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**AAMA:**  
Annual  
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Gala, and  
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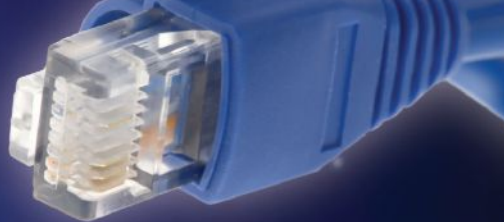


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Intl. Assn. of Amusement Parks & Attractions (IAAPA)

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35

30



93

# CONTENTS

Vol. 38 • No. 9  
September 2012  
www.playmeter.com

## 32 AAMA Annual Meeting and Gala

Check here for full AAMA event coverage and then flip over to Gala Games at a Glance for a complete listing of new products shown. New this year were presentations from six manufacturers.

## 46 Music and More

A lot has happened in the world of jukeboxes this year. We spoke with leaders at each of the three digital jukebox companies for a look into new products, new features, and new partnerships.

## 74 PinGame Journal turns 20

*PinGame Journal*, purveyor of all things pinball, turns 20 this year. Jim Shelberg, Editor/Publisher, discusses the magazine's accomplishments, the Pinball Expo, and the future of pinball.

## 83 Company Profile: Hoffman Mint

Hoffman Mint has been in the token business since the hey-day of the amusement industry. Today, it still thrives, supplying tokens to family entertainment centers (FECs) across the country.

## On the Cover

Incredible Technologies (IT)'s longstanding golf video game, Golden Tee LIVE, has been around for eight years and is still going strong. *Play Meter* spoke with IT about this year's version, complete with a description of each exciting new course.

## Departments

Ad Index	112
Beyond the Playfield	82
Classifieds	99
Coin-Op News	12
Coinman	70
Cover Story	54
Critic's Corner	84
Consultant's Corner	86
Editorial	8
Equipment Poll	10
FEC of the Month	66
FEC News	60
FEC Target	65
Hot Clicks	69
In Step with AAMA	44
Merchandise Market	92
News Bulletin	1
On the Road	45
On the Spot	52
Redemption Formula	68
Say What	53
Scoring Success	58
Social Studies	88
State Meeting: AMOT	78
Trade Accessories	91
Trade Show: BCA Summit	80
Travel Tracks	98
VNEA Vision	90
What's New	28



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Attending the American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA) Annual Meeting and Distributor Gala in August was like a shot in the arm, seeing all the new releases coming for the industry this fall.

Check out our coverage of this event in this issue, along with the “Gala Games at a Glance” listing of what was on display. Thirteen companies exhibited 29 games. Check out “What’s New” in this issue for more details on new releases.

While not every manufacturer in the industry showcased equipment at the AAMA Distributor Gala, it is a good start to the fall season.

As Frank Cosentino of Namco America said, “There is a fall business before the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) Expo in November. This gala gives our distributors the opportunity to see product that may be available before the IAAPA Expo so they can let their customers know. Distributors can then promote the products at their events.”

Mark Struhs of Raw Thrills said, “The gala is an opportunity to show distributors what we’ve got coming so they know how to plan for their market. When they know what’s coming, they can build excitement in that market. And it’s our job to deliver that excitement.”

Exhibitors at the gala did deliver excitement with a flurry of new games in a number of equipment categories: children’s games, coin pushers, countertops, cranes, darts, jukeboxes, photo booths, pinball, merchandisers, ticket redemption, sports games, table games, and video games.

Many of the games are prototypes that should be ready in time for the IAAPA Expo, which has seen a steady increase in the number of coin-op products shown in the last 10 years. It is not a traditional coin-op show but coin-op is well represented. Dates for the show are Nov. 12-16 at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Fla.

AAMA secures a large amount of booth space at the IAAPA Expo for its members as part of its Location Trade Show (LTS) program so that much in coin-op is concentrated in one area. Plus, additional coin-op companies take their own larger booth spaces. Our coverage of IAAPA Expo 2011 included information on products from no less than 63 coin-op companies.

This is a big issue packed with informative articles including the Coinman Interview with Mike and Dawn Brower of Merlin Amusements in Florida; the 20-year saga of Jim Schelberg’s pinball passion, which became *PinGame Journal*; a Company Profile on Hoffman Mint, which has served the industry for 22 years; a report on the Amusement and Music Operators of Texas (AMOT) Convention and Trade Show; the Cover Story on the new courses for Golden Tee LIVE 2013; and the music feature that provides details of the advances in digital jukeboxes that have made them much more than music delivery vehicles and turned them into complete entertainment packages.

When combined with all of our regular features and columns it adds up to a packed end-of-summer issue. Four months remain on the 2012 calendar. With all the new releases coming soon there is good reason to be optimistic about the future. ▲



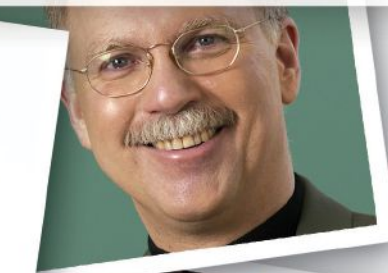
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Editor

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*Larry Elbert, Cedar Rapids, IA*



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*Sal Cifala, Newton, MA*



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*Phil Juckem, Tampa, FL*



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*Brenda Daniel, Tampa, FL*

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AMI Entertainment  
Megatouch Live V2

# Games *at a glance*



AMI Entertainment  
NGX Face Place



Andamiro USA  
En Shoot



Andamiro USA  
i-Cube



Apple Industries  
Face Place



Bay Tek Games  
Beer Pong



Bay Tek Games  
Dizzy Chicken

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(800)523-2760; [www.amientertainment.com](http://www.amientertainment.com)

**ML-1 and Megatouch Live V2 (countertop)**

The ML-1 countertop with classic games re-invented for and enabled with an online service that gives players more to do. Features include 22-inch multi-touch screen, in-game challenges, Megatouch Live Score, virtual currency that can be used to buy virtual goods, global leader boards that allow players to post scores to Facebook, and player accounts created on-screen.

