



STRIKE OUT

As the line between bowling centres and FECs continues to blur, **Brunswick Bowling** shares its thoughts on the changes occurring in bowling and how coin-op continues to play an integral role in a location

BRUNSWICK Bowling is one of the market leaders, both in manufacturing of bowling equipment and in the running of bowling operations. It has opened locations around the world and has seen the systems used within locations change dramatically over the years.

For Brandon Meigs, director of product management at Brunswick, bowling systems today are vastly improved on older systems and there are four primary benefits (customer satisfaction, better marketing, more operational control and increased reliability) that centres can achieve using the latest technology which match the evolution of bowling towards entertainment bowlers and are geared for maximum profitability of any entertainment centre.

"Bowling today is more entertaining and interactive," said Meigs. "Increased customer

satisfaction can be achieved through games, high quality graphics and features like digital signage, online scoring, smart phone waiting lists and internet reservations integrated with social networking – these are just a few of the features now available with our Vector system. Add to this full glow in the dark lanes, audio-visual equipment combined with large down-lane video screens, LCD monitors as well as LED pin-deck lights – even just the completely automated PBW bumpers for children, which are still not installed on all bowling lanes, gives increased customer satisfaction, more opportunity to enjoy time with the entire family together, meet new friends or for a boys night out."

According to Meigs, better marketing of the locations for leagues and tournaments and towards casual players can now also be achieved

through improved software such as the company's Vector Plus system.

"With Brunswick, centres can take advantage of the optional internet reservations application where customers can view lane availability in real time for that particular day and then make their own reservations including what add-ons they would like such as food and beverages," he said. "When finished, they can even post their reservation to social media sites such as Facebook, which further increases the likelihood of additional patrons visiting the centre. Vector can be customised for complete control of marketing messages and branding, on or off the lane."

When it comes to the operational side of the business, for Meigs all aspects of bowling systems today are tied into a single management system.



This integration allows proprietors to better manage their centre by giving them complete visibility of customer spending patterns, consolidating financial data and implementing controls to reduce employee theft. The increased reliability achieved across the whole site results in higher lane utilisation and lower maintenance costs in the long run.

For Andrea Bisi, director of sales at Brunswick, running a successful entertainment centre with bowling is a complex and multifaceted activity, but is extremely rewarding. "Financing has always been critical and more so with the credit crunch," she said. "But given the three basic elements – the will, finance and location – Brunswick provides a complete service to help and support any investor to develop and run their project. From helping with a business plan, demographic consideration, project planning and design, to delivering the best performing bowling equipment, training and installation, we make the bowling investment as profitable as possible.

"With continuous technical and marketing updates with seminars, meetings and forums – the introduction of new products, service and support of existing installations – Brunswick helps to protect bowling investments for years to come."

Thanks to improvements in technology there are now multiple styles of bowling equipment an operator can choose from. According to Bisi, location and especially business models influence the choice of the specific bowling equipment and the additional ancillaries and other revenue generator activities inside a centre. The Brunswick product range is vast and covers every possible aspect, location and business model from traditional centres to family entertainment centres to boutique and hybrid locations, which include multiple bowling lane installations in the same location with some more dedicated to sport orientated customers and others dedicated to fun and entertainment or private parties."

For Meigs, a single scoring system is suitable for many different types of locations – Vector scoring



is built around an open architecture that offers the ultimate in scoring flexibility and upgradeability and can be easily configured for a centre's unique business model and bowler demographics.

In Europe in particular, only a relatively small number of bowling centres are purely dedicated to bowling as a sport. The vast majority are entertainment centres with bowling as the anchor of the business. Some markets have even been known to use bowling to attract traffic into shopping malls. "In any case there is no doubt that bowling locations have evolved," said Bisi, "and need to continue to do so, in order to continue to compete for the disposable income of all customers."

And in the US, a market where league bowling has remained popular with many players, a similar pattern is occurring, according to the company's Gary Smith. "With the exception of boutique style centres, most new centres in the US today would fall into the category of entertainment centres," he said. "Bowling is of course the major draw, with most centres still placing focus on sport or league bowling, but with the majority of bowling customers being open play/entertainment bowlers, in order to have maximum demographic appeal, these centres will include redemption arcades, additional entertainment venues such as laser tag, bumper cars, go-karts and other attractions, party and meeting rooms to accommodate birthday, corporate and general group parties. Also, better quality restaurants, snack bars, food courts and bars/sports bars. Many existing centres are following this trend of diversification and renovating their facilities to offer the same thing."

For Meigs, bowling lanes and coin-op amusement game rooms complement each other

and can result in higher revenues for both.

"This is especially relevant for family entertainment centres and other venues with large populations of casual bowlers," he said. "There are concepts on the market today that integrate ticket dispensers with the game of bowling. While we believe that this concept has a lot of potential, unfortunately the designs of current products on the market limit the viability of the redemption devices because the dispenser location disrupts the flow of the bowlers between the seating, approach and lane. We are working with leaders in the amusement industry as we continue to evaluate the concept."

"We believe it is extremely important to take advantage of the marketing opportunities that the direct personal relations with the customer give," added Bisi. "It is more important to be able to track and measure the specific spending habit of each customer, in order to analyse and segment, and then create promotions that can attract more people, have them come back more often and stay longer – spending more each visit. If you limit yourself to purely coin-op or ticket redemption, the relation with the customer tends to decrease over time. Integration with card systems and frequent bowlers programmes can be very effective and more customer service focused."

Brunswick has interfaces with all the major debit card systems in the amusement industry, which allows integration of data collection and opportunity for profiling the customers by demographic, with enhanced marketing options. This also allows some centres to go cashless with their entertainment offering, with customers using the same card they use for games at the bowling lanes for games of bowling. "This essentially makes it easier for people to spend money, provides marketing advantages and in the end increases revenues," said Bisi.

Brunswick Bowling is a global company, with powerful R&D and active offices or representatives in all continents and countries, exploring opportunities in every country and every aspect of the entertainment industry. Some markets are still very new to any investment in bowling, others have explored only the entertainment side and again others mainly the sports element of the game.

"By organising business seminars, marketing and investor seminars around the world, we bring together different experiences and we help existing customers and potential investors to take advantage of the popularity of bowling," continued Bisi. "We believe a good balance between fun and sport, with a combination of attractive, well-designed centres, food and beverage, games, billiards and attractions is the best recipe for a successful entertainment centre, with future development into the internet and social networking to allow enhanced marketing opportunities, more customer interaction, fun games and further entertainment options."

"Most people would be surprised at how global bowling already is," added Smith. "Bowling is played in over 100 countries by over 125 million people. Right now, there are several 'growth' markets we're working on. A logical country is India where there is tremendous population and rapid development taking place."