

New York rink, Illinois FEC turn their game rooms into innovative profit centers

By Kathy Bergstrom

If you haven't devoted much time to your rink's game room, you might be missing out on a chance to boost your bottom line.

Game rooms can provide an additional source of revenue for rinks on top of adding to their entertainment value. But making money with a game room requires at the very least an investment in time – figuring out what games patrons want in addition to the prizes that will keep them coming back.

Reva Roller-drome, a rink in Auburn, N.Y., leases its games from a local vendor, Stanton Automatics, and splits the revenue from the games with the company, said rink owner Mike Ferro.

Auburn is a community of about 29,000 people in the Finger Lakes region of New York.

The rink has 13 games in its 200-square-foot game room that generate roughly \$20,000 in annual revenue. They include redemption games, a dance machine, some video games and others.

The rink tries to offer a variety of games that will appeal to different age groups, Ferro said. Games cost 50 cents to \$1 per play.

"We have a great relationship with a vendor," Ferro said. "They come in, and they do pretty much everything." The company maintains the games and rotates different games into the mix every six months or so. "That's one of the advantages of having a vendor. They have access to all those games," Ferro said.

Holding onto the same games for too long is one of the key mistakes many rink owners make with their game rooms, said Jim Chapman, who heads sales and marketing for Trails Entertainment Centers Corp., which operates three family fun parks in the Chicago area. The parks do not include roller skating rinks, but each of their game rooms has

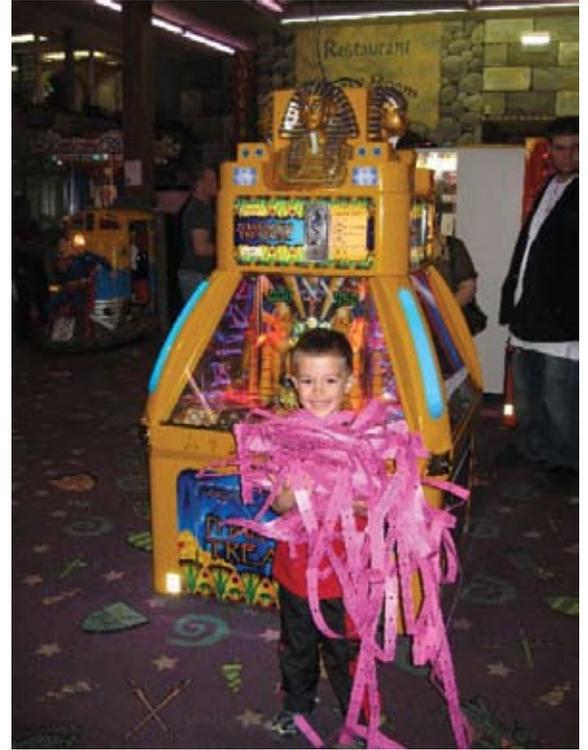
about 140-160 games.

Rinks often hold on to their games for five to 10 years, and that's too long, Chapman said. They need to rotate

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Basket fortune is a popular redemption game among younger children at the Enchanted Castle family entertainment center in Chicago, Ill.



A young Enchanted Castle patron shows off his redemption winnings and a big smile.

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games in an out of the mix on a regular basis. Rinks that own their games can often trade in that game for another used one at a cheaper price.

The most successful Trails Entertainment venue is Enchanted Castle in Lombard, Ill., which is a 60,000-square-foot facility that includes redemption games, a kids' play area with inflatables, bumper cars, restaurant, laser tag, go-kart track and miniature golf. The games alone generate about \$2.3 million in annual revenue at that location, Chapman said.

A sister company, Family Fun Cos., manufactures coin operated redemption games. According to the Enchanted Castle Web site, company owner J. Richard Oltmann has created more than 40 games and has the reputation as a the "Games Guru."

The mix of games must appeal to different age groups, including young children, teen-agers and adults, Chapman said. Many game rooms don't recognize the adult business, he added.

"The parents of today were game players years ago," he said. They grew up playing games like Pac Man and Donkey Kong and Pong and they still want to play and save for their own prizes, he said.

"It really comes down to having the right game mix, having the best redemption counter," Chapman said. "Your prizes drive your game income, but you have to have the right games and the right mix."

Prize counters should have items

like toasters or even more expensive items like big-screen television sets or microwaves to appeal to adults. Chapman said rink owners should ask their customers what prizes they want to play for, and make sure those prizes are available.

The prize counter at Reva Roller-drome is combined with the pro shop and is staffed by one person. Ferro works with a vendor to get the latest and most popular prizes, but said the

rink also has a good feel for what skaters want.

Popular prizes are promoted during skating sessions to bring people into the game room. His rink has five redemption games, and they are the top money makers in the game room.

Ferro advises rink owners looking to improve their game rooms to do their research by contacting resources like RSA, prize vendors and game companies. "Do your research with your local

vendors and find out what kind of deal you can get," he said.

Service is another important part of a successful game room, Chapman said.

Games should be well maintained, and staff needs to pay close attention to customers. The games also should pay out enough so that customers will keep playing. Prize counters need to provide quick service, too.

Redemption tips to get the most out of your location

Courtesy of Jim Chapman, Trails Entertainment Center Corp., Chicago, Ill.

- You must have PASSION in what you are doing!
- Clean Location- Mom's know clean so your location must meet their standards.
- Game Mix-you need the proper game mix to meet your many target markets.
- Prize Selections-your prizes drive your game income.
- Give them a reason to save tickets and come back for more fun-buy the right prizes.
- Games Need To Work-your games need to work properly all of the time.
- Make your redemption counter look like a retail store- WOW them!!
- Your layout must let Mom feel comfortable she can spot her kids in an instant
- Your payout percentage must be at the proper level or the player will walk away.
- Your staff must be helpful and know how each game plays.
- You need a parts department-keep the needed parts in stock to keep your games working.
- Converse with you customers-they will tell you everything you need to know.
- Market your location to every possible group and organization.
- Make sure everyone leaves with something in their hand.
- You are creating an experience—make sure it is a lasting one that brings them back.
- Make sure Mom does not wait - if she is unhappy upon leaving you will not see her come back.
- Train all of your employees to have your same sense of PASSION!!!



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