**Rowe NGX Face Place (jukebox)**

A joint effort between AMI and Apple Industries produces an NGX jukebox with V3 software and Apple's Smile 2.0 photo booth technology. Patrons can play music take photos, and print photos (photo strips and four-inch by six-inch photos) on the spot. Beta testing is taking place in September, with delivery to the market scheduled for October.

**Andamiro USA Corp.**

(310)767-5800; [www.andamirousa.com](http://www.andamirousa.com)

**En Shoot (sports game)**

A new basketball game that can be single player or multi-player, linkable up to 16 units for competitions. It utilizes a system of quarter time play (maximum four quarters). Features include a moving basket, LED lighting, attractive graphics, and special sensors for "swish" and "money ball," and double scoring in the last five seconds. En Shoot stands 98 inches tall.

**i-Cube (prize merchandiser)**

This is an advanced prize merchandiser with a cabinet based on the iPhone design. Features include LED lighting, adjustable prize bins, and nine individual places to put prizes with room for three more items behind for a total of 27 prizes. Players press one button to move an arrow across the field of prizes, and then release the button to move the arrow into the prize space.

**Apple Industries**

(880)607-2444; [www.appleindustries.net](http://www.appleindustries.net)

**Face Place Photo Booth (photo booth)**

This photo booth with the Smile 2.0 software has the ability to print black and white and color photo strips, four-inch by six-inch photos, post cards, photos with fun borders, and more. Players can also share photos on Facebook and Twitter.



Bay Tek Games  
Pig Out



Bromley Inc.  
Heroes in Action

### Bay Tek Games

(920)822-3951; www.baytekgames.com

#### Beer Pong (novelty)

After the success of Beer Ball, Bay Tek has adopted the universally popular game of Beer Pong to coin-op housed in a red cabinet with a reservoir for the balls in front. The game will be ready in spring 2013.

#### Dizzy Chicken (novelty)

Players push a large handle to propel a racket ball size ball along a winding playfield lined with lights that each have a different ticket value. If they get the ball to land on the flashing light they win 1,000 tickets. Landing on a blue lights wins four tickets; a green light wins 20 tickets; an orange light wins 40 tickets. An overhead camera tracks the ball.

#### Pig Out (novelty)

Players push a shovel to land ping-pong size balls into the mouth of a giant pink pig's face and win tickets. Dimensions are 2-1/2 feet wide by four feet deep. The game will be shown at the IAAPA Expo 2012.

### Bromley Inc.

(847)509-0240; www.bromley-inc.com

#### Heroes in Action (coin pusher)

A licensed Marvel four-player coin pusher with large rotating marquee, graphics of all the Marvel super heroes, and real skill multiple ways to win tickets and a jackpot bonus.

#### Marvel Heroes (crane)

A licensed Marvel, 32-inch wide crane that features artwork of Marvel characters, joystick and one button controls, and two coin mechs. The crane is dollar bill acceptor ready. It was shown filled with licensed Marvel plush available from Bromley.

### Family Fun Companies

(920)491-9453; www.familyfuncompanies.com

#### Hammerhead (novelty)

Players turn a big wooden handle to move balls off a wooden plank into one of the life preservers waiting in the water. Each life preserver has a ticket value. The goal is to keep the life preservers from floating into the mouths of two sharks at the deep end of the game. Plans call for a ticket bonus if a player gets a ball into every life preserver while avoiding the sharks. The game will be shown at IAAPA Expo 2012.

#### Pharaoh's Revenge (coin pusher)

A follow-up to the popular Egyptian-themed Pharaoh's Treasure, this four-player coin pusher has fully adjustable payout percentage and more ways to win tickets. A card reader kit is available.

#### Reactor (coin drop)

A multi-player coin drop game that challenges players to bounce their coin through openings of the spinning center column to set off the reactor and win tickets. As the column spins faster, the amount of tickets that can be won increases.

### Gold Standard Games/Shelti

(877)893-1739; www.gold-standard-games.com

#### Gold Standard Air Hockey (air hockey)

The first in a new line of coin air hockey tables designed by Mark Robbins. Features include durable laminate surface, centerline and face-off circle for competitive play, all-plywood cabinet, and extra-thick steel goal cover. Available in three models: Professional, with side scoring; Elite, with overhead scoring with player-operated black light/white light option; and Premium, with a first-ever display monitor facing the coin side of the game.



Bromley Inc.  
Marvel Heroes



Family Fun Companies  
Hammerhead



Family Fun Companies  
Pharaoh's Revenge



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Reactor



Gold Standard Games  
Gold Standard Air Hockey



**Gold Standard Games  
Radikal Darts**



**Global VR  
The Swarm**



**Namco America  
Ball Spectacular**



**Namco America  
Deadstorm Pirates Mini**



**Namco America  
Funky Gator**



**Raw Thrills  
Big Buck HD Panorama**



**Raw Thrills  
Cars**



**Raw Thrills  
Sno Cross**

**Radikal Darts (darts)**

This game uses a system developed by Gaelco Darts in Spain. Players can play live with others anytime and anywhere in the world. Features include a laser throw line, online system, and a variety of competitions (online, traditional, and virtual leagues). All games are validated through the patented remote referee system.

**Global VR**

(408)597-3400; [www.globalvr.com](http://www.globalvr.com)

**The Swarm (video)**

The popular PC game comes to coin-op in 2D and 3D. The premise: Moscow has been invaded by aliens, the city is in shambles, and everyone is mutating. Players fight the aliens and resulting monsters and mutate along the way. Features include a 47-inch LCD display and two sets of guns. Operators can sell the 3D glasses (3D polarization required). Available in two Parental Advisory System (PAS) versions: yellow for mild violence and red for strong violence.

**Namco America Inc.**

(847)264-5610; [www.namcoamerica.com](http://www.namcoamerica.com)

**Ball Spectacular (novelty)**

This one-button pachinko-style skill game has players dropping a ball down a peg-filled playfield. If they drop the ball through the five-ball gate target it will release five more balls onto the playfield with more opportunity to win additional tickets. If they hit the jackpot game at the bottom, then all the balls in the jackpot tray will be released. An overhead LCD monitor shows scores to spectators. Available: fall.

**Deadstorm Pirates Mini (children's game)**

The game play of the original Deadstorm Pirates has been modified for young players. Features include pirate adventures, stirring music, and colorful cabinet with two playing stations to accommodate two players. Available: fall.

