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TAKING IT ALL ONLINE

Redemption Plus' new online redemption system keeps customers connected to FECs long after their visit *by Marion Hixon*

WHAT IF FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTERS (FECs) could reinforce brand loyalty and reach their visitors after they've gone home for the evening—not through traditional advertising, direct mail, or even phone calls, but by the customer voluntarily logging online at home?

Redemption Plus (RP) realizes this possibility with its most recent service, Planet Prize Online Redemption (PPOR), which allows FEC visitors to bypass the line at the redemption counter, take their ticket counts home, and redeem them for merchandise online. Once customers register a game card at the facility, they're free to log on to the facility's web site, where they have access to a multitude of prizes—even more than what's offered behind the counter.

"I feel this is where redemption is going in the future," says Ron Hill, CEO of Redemption Plus. "The idea is just in its infancy right now, but it will give family entertainment centers a way to not only increase items, but to reach out to customers long after they leave the store."



Ron Hill

Since its launch in February, PPOR has been used in demo mode at Alley Cats in Arlington, Texas. In the future, Redemption Plus hopes to allow customers to log in directly at home and bypass the on-site facility registration.

RP created and trademarked another industry innovation—the digital packing list (DPL), which eliminates rigorous data entry for merchandise on the customer's side and is now extensively used in the industry. To develop concepts like PPOR and DPL, Hill uses his background experience in computer software training and applies that knowledge to the redemption and attractions industry. He says putting his technological perspective on practical solutions for the business has taught him a lot about FEC management and operation.

"Facilities have so many areas to focus on, so redemption may not be what they're paying attention to, but it *is* where they can get a lot of profitability," Hill says. "When you're running a redemption center, it's important to be focused on the big picture—goals, total revenue, total expenses—so FECs can run their business instead of focusing on certain products."

On Redemption Plus' philosophy, Hill says the company can only grow if its clients are doing the same: "We provide the merchandise, but if we're not also providing the solutions for our customers to be more successful, we're not going to be more successful."

Redemption Plus is seeing interest from both facilities and software companies willing to integrate the system; often the former fuels the latter. By the end of the year, Hill says he hopes to have one or two software companies and around a dozen customers.

HOW IT WORKS

1. FEC customers can register their game cards on-site (the Alley-Cats location currently uses a kiosk to do so). They receive a login and password after redeeming their tickets and their information is saved electronically.
2. Visitors log on to the individual (or chain) facility web site (i.e., www.AlleyCatsBowl.com) and find the link to the online redemption store. Note: It may be helpful for facilities to create take-home instructions to send with first-time users on how to redeem online.
3. Users are taken to a new page (i.e., <http://alleycatsbowl.planetprize.com>) and enter their card number and password. If they have a newer version of the card, they will not have to log in on-site and can use a Card Verification Code (CVC) that came with their ticket. Any users experiencing difficulty with their codes are given a customer service contact at Redemption Plus.
4. Guests get to shop away. Planet Prize Online Redemption users can search redemption products by prize category or use the search function to look at items by ticket amount. Hundreds of items are available in categories like cars and electronics, toys, candy, and plush.

During the checkout process, the customers enter their mailing addresses, and prizes arrive within 10 business days.

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