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# BOWLING INDUSTRY

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## DALE SCHWARTZ'S PINSTRIPES

THREE B'S TO SUCCESS

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PBA'S  
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11 MONEY  
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# BISTROBOWLING

Dale Schwartz's Pinstripes chain melds fine dining, bowling, and Bocce into a unique midwestern entertainment experience.



## ■ Michael Goldman

**T**he unorthodox concept that eventually became Pinstripes first percolated into the mind of Dale Schwartz about 25 years ago. That's when the Cleveland native says he "gave some serious consideration" to purchasing a bowling alley in Manhattan. Eventually, he and a couple of friends decided against it for various reasons, and Schwartz moved on to decades of entrepreneurial business success. But what Schwartz calls "the original thought" he had about the bowling business in the 1980's never quite left him.

That thought was this—why not combine bowling and fine, upper-scale dining together in a sophisticated way? He's now doing it with three Pinstripes venues—two in the suburbs of Chicago and one in a suburb of Minneapolis. All are built on the notion that bowling, fine dining, the event business, and even the sport of Bocce could be merged into a reasonably priced, but highly sophisticated, entertainment experience for consumers.

## Novel Concept

But getting to the point of making that 1980's dream a reality first required a lengthy journey through the business world for Schwartz.

"I just wasn't ready to pursue the idea back then," Schwartz says. "I knew of a number of different concepts at the time in the bowling industry, and I continued to watch the industry closely for the next couple of decades. Periodically, I would mention to friends and family this Pinstripes concept. It was always well received, and everyone kept saying that, one day, I should go ahead and do it."

Meantime, after founding and running an asphalt sealcoating company, working for an investment bank, completing his MBA at the Harvard Business School, working for a venture capital firm, and serving as CFO of a biotechnology company, Schwartz co-founded Pharmaca Integrative Pharmacy, Inc. in 2000 and served as its CEO until 2006. He calls Pharmaca "an integrated pharmacy concept," meaning its chain of pharmacies in the Western United States simultaneously offers both traditional pharmaceutical products and services and natural products that, historically, have been sold in separate stores.

"It was a novel healthy pharmacy concept," he says. "And that experience once again spurred my interest in bowling and entertainment, with the idea that we could redefine this industry in a similar way. That was about five or six years ago. I just felt life was too short, so maybe I should pursue the dream I had 25 years ago, and finally do something exciting with bowling and entertainment."

What's exciting about Pinstripes is not just the concept and the execution, but the fact that Schwartz has managed to grow and expand it to three venues, with more in the planning stages, in a rough economy and in a region that is "well saturated in terms of lane inventory," in the words of Kurt Harz, VP of Capital Sales for Brunswick in Chicago.

Harz and others on the Brunswick team have worked closely with Schwartz, as Brunswick has been the equipment provider for the three Pinstripes' venues over the last few years. He has known Schwartz for several years, and has no interest in restraining himself when describing Schwartz's contribution to the industry. He insists Schwartz is "as big a visionary as I have ever run around with, and I've been doing this 35 years with Brunswick."

The reason for his enthusiasm over Schwartz personally and Pinstripes generally is the nature of the idea Schwartz hatched all those years ago, his boldness in taking a risk on an unorthodox concept, and making a success of it during a period of great economic turmoil. Pinstripes launched in Northbrook, Illinois, in 2007, expanded into South Barrington, Illinois, in 2008, and most recently, opened up a new facility in Edina, Minnesota in late 2010.

According to Harz, Schwartz gambled on a rare, multi-tiered concept that relies as much on the gourmet dining experience and the event business as it does on bowling and Bocce. (Indeed, the Pinstripes' motto is "Bowling, Bocce, Bistro"). In other words, Harz credits Schwartz with coming up with something entirely unique, of extremely high quality, that is nevertheless, affordable for discriminating consumers who are being more judicious than ever about what to spend their entertainment dollars on.

"He's very entrepreneurial—he just felt there was a



niche waiting to be occupied for this type of entertainment venue in the marketplace,” Harz says. “Dale produced a unique combination venue under one roof—gourmet food, Bocce, and bowling. In a sense, food and beverage are the draw, and Bocce and bowling are complimentary. Combining bowling and Bocce was strategic. (Schwartz) had visited some Bocce courts, but felt the sport didn’t have enough legs by itself, without food and more. So he added food and bowling, and felt that demographic would give him a much stronger customer base.”