**Funky Gator (bopping game)**

A new bopping game that updates the classic Wacky Gator. Game play is simple: players must hit pink gators as they slide out at random ready to bite. Two games can be linked for competitive play. Available: now.

**Raw Thrills/Play Mechanix**

(847)679-8373; [www.rawthrills.com](http://www.rawthrills.com)

**Big Buck HD Panorama (video)**

The latest in the successful Big Buck game series features HD cinema quality graphics, new game play, online features, Facebook and Twitter integration, in-game promotions, and credit and debit card acceptance. A Verizon cell modem is preinstalled for easy connectivity. Operators may provide the monitor, from 42-inches to 55-inches.

**Cars (video)**

A new driver licensed from Disney Pixar that features every car from both of the popular "Cars" movies. Additional features include fully animated Cars characters that interact with the player, a 42-inch LCD monitor cabinet, force feedback steering wheel, and seven tracks based on locales in the movie. Lightning McQueen and Mater are depicted on the marquee.

**Sno Cross (video)**

Snowmobile racing delivers a new experience to players in this video game officially licensed from ESPN. Racers can perform the same tricks as seen in the Winter X Games. Features include seven tracks, six snowmobile racers, ultra-high marquee, linkable up to eight units, and a new Facebook connect (no network required). Two models will be available: 32-inch fixed seat and 42-inch motion version.

### Sega Amusements USA Inc.

(847)364-9787; www.segaarcade.com

#### Bejeweled (novelty)

The console, mobile, and PC puzzle game popular with women comes to coin-op in this multi-player game. The goal is to swap adjacent gems to create lines of three four and five gems. The game can be set for ticket redemption or to award prize vouchers. Two cabinets can be linked to create a centerpiece with four player stations.

#### Key Master Colors (prize vendor)

Five new colors are available for Key Master, which allows players to unlock prizes by skillfully putting a key in the right spot. There are three prize levels and a wide range of operator-adjustable settings. New colors are: coral pink, electric lime, ice blue, laser lemon, and orange sherbet.

#### Sonic Sports Quad Air (sports game)

Up to four players can enjoy air hockey with this game, which is part of the Sonic Allstars series of sports games. Features include chasing LED lights, a scratch-free playfield, and LED scoring and timer on the playfield.

#### Superbooths (photo booth)

An interactive photo booth that delivers an experience beyond photos. Five funky photographers provide instructions on poses; each session includes nine photos and finishes with three free style snaps. Previews are shown before exiting and collecting prints. Features include a 42-inch internal screen and two 37-inch marquee screens.

#### Virtua Tennis 4 (video)

This latest in the Virtua Tennis series features 19 of the world's top players, including Federer and Murray and Sharapova and Williams, who competed in the finals of the recent Olympic Games in London. Features include the Match Momentum Gauge that builds over time to create more dramatic matches. In addition, mini games (an alternative to tournament mode) can be played with up to four players.

#### Stern Pinball

(800)542-5377; www.sternpinball.com

#### X-Men Pro (pinball)

Stern's latest pinball game is licensed from Marvel and based on the X-Men comic book series. Players gather their favorite X-Men to battle enemies. Features include a custom-molded Wolverine bash toy and Magneto figurine, bright LED pop bumpers, two high-powered slingshots, game specific QR codes, official game speech provided by Marvel, and a third flipper.

#### TouchTunes Interactive Networks

(888)338-5853; www.touchtunes.com

#### Virtuo Karaoke (jukebox)

The capabilities of the Virtuo smart jukebox have been extended with the new karaoke feature. A state of the art karaoke system allows users to enjoy karaoke through the digital jukebox so every location with a Virtuo can make it possible for customers to perform their favorite songs. With Virtuo Karaoke operators have the opportunity to gain back the karaoke night when the jukebox would be turned off. ▲



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Virtua Tennis 4



Stern Pinball  
X-Men



TouchTunes  
Virtuo Karaoke



# A presence on Capitol Hill

In September 2011, the American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA) began a program of quarterly journeys to Washington D.C., to meet with legislators and present the industry's position on a number of issues. The goal: to establish a presence for the industry on Capitol Hill.

John Margold, Chairman of AAMA, spoke about the importance of those journeys: "John Schultz, President of AAMA, accompanies two representatives of the association on each visit. Ideally, we have one AAMA member from manufacturing and one from either distribution or a supply firm.

"Our attorneys in Washington, SNR Denton, do a great job of organizing a day and a half using our time efficiently. They make sure we see a legislator, or a member of their staff, from a congressional district that is home to the AAMA members on the trip."

On a Washington visit in February, Margold met with Justin Amash, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives (Michigan), where AMI's facility is located. Margold said, "When it comes to issues like the dollar coin and the elimination of the paper \$1 bill, Amash has one of the votes that will determine the outcome. Each vote is important."

He added, "When we get home from Washington, we follow up with the people we met, remind them of what we discussed, and make sure they have the facts."

According to Margold, a poll of AAMA members found that the dollar coin, health insurance, and business taxes are the three main concerns. When AAMA travels to Washington, these are the key topics.

Margold commented, "When I look back, if our industry would have had more involvement with lawmakers when smoking bans were beginning to become an issue, perhaps we would have been able to convince them to look at the other side. As a result of smoking bans, a lot of locations have had to lay off employees."

An important element in the political spectrum is being politically pro-active and supporting the AAMA Political Action Committee (PAC) Fund.

Margold said, "Our PAC Fund is a very important part of the business. Government relations are important, as well as meeting with congressional representatives. It's a fact of politics that legislators work toward re-election. They cannot do any good in Congress if they are not there; they need to be re-elected.

"Supporting our elected officials comes in only a few ways; one tangible way is through donations to the re-election campaign. We need to do a better job of raising those funds. If we want our elected officials to consider our point of view, we need to be able to have access to those lawmakers."

## INDUSTRY EVENTS

Margold is looking forward to attending the upcoming Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA) Mid-Year Board Meeting in Colorado this month. "My wife Julie has met some great people at this event," said Margold. "A lot of work is done in the committee meetings and there are some wonderful social events and spousal activities. This is a first-class group."

