an upcoming event,” he explained. “And I know I am reaching a large number of kids because of some of the promotions we've had.”

“I have kids sign up for our VIP List, which gives me their numbers. Recently I sent them a message telling them because they are on our VIP List they could come to the Friday (or some other) session an hour early. We advertise the doors will

handout calendars. Kids can get the rink's number and text in to sign up, or they can sign up at the rink.

“If I see a kid with a cell phone, I ask them if they are on the VIP List. If they aren't I tell them they can get on the list by texting Hot Wheels and they can sign up just like that.”

Eady then goes to the tXtBlaster Web site and checks the list and sends out his next promotional message to everyone on the list.

“I can do it from my Blackberry or my office computer and it takes about 30 seconds,” he said.

### Facebook brings them in to Georgia fun centers

When the Couey family decided to put on a '70s-'80s Reunion Skate Night, they put out the word on Facebook. The results have been outstanding.

“I had about 300 ‘friends’ on my Facebook page and the rink at Kennesaw had about 800 or more, so the promotion for the '70s-'80s Reunion Skates went out to more than 1,000 people (mostly adults),” said Jeff Couey, owner of the Sparkles Family Fun Centers in Kennesaw, Hiram, Gwinnett and Smyrna, Georgia.

The first session was so popular, drawing 150-200 skaters, that the Kennesaw rink has continued the reunion skates several more times, each time with the main promotion on Facebook.

“There's no doubt this has been a success due to Facebook,” Jeff Couey said.

Michael Couey, general manager of the Kennesaw rink, said collecting email addresses is another important method of promotion for the rinks. In fact, each night they announce that putting their email address into the rink's computer automatically signs them up to win a trip to Walt Disney World, the response is

and upcoming events.”

They can also sign up from home by accessing the Sparkles Web site.

One promotion that has been successful from using the email lists has been Win-A-Party. The customers are notified by email that they can sign up for Win-A-Party, which allows each one to bring nine of their friends for a skating session. If they sign up, they win. All that gives them is free admissions. They pay for everything else.

“The first time we did it, we had about 60 people sign up (that's potentially 600 people walking into the rink),” Michael Couey said.

He said they designate certain days the Win-A-Party can be used. They look back at slow days from past years and put them on those days during the current year. They also use them on Martin Luther King Day, when they are open all day.

“They have generated a lot of money,” he said.

The Kennesaw rink also uses high-tech inside the building. Instead of signs hanging everywhere, promotions come on their several screens via their computer system. It's all tied into the music system. Not only are upcoming events promoted this way, but there are also ads for people to join the Sparkles Facebook and Twitter pages.

Messages promoting events are placed on Facebook and Twitter about twice a week. They often contain “electronic coupons” for reduced-price admissions, etc. Coupons are also found on the Web site.

### Cal Skate at Milpitas is a Facebook fixture

Chris St. Germain-Frank, owner of Cal Skate of Milpitas (California) said she spends “about an hour a day” checking and updating all of the messages she has on Web pages, such as Facebook, Twitter