“Bocce and bowling share lots of elements, obviously,” Schwartz adds. “The rolling of the ball element, the competition, and the idea of good, clean community fun. But, for me, the real rationale for including Bocce was, first of all, to make us a bit more distinctive than having only the bowling component. And second of all, it allows us to accentuate the duality of Italian-American food and wine with the Bocce and bowling component.”

### Multiple Components

Thus, the three Pinstripes locations are, essentially, fine Italian-American themed restaurants supplemented by bowling lanes, Bocce courts, leather couches, fire pits, Italian-themed artwork, outdoor patio dining, fine wine, music, and a whole lot more. (The Northbrook facility is 38,000 square feet and features 18 bowling lanes and six Bocce courts; the South Barrington facility is 39,000 square feet, and has 20 lanes and 10 Bocce courts; and the Edina Pinstripes is 32,000 square feet with 16 lanes and six Bocce courts.) The nature of the three facilities has evolved Pinstripes into a company that is very active on the local event circuit—a smart business move, but a strategic tradeoff because it can sometimes mitigate use of the facilities by traditional league bowlers.

All told, the nature of Pinstripes gives Schwartz lots of components to manage that separate the three locations from traditional bowling centers across the region.

“It’s meant to be unique and different, and to intentionally break with some of the stereotypes of traditional bowling facilities in terms of the food served that might not be on par with quality restaurant establishments,” he says. “It’s an environment or an experience, and we do go to extraordinary lengths to choreograph and manage all those various pieces. We work with, and enjoy, leagues and clubs that bowl with us, but we are trying to cater to a wider spectrum of the community.”



As a result, Pinstripes venues have service people and managers who have worked in major entertainment facilities like Houston’s and Maggiano’s Little Italy restaurants around the country, and chefs trained at top culinary schools. Indeed, the fine dining aspect has grown so important that some customers at the three venues regularly stop by just for lunch or dinner, whether or not they have time or the desire to bowl or play Bocce.

Still, from the day the first Pinstripes opened in Northbrook in 2007, Schwartz had no illusions about the fact that he was taking a significant risk. And it was a risk that grew exponentially in the last three years as major economic upheavals rocked the nation and forced his industry, and others, to cut back dramatically.

“Any business venture is a risk, and certainly with the size and scale of what we’re doing, there were some substantial money and other risks involved,” he says. “Even in a good economy, this is not an easy business, because it has a lot of complicated pieces. But my business background was helpful in that regard. It’s all in the manner of how you structure the business and the team you put together. We did have to be on the top of our game in the Chicago market relative to the number of quality restaurants, quality bowling, and other entertainment available



in that area. We did it right, and that gave us confidence we could repeat that success elsewhere.

"The original planning for Pinstripes really got going in about 2005, well before the economy turned sour. But the truth is, even if we had known about the (looming recession), it would not have changed the original premise. Then, once the difficult times came, as with other businesses, the strong actually got stronger while the weak got weaker. So we were able to buck the trend nicely and keep our focus on our high standards of service, food elements, and entertainment, and it's worked out."

Indeed, it's worked out so well that Schwartz added the Edina Pinstripes in November of 2010 with plans for more. When Pinstripes expanded into Minnesota, the move came after an evaluation process looking at developments and locations across the nation. Schwartz felt that Minneapolis' proximity to Chicago, similar Midwestern culture, weather, and familiarity to himself and his team would bode well for launching a new Pinstripes. Now, Schwartz continues to plan what he calls "opportunistic growth" into other markets.

"Certainly, you expand carefully and selectively, and aware of the economy and the general market, but we definitely expect to keep growing," he says. "Exceptional service, a quality team, fair prices, great food, and unique entertainment is always a good formula if you know how to organize and choreograph everything." ❖



Michael Goldman is a veteran print and online journalist who, over the last 30 years, has covered sports, business, entertainment, technology, and media for a wide range of publications and web sites. For more on his work, visit his web site at [www.michael-goldman.com](http://www.michael-goldman.com).