Margold complimented AMOA on the Mid-Year Board Meeting and the Annual Council of Affiliated States Meeting for the opportunities they present for interaction and for the level of commitment they show for the industry.

In conclusion, Margold said, "When my tenure is completed as Chairman of AAMA, one of the things I will miss the most is the invitation to the AMOA Mid-Year Board Meeting."

Margold traveled to the Wisconsin Amusement and Music Operators Association (WAMO) Conference in June.

"WAMO is an amazing group," said Margold. "Members are hands-on and so engaged. To them, the customer is not just the person who owns the bar but also the people who hold the pool cue and dart flights. Member companies small and large bring staff including league coordinators. Seminars are conducted to share information and best practices."

He continued, "They understand that a high tide raises all boats. They are supportive of each other and understand that when everyone is better at what they do, coin drop will be higher and the percentage of participation will increase. The average coin drop in that state per machine is probably higher than the national average."

Margold values travel and interaction with operators. In his capacity as Senior Vice President of Sales at AMI Entertainment Network he attends frequent meetings with software developers.

"It's helpful to see customers in person," said Margold. "When I have direct contact with operators and hear about their challenges and what they need in next generation products, I can impart valuable information at those meetings." ▲





# Music, Mid-Year, and Amusement Expo

**P**lay Meter caught up with Andy Shaffer, President of the Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA), soon after his visit to the Amusement and Music Operators of Texas (AMOT) Annual Convention in Ft. Worth, Texas.

Shaffer said: "It was a really great show. I was able to walk the show floor and meet with so many quality operators. I strongly encouraged them to consider being a director of AMOA. We have not had strong representation from Texas. I also encouraged them to take advantage of the Hesch Scholarship that has awarded scholarships to deserving college-bound students."

## MUSIC LICENSING

Due to concerns about music licensing that have surfaced recently in New York, Shaffer traveled with Russ Mawdsley, a Past President of AMOA, and Jack Kelleher, Executive Vice President of AMOA, to meet with the Amusement and Music Operators of New York (AMOA-NY).

"We proactively went to New York to get everyone on the same page and let AMOA-NY know what we hope to accomplish. AMOA takes music licensing seriously. We would like to set up a portal on the association Web site ([www.amoa.com](http://www.amoa.com)) where AMOA member operators could electronically report the use of unlicensed music on digital jukeboxes and get a response."

"That's where AMOA can help," said Shaffer. "Digital music providers want to help as well. We are working closely with AMI Entertainment Network and TouchTunes Interactive Networks."

While in New York, Shaffer, Mawdsley, and Kelleher met with Joe Bossolina of AMOA-NY and also visited the TouchTunes offices to discuss this issue with Charles Goldstuck, CEO of TouchTunes, and other TouchTunes staff.

A number of operators are concerned about the business model being used by NSM Music, which sells digital jukeboxes direct to locations and through distributors.

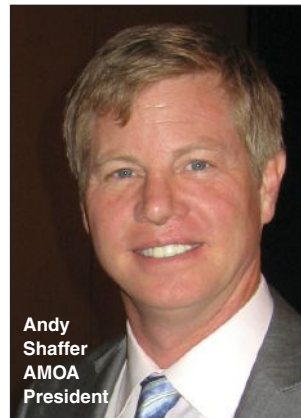
Shaffer said firmly, "I don't condone the NSM business model. I don't believe in it. However, ours is a free enterprise market and AMOA is not a regulatory group. AMOA is on record that it does not agree with this business model."

## MID-YEAR BOARD MEETING

Shaffer has high expectations for the AMOA Mid-Year Board Meeting to be held Sept. 21-25 in Avon, Colo., at the Westin Riverfront Resort & Spa on Beaver Creek Mountain.

"All indications show this may be the highest attended Mid-Year," said Shaffer. "The change of venue and move to a state not many members have visited makes it extremely attractive. I am grateful that so many people are taking so much time and money from their professional schedules to come to Colorado and join us."

Shaffer said a great deal of work will be accomplished during the committee meetings. He is also looking forward to the social activities, in particular "Monday on the Mountain" when attendees will have dinner at Allie's Cabin looking out over the mountains. Shaffer has planned special entertainment for the evening with a performance by acoustic guitar artist Shane Wilson.



Andy Shaffer  
AMOA  
President

*"I am grateful that so many people are taking so much time from their professional schedules to come to Colorado."*

## AMUSEMENT EXPO 2013

With the Amusement Expo 2013 only six months away, March 20-22 in Las Vegas, conference calls are heating up for the show committee.

Shaffer said, "This will be the fourth time that AMOA and the American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA) have come together to host one big spring show. We had an up-tick in attendance and booth space last year; I'm expecting another up-tick for 2013. The expo is on more schedules now."

He added that he is a "strong proponent of moving the show around the country from a recruitment and exposure standpoint. I totally understand that it is difficult to shut your whole business down to attend a show. Moving the show regionally will make it possible for more operators to attend."

The added by-product: greater participation and a larger membership that will give the association an even stronger voice for the industry. ▲

# Music

## and more

by Courtney McDuff

From music box to multi-faceted entertainment device, the jukebox continues to evolve and change.

2

2012 has been a big year in the jukebox arena. One company closed its doors, others introduced new features, and the jukebox has started to make its mark as more than a device used simply to play music.

Now with applications that turn the jukebox into a karaoke machine or a photo booth, operators and location patrons alike are wondering what it will do next?

*Play Meter* spoke with representatives from each of the three leading digital jukebox manufacturers to get an idea of how these new features are performing and what's next on the jukebox agenda.

After Ecast's closing in March, the remaining jukebox companies began to pick up the pieces. Both NSM Music and TouchTunes Interactive Networks made conversion kits available, while AMI Entertainment Network offered operators a chance to continue operating Ecast-connected equipment on the AMI network. Eventually, operators who chose that route will transition to AMI equipment.

### KARAOKE

At this year's Amusement Expo, all three companies introduced a Karaoke application. The response has been positive overall from operators and patrons.



Phil Cohn, CFO of TouchTunes said, "With TouchTunes Karaoke our operators are able to deliver great value to their locations while generating a new revenue stream. Our rollout is continuing on-schedule with both operators and locations rallying behind this re-invented classic."

