

# Never underestimate the power of novelty items on your rink's bottom line

By Dionne Obeso

Novelties can be many things to a roller skating rink owner and to his or her skaters. They are a source of revenue in many rinks, a source of entertainment for the kids, and a smash hit when added to gift bags. Novelties are a great way to encourage more game play in your arcade, a way to reward or appease an unhappy child (and earn the gratitude of the parents), and a way to make a skate event or party even more of a fun and exciting for skaters of all ages.

Donna and Steve Turner of USA Skate Center in Romeoville, Ill. enjoy the additional novelty sales during their monthly glow skate. On the first Saturday of every month, skaters are welcomed onto a dimmed skate floor with their glowing or flashing items, all of which can be purchased from the novelty counter. "We have noticed a 500% increase in the sale of glow items during our monthly blackout skate," said the Turners. When it comes to glow items, especially, it seems as if the more a person wears or carries, the

To replicate the successes of the Turners in this area, turn the lights down low, perhaps set up a few black lights to enhance the mood, and set up sales and perhaps some special discounts for all items glowing, flashing and fun (and safe) in the dark. Charge a little more for the session and include a

basic glow stick, necklace, or bracelet to get the night started (and to make sure that each skater is lit up in some way on the floor to prevent collisions).

USA Skate Center is the 25,000 sq. ft. home of one of the finest skate floors in the area. Their opening in 2003 was rough, but the Turners have turned a dead rink into a thriving business, in part through their novelty counter. They host birthday parties every weekend, and sometimes pack the rink to capacity. One thing that makes these birthday parties so exciting for the kids is the unique way that the Turners handle the typical novelty gift bag.

Parents buy the gift bags at USA Skate Center for \$3 each, and the children are allowed to pick through the novelty items and select a total of \$4 worth of toys. The parents get a great deal for the party, the children get the excitement of picking out their own goodies, and everyone goes home happy. This has increased both novelty sales and birthday party bookings for USA Skate Center.

Alishia Funk, manager of Skateworld of Kettering in Ohio, has also seen the

benefits of making novelty items a part of the fun and games at Skateworld. The rink

give a glow stick and add novelties to our favor bags," said Funk. The items in the party packages whet the children's appetites for novelty toys and give them a great start on the parties, too.

To further encourage novelty sales, the DJs at Skateworld are encouraged to make regular announcements to promote the novelty items during the skate sessions. Special skates during regular sessions also help to promote glow and blinky items and to encourage skaters to spend a little time browsing. The more time skaters have to study the redemption counter and stuff shops, the more they will be likely to spend on toys, games and candy to entertain

themselves as well as on the video games that spit out redemption tickets.

A creative owner or manager might wish to spend time brainstorming ideas for themed parties and skate nights (like a Smiley Face night or a Flower Power skate) that will entertain skaters while encouraging purchases from the stuff shop. Include the first item in the admission price, and you will soon notice your novelty item sales spiking.



Including novelty items in birthday gift bags has increased party bookings at USA Skate Center in Romeoville, Ill.

redemption counter takes up an area of 10 ft. by 5 ft. in the 26,500 sq. ft. rink. "We carry 60 of the hottest novelty and redemption items from blinky to glow, and from candy to 25 cent toys," says Funk. Their merchandise is all age appropriate for young children and families, the groups that Skateworld advertises to.

"During our private parties we tend to give kids one or two items in a goody bag and in our birthday party packages we always

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Anita Bennett, general manager at Theisen Vending, has consecutively exhibited bulk vending product and equipment at the RSA shows for the past thirty years. As new generations have taken over many of the skating centers, new ways of doing business have been introduced. Computers have revolutionized communication and made it possible for them to establish a website [www.theisenvending.com](http://www.theisenvending.com) where their customers can see their product (updated weekly) in living color!

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Anita Bennett, left, and Judi Heston, right, are holding display cards for Novelty Capsules.

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