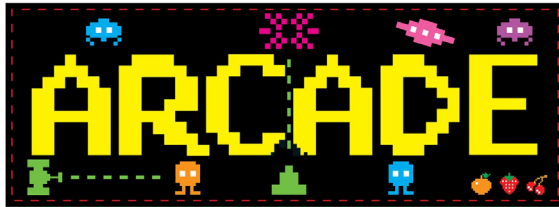


Rethink and Refocus on Parties

By: Howard McAuliffe

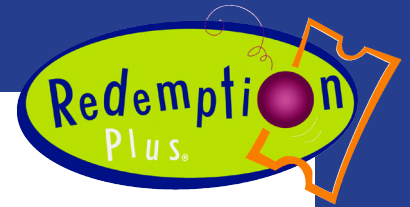
When is the last time you went to a stand alone arcade in the United States, a facility that relied on games to attract customers to the venue? The answer likely is “I haven’t in recent years.” It’s no revelation that our industry has evolved to including game rooms as a part of an entertainment experience including things such as bowling alleys, movie theatres, and casinos. Outside of these larger facilities games are operated primarily in grocery stores, big box retailers, and bars that rely on customers being exposed to the product by simply walking by or sitting in the same room.



These larger facilities have the advantage of providing a variety of entertainment experiences that make them perfect party destinations. In addition, they require significant capital investments, so getting more bodies in the door is the key to increasing revenues. Given this fact, I am struck by how often facilities I visit have their party programs on auto pilot and in some cases even miss the basics of promoting parties in their facilities.

In this article, I would like to outline some ideas for innovation in the party experience as well as review a few simple basics to help promote parties. Many of these will be obvious to operators but you may get a few ideas and, if nothing else, starting the brainstorming process is always important.





All too often I find that in our industry we think of “parties” synonymously with birthdays and further design party packages as a one size fits all situation. Even internally at Redemption Plus we realized this when redesigning our “Birthday Bags”; we renamed this product “Prize Bags” to allow them to be used for a variety of events and, more importantly, open the minds of our staff and customers to a variety of events that gifts can be used for. Here are a few quick ideas for targeted promotions:

- 1) Promote targeted parties for growing markets such as quinceanera parties for Hispanic customers.
- 2) Promote end of season banquets for sports leagues.
- 3) There have been several bowling center weddings in the news recently, why not?!
- 4) Sunday football packages are common - consider a party package for kids who don't want to watch the games.

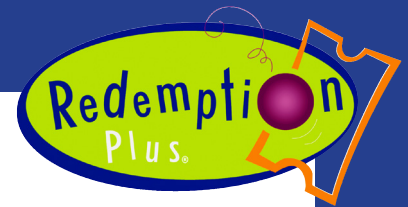


The possibilities are nearly endless, often just starting to think outside of birthday parties will get the creative juices flowing. Any facility can find a niche appropriate to the local market. Once the niche is identified, focus is key. The old adage that if everyone is in charge nobody is in charge certainly fits. If the facility is not big enough to have a staff person dedicated to parties, someone on the staff should be the point person for marketing and selling party packages.



In addition to implementing innovative party solutions, its always important to make sure the basics are covered. Here are a few ideas that are often overlooked:

- 1) Turn the lights on in party rooms and set-up as if there is a party (at least during



- busy times).
- 2) Use databases available from debit card systems, promotions like “Kids Bowl Free,” as well as past parties for target marketing.
 - 3) Offer packages that give the customer a good experience and value. While some customers like to theme and decorate themselves, others are happy to pay you to do it.
 - 4) Invest in training: Birthday University and Trainertainment are two industry options that are well respected.

Parties are a great way to drive groups of customers to facilities. While nearly everyone in our industry knows this, sometimes party promotion gets put on autopilot as the stresses of day to day operations build up. By focusing some resources on improving your guest’s experiences, more customers will come, and ultimately it will result in more profits. Focusing on innovation while executing the basics are something we all need to continue to address to build our businesses.



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