Bob Cooney, President of NSM Music, said, "Frankly, our Karaoke product has been slow to roll out. After the feedback from the show, we really focused our attention on getting our free, software-only conversion kit developed."

"We are testing Karaoke in a few of locations. The initial version of our Karaoke application is designed to be

## MOBILE APPS

This year, AMI introduced a mobile app for Android and iPhone platforms that allows users to play music on the jukebox from their phones. TouchTunes introduced a second version of its myTouchTunes app, complete with improved features.

AMI Entertainment Network's app, AMI Bar Link, allows operators to view earnings generated from mobile sales. Mike Maas, President of AMI, said, "We introduced several products at the Expo that have really taken off. The AMI Bar Link app has had a tremendous response. Operators are seeing a great return

MyTouchTunes 2.0 app



said, "AMI previewed NGX Face Place, our photo booth, at the Amusement Expo and the company is in the final stages of preparing that product for release. In partnership with Apple Industries, NGX Face Place offers AMI's popular jukebox and V3 software with Apple's Smile 2.0 photo booth technology. Patrons will have a great time playing their favorite songs and taking fun photos, all from one unit. Locations can even add their own branding to the photo prints for additional promotion."

Cohn said, "Our deployment of TouchTunes PhotoBooth is also progressing on schedule with over 80 percent of our fleet of Virtuo SmartJukes now enabled. Our operators are very excited to offer PhotoBooth to their locations to expand the entertainment experience in venue and, like the TouchTunes Karaoke service, provide yet another revenue stream."

Cooney said, "We are always listening to our customers. We're trying to be responsive to their needs. That's why we slowed down the deployment of the Karaoke service to focus on the free, software-only hard drive conversion for Icon jukeboxes."



run and managed by a karaoke host. Typically that's going to be an employee of the bar. It's not designed to replace a dedicated karaoke jockey with a loyal following on a regular karaoke night.

"It allows bars to offer Karaoke on an ad-hoc basis to groups, parties, and on slow nights, when small group asks for it, or maybe an employee is getting off of a shift and wants to host for an hour or so. Based upon feedback we have gotten from the market, we are adding a queuing feature that allows the application to be unattended as well as hosted. We will continue to work with the market to create the ultimate jukebox karaoke experience."

and patrons have responded by downloading the app in great numbers."

TouchTunes debuted TouchTunes Mobile 2.0. Cohn said, "This latest iteration of our mobile app allows consumers to engage with our jukeboxes at an even higher level and usage continues to grow. It is a huge hit with consumers, with downloads exceeding 750,000 since it was first launched. Version 2.0 of the mobile app has enhanced social features, new rewards, and is fun to use. Many of our operators are seeing significant mobile use in their locations."

## PHOTO BOOTHS

Photo booth capability was the other big innovation this year. Maas



AMI's  
NGX Grand



NSM's  
IconLite



AMI's Toast or Roast app

TouchTunes Virtuo



PLAY METER

He added, "We're also working with our label partners trying to find new ways of bringing music to the out-of-home marketplace. Some of that is finding its way into bars and restaurants in the form of smart phones and tablets. TouchTunes and AMI's smart-phone apps are a good example of that. We are looking at ways of potentially integrating a personal mobile experience into NSM's jukebox platform to make sure that the jukebox can stay relevant to the customer. That's our biggest challenge."

### TOAST OR ROAST

One of the most unique applications that rolled out this year was the Toast or Roast promotions on AMI jukeboxes. AMI partnered with Anheuser-Busch to offer patrons the opportunity to create their own songs to punk, praise, or celebrate their friends.

Maas said, "The partnership between AMI and Anheuser-Busch has been a positive one. Because they are the largest beer brand in the world, patrons already have a connection and are likely to participate. Anheuser-Busch has provided locations with promotional materials and is currently in the process of setting up a schedule for promotional events."

### NEW FEATURES

Of the features NSM debuted at the Amusement Expo, the biggest feature leaked at the show was the new Touch and Slide User Interface. Cooney said, "We just began shipping the Touch and Slide User Interface in the U.S. in July after extensive testing in the U.K. It features a new swipable touch mechanism that consumers have become accustomed to with smart phones and tablets. It also features a "play next" feature to jump the queue for an extra fee, which is something our customers have been asking for. There are intelligent recommendations

# TouchTunes

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# VIRTUO



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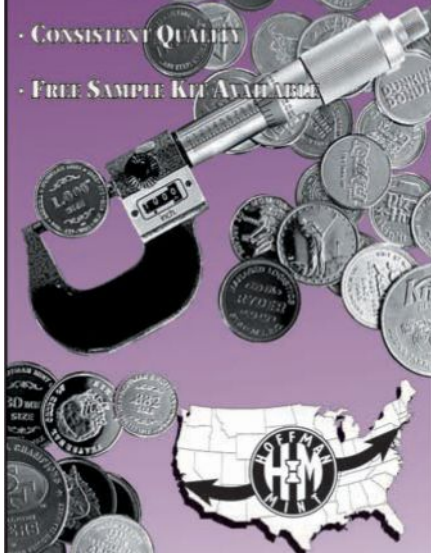


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that suggest other artists while you're browsing."

Also introduced this year from NSM was the IconLite jukebox with a new user interface design. Unfortunately, the unit was broken in shipping so the software couldn't be shown at the Amusement Expo. But the product has been shipping for several months and already accounts for about one third of NSM's shipments. It comes with an all-digital audio amp, which NSM describes as the most reliable amplifier it's ever shipped. The Icon Lite costs about 20 percent less than the Icon 2, but has the same features and functionality, plus the new digital amp and customizable graphics.



Patrons can select tracks from specific artists on the NSM IconLite

TouchTunes released its Virtuo Floor stand with integrated acoustics at the Amusement Expo.

Cohn said, "We knew our floor stand would be in high demand, and that has proven to be the fact since Amusement Expo. The floor stands have been very well received and our customers are extremely pleased with the design, utility, functionality, and superior sound experience delivered in the acoustics package."

### CONVERSIONS

At the Amusement Expo, NSM Music announced a conversion kit for NSM Icon jukeboxes formerly powered by Ecast. Cooney said, "We had many operators take advantage of this kit who successfully converted their units.

This was always just a stopgap measure for our customers that did not want to wait for our software-only conversion. We heard loud and clear from many of our customers that they could not afford to invest thousands of dollars just to keep their locations running when Ecast shut down, so we accelerated the development of a software conversion, which we only recently began shipping."

He added, "This allows operators of NSM Icons, formerly powered by Ecast, to just swap out a hard drive, upgrade their core memory, and be up and running on the NSM Music Network. Early feedback has been extremely positive. There were more



Browsing artists is easy on NSM's new user interface

than 1,000 Icon jukeboxes sold in the U.S. market. By allowing our customers to swap a hard drive vs. converting the core, we could be saving them as much as a million dollars in capital expense."

Mark Fitzke of Wausau Coin Machine in Wausau, Wis., began operating NSM equipment shortly after Ecast went out of business. He said, "I called a guy I know from NSM right away and ordered some of the Fusions and just kept going and changed my route over. NSM has been pretty good to me. They listen to their customers and respond to a lot of the ideas we have; even guys with fewer locations. I like the new user interface that I'm testing. It seems like it will be nice and helpful for patrons that need a little guidance in using the jukebox." ▲

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# On the Spot

**Have the new digital jukebox features and apps helped your bottom line? Which ones are the most popular? Do you see any activities in your locations, such as trivia or theme nights, that could be done via the jukebox?**

**Roger Westmont • Modern Specialty Inc. • Madison, Wis.**

Our digital jukeboxes continue to be very strong earners.

There seems to be nothing that can stop their popularity. We are pushing customers more than ever to make use of

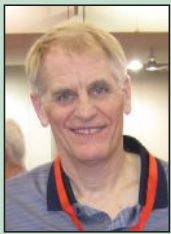
all the features. We keep telling them if they want late night business then they need to offer choices to the 20-somethings that they want.

We had great success with the Ecast EQ jukebox. It was a sad day when they closed the doors but AMI is doing a good job of supporting the product, so ours are doing just fine. It set the bar with its photo-feed idea. The bar patrons loved this beyond anything we could have guessed. AMI and TouchTunes are both

doing a great job of “presenting” music to the customers.

The mobile app is going very strong. Many of our customers laugh about the lazy bar patron who simply doesn’t want to get off his or her duff to play the juke, but who cares? The customer is right; give them what appeals to them. And, if it means they will stay around and shoot pool or play darts, then we win!

We just got started on AMI’s “Toast or Roast” feature so it’s too early to know if it’s going to be really good, but by early comments we are hopeful. I don’t know of any other ideas to push the jukebox but we are always interested in new things.



know how they can access the new jukebox features.

One of our technicians goes to the locations to show them how customers can upload their photos and how they can promote upcoming events on the jukebox. We take advantage of the advertising feature to promote our dart and pool leagues for the fall and winter.

So many activities take people out of the bars in the summer. We’ll get a true picture of the impact of new jukebox features in the months ahead. Theme nights could present possibilities for jukebox involvement.

**Ron Kinney • Kinney Amusement & Vending Co. • Springfield, Mo.**

We have just put out our first TouchTunes Virtuo Karaoke. It has increased the use and the revenue of the jukebox at this particular location. It also saves the bar owner from paying for a karaoke DJ, so he is happy. This location hounded us for a year about the new jukebox feature, once we told them it was coming.



I think the karaoke feature is going to be a big deal. It’s a good selling point for locations.

We’ve enhanced the karaoke experience by hooking up two monitors to the Virtuo: one on the wall so people watching can see the words, and one that faces the stage, on a special table we built, so the person singing can see the words.

A lot of locations are struggling to keep their doors open and don’t want to pay a DJ or pay for background music. We’ve been able to offer karaoke with the jukebox and also background music for certain time intervals. It comes down to: You have to do what you have to do.

Other jukebox features like “play me now” have been great. Someone can select a special song and hear it next, or they can hear their song if they are waiting for someone or getting ready to leave.

Patrons are using the mobile app more than they will walk up to the jukebox to use their credit card. At one time I wanted credit card acceptors on jukeboxes, but patrons are using the mobile app more than they use credit cards. TouchTunes has been fantastic about providing us with packets that include table tents and all the information we need to put in the locations to educate patrons on how to use the new features.

Here in Springfield we have a smoking ban in the city limits that has really hurt. Our amusement route is down 20 to 30 percent. The new jukebox features help keep patrons in the locations. Once they go outside to smoke and have a beer, they’re not playing the jukebox or any of your other equipment. We have to do everything we can to keep them in the location with promotions, pool tournaments, food, Beer Ball events, jukeboxes, videos, and more. Every time they walk out the door you might lose them. ▲

**Rocco DiNapoli • Superior Amusement • Milford, Conn.**

The new mobile apps on TouchTunes jukeboxes have increased sales; the credit cards don’t hurt either. We are still waiting for the Karaoke. We saw TouchTunes promise the product over a year ago, then again in March, and we still don’t have it. By the time they come out with theme night or trivia night, that trend would be obsolete.



**Larry Von Reuden • Jukebox Larry’s Vending Co. • Hartland, Wis.**

We are transitioning from Rock-Ola and NSM jukeboxes to the AMI Network, due to the exit of Ecast. When a company says it is going out of business, and the equipment is one of the most important components of your route, it’s a shock.

We totally appreciate that AMI took the initiative to help operators. We have not had any glitches with our transition; it’s been a smooth process thus far.

We’ve come a long way in the capabilities of jukeboxes. You can sit at the bar and use your smart phone to play your music selections. We’re putting out table tents in locations to let patrons



## SAY WHAT?



# 10

second  
*interview*  
with...

While **Phil Cohn** is relatively new to the coin-op industry (he looks forward to celebrating his first anniversary with TouchTunes this month), he has always had a strong connection to technology and entertainment through his 20+ years in the consumer electronics industry. Working for an industry leader like TouchTunes enables him to put his passion for music and innovation to work for its customers. When he is not traveling the country, he tries to spend quality time with his wife of 18 years and his two kids.

My first job was:

being a lifeguard at our town pool.

My favorite type of music is:

anything from the 1970s...it drives my kids nuts.

I wish I had the nerve to:

bungee jump.

One thing I can't live without is:

my smart phone.

The last book I read was:

"The Yankee Years" by Joe Torre.

One word that describes my personality is:

outgoing.

The best advice I ever got was:

always tell the truth, it's the easiest thing to remember.

My favorite TV show is:

Classic: M\*A\*S\*H\*; Current: Curb Your Enthusiasm.

If I could have dinner with a famous person that person would be:

Ronald Reagan.

My most cherished inanimate possession is:

a 1913 seat from the original Yankee Stadium.

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# Eight years is not enough

*Golden Tee stands the test of time.*

**T**he year 2005 may seem like only yesterday to some, but a lot sure has changed in those eight short years. This is especially true in the world of technology and entertainment: cameras used film, cell phones were mainly used for phone calls, and televisions had curved screens.

In fact, nearly every technology device or appliance purchased in 2005 has been improved with new technology, making the original items obsolete.

Fortunately one versatile product has managed to keep up with today's fast-paced, ever-changing landscape: Incredible Technologies (IT)'s longstanding golf video game, Golden Tee LIVE.

In today's world of short attention spans, continuous technological advancements, and incredible graphics enhancements, this durable industry franchise continues to engage and maintain its core audience, appeal to new players, and most importantly remain profitable for amusement operators.

Much of the success of Golden Tee LIVE is its captivating, engaging, almost magical game play experience. It is the very definition of the adage "easy to play, difficult to master," where the players feel that they can improve with every shot they take. That innate human desire to challenge, progress, and compete is what keeps players coming back week after week.

These days a compelling game experience is not enough on its own. If it were, classic games like Capcom Bowling would still be at the top of the charts.

## UNIQUE CHALLENGES

Today's technically-savvy players demand a state-of-the-art experience, including crisp hi-resolution graphics, engaging audio, and ergonomic controls. In addition, critical hardware components can often quickly become obsolete, making both manufacturing and field support difficult.

This ever-changing, ever-increasing demand to keep pace with technology creates unique challenges for the amusement game industry, whose fundamental business model is to operate games that maintain player interest well beyond the initial investment.







Launching a new hardware platform for a current game can be a risky endeavor, as it asks operators to reinvest significant income in a product that is already on location and making money. The new model has to be a vast improvement over the original before operators are convinced that a switch is not only necessary, but a good investment as well.

### CONTINUAL UPGRADES

Golden Tee has upgraded to all-new hardware platforms four times over its 25 year history. The initial version released in 1989 was a JAMMA-compatible single board that relied on a custom ASIC processor and housed its memory on EPROM chips. This hardware was fairly versatile for its time, and was adapted and reconfigured for a variety of games produced by IT in the early '90s.

In 1995, a more powerful three-board, EPROM-based hardware set was introduced with Golden Tee 3D Golf. This platform pushed the envelope for available memory storage, and introduced communication ports to accommodate the ground-breaking ITS tournament system.

During its five-year lifespan, the hardware set was reconfigured to a single board as a rolling change to accommodate larger memory and easier servicing.

In 2000, Golden Tee Fore! was released on the Eagle platform, an all-new single-board system that still relied on a custom processor but replaced the need for EPROMs with a read/write

hard drive and added a video card to allow stunning 3D graphics.

The Eagle system remained in use for five years as well, with a variety of small hardware upgrades and minor changes to accommodate new technology and obsolete components.

### NIGHTHAWK SYSTEM

In 2005, the Golden Tee LIVE platform made its debut, and the technological advancements were plentiful. The powerful Nighthawk system contained components that were more technologically advanced than any home console, with an onboard cellular data modem, Ethernet and USB ports, a 64-bit video card, and massive central processor. The graphics capabilities of the Nighthawk outstripped the 4x3 tube CRT monitors that were still commonplace at the time.

Learning from these past years of experience, IT's hardware engineers took a modular approach to the Nighthawk. By creating a rack-based system, the Nighthawk was capable of integrating new or updated components as time progressed. This versatility has allowed the Nighthawk to extend well beyond the five-year norm for a hardware platform.

In the eight years it has been in service, the Nighthawk has been through six motherboard upgrades, five different processors, and four different video cards. Memory upgrades have been employed three times to keep pace with performance requirements.

It even survived a complete revision

of the low-level Linux operating system, which will be introduced with Golden Tee 2013. Through resourceful forethought and diligent continuous development, today's Nighthawk is still more powerful than most current home consoles and best of all, with no additional cost to the operator's bottom line.

### FIELD SUPPORT

From a software standpoint, IT spends a great deal of time, money, and effort to make sure that every variation of the Nighthawk hardware is supported in the field. Every new course update requires multiple sets of art to accommodate monitors with distinctly different aspect ratios and resolutions.

Special effects like shadows and rippling water are optimized to look their best on older video cards, even when the effects aren't fully supported. And as the years roll on and hardware gets older and more obsolete, the challenge to continue support becomes more and more difficult.

The most challenging example has been to integrate a new and improved Linux operating system that will be installed and updated during the Golden Tee 2013 software installation process.

In the past, this substantial and unavoidable upgrade to the game's underlying operating system would signal a need for an all-new hardware platform. But IT's development team expended considerable effort to port the entire game structure to the new kernel with minimal inconvenience and no additional cost to the operator.

## UPDATE BONUS

In addition, this year IT will include an extra 1 GIG of RAM with every update, to help maintain game performance and player expectations.

This supplemental memory requires installation, but comes at no additional charge to operators. Pricing and quantity discounts for the course update will remain the same as last year, keeping Golden Tee LIVE as one of the most profitable investments in the industry.

These significant hardware shifts have not held back IT's talented game design teams, who continually strive to stay on the leading edge of technology and get the most out of the latest hardware configuration.

One of the secrets to Golden Tee's long success is its ability to reinvent itself, and stay relevant with players and up to date with current trends. In many ways, Golden Tee LIVE can be considered a completely brand new game every single year, but at the cost of a software update.

## 2013 ENHANCEMENTS

Golden Tee LIVE 2013 is no exception to this development and improvement strategy, and it may have the most significant and noticeable enhancements to date. The Golden Tee development team has employed sophisticated new anti-aliasing and shading algorithms that smooth out the image and add incredible realism and depth.

New grass textures detail individual blades of grass. Sand traps depict natural patterns caused by wind and wear. Water effects have been improved to not only show the sun glinting off the rippling surface, but exotic creatures swimming below. Individual leaves from highly detailed trees sway in the breeze as their shadows follow the sun along the fairway.

Every aspect of the game has been optimized for HDTV resolution, a standard that today's players and locations have come to expect.

A key element to success in the coin-op industry is to provide a quality enter-



***"In many ways, Golden Tee LIVE can be considered a brand new game every year, but at the cost of a software update."***

tainment experience that is as good as or better than what can be found at home. Older game cabinets and CRT monitors are still supported, but like Golden Tee, operators are encouraged to reinvent and reinvigorate their equipment with a Showpiece or Showpiece Transfer Cabinet, to stay meaningful and relevant to their customers.

## GOLDEN TEE LIVE 2013

The five new courses for 2013 bring the total course count to 40, which are all available to play at any

time on Golden Tee LIVE 2013.

The new courses not only take full advantage of the latest hardware improvements, but they are perhaps the most inviting and approachable courses in years. Wide, sprawling fairways, large greens, and multiple tee placements highlight courses derived from extensive player research.

Here's a closer look:

## BEAR LODGE

Nestled between some of Alaska's tallest mountains, Hatcher Pass is the



sand dunes on the East Coast and one of the most unique golfing experiences in the entire country. While the plentiful dunes can impact your round if you happen to miss the fairway, the choppy Atlantic seas can also come into play on errant drives and approaches. Bring your sandals and your sand wedge; you're going to need them.

### COCONUT BEACH

Don't let the majestic blue water confuse you. This isn't your average tropical getaway. Despite the beauty of Coconut Beach, this Punta Gorda, Belize, course has more bite than bark. Constructed throughout a rugged Caribbean jungle, nature will likely force you to use every club in your bag. And when the dense trees aren't standing between you and the flag, the ancient ruins will serve as a formidable, antique foe.

### JACK RABBIT JUNCTION

Situated directly under the sweltering sun, Jackrabbit Junction is an 18-hole trek well off the beaten path. Unlike most desert courses, this Gila Bend, Ariz., creation is not jam-packed with sand, but instead spreads across the dry, sun-drenched earth that stopped growing grass long ago. Miss the green or stray from the fairway and you'll likely have to deal with the many cacti situated throughout. Be careful on that follow-through!

### SEQUOIA GROVE

A truly one-of-a-kind setting, Calaveras, Calif., houses the largest trees on the planet in one compact area. These Sequoias, which can get upwards of 20 feet in diameter at their base, seemingly blend in with the clouds. These gigantic obstacles are scattered throughout Sequoia Grove, and will push your virtual golfing creativity to its max. Be prepared to go under, around, and even through them if you want to score low! ▲

location of Bear Lodge, and one of the most breathtaking 18-hole adventures that nature has to offer. With the snow-covered mountain tops serving as a backdrop, a variety of traditional golf elements will greet you throughout your round. Strategically placed rivers

and lakes will force you to take chances on drivable par-4s and par-5s. Do you play it safe or go for the gusto?

### CAPE HAVEN

Tucked away in Nag's Head, N.C., Cape Haven is home to the largest



Inside view of the laser tag arena.

# Laser tag in Louisiana



After the renovation of Laser Tag of Baton Rouge.

**D**avor and Patricia Franicevich, Owners of Laser Tag of Baton Rouge and Laser Tag & Games in Metairie, La., understand the need to reinvest in their businesses. In February 2011, five years after Hurricane Katrina destroyed Laser Tag & Games of Metairie, the 26,000-square-foot center reopened its doors (across the street from its original location).

In addition to a multi-level, 7,500-square-foot laser tag arena, the center now includes a 3,000-square-foot game zone, Roller Ball Mini-Bowling, Spin Zone Bumper Cars, and a Lazer Frenzy Laser Maze.

A major upgrade to the Metairie location was the redesigned arcade. The owners also took the opportunity to move from a revenue share system for the games to purchasing and owning them. The business saw an immediate and dramatic increase in game rev-

enue. With the success in Metairie, Davor immediately began the process of renovating Laser Tag of Baton Rouge, realizing that it was time to take this center to the next level.

Laser Tag of Baton Rouge opened in May 2005, just a few months before Hurricane Katrina. It is a 21,000-square-foot center with a 7,000-square-foot, multi-level laser tag arena. Like the Metairie center, the arena was designed and constructed like the original Alpha Photon arenas. There are currently 24 crewmembers and five managers who operate the center.

During Katrina, the Baton Rouge center became a temporary home and safe haven for friends and family from Metairie and surrounding areas as they

By Tracy Sarris and Frank Seninsky



New redemption counter at Laser Tag of Baton Rouge.

ing for a new swipe card system, new lighting, adding new Laserforce P.O.D.S. (Phaser Observation Deck Stations) to the arena, a complete interior and exterior refurbishing, and a new game zone.

Davor worked with Amusement Entertainment Management (AEM) and Alpha-Omega Sales to design the new area, add a new redemption prize center, and pick the right mix of 32 video and redemption games.

Davor believes that you need to push your laser tag center to the highest degree possible for the best entertainment value. He feels they have achieved this through using the best laser tag equipment; adding services like birthday parties, group events, and team building; keeping the center clean; and investing in paint and upgrades as often as needed. "We have an image of sophistication that is hard to beat anywhere in the area," exclaimed Davor.

According to Saunders, they are already discussing future changes to Laser Tag of Baton Rouge that would utilize currently wasted space and allow for an expansion to the game zone. "Our customers appreciate the effort we put into making our centers the best that they can be."

For more information on Laser Tag and Games of Metairie, visit ([www.ltag.com](http://www.ltag.com)); for Laser Tag of Baton Rouge, visit ([www.ltofbr.com](http://www.ltofbr.com)). ▲

waited out the storm and temporary evacuation from their homes.

Twenty-eight individuals called Laser Tag of Baton Rouge home at various times during a two-week period. They all found a place to sleep and a meal waiting when needed. The center also became a location for misplaced friends and families to receive mail and other items.

Jonathan Saunders, General Manager of Laser Tag of Baton Rouge and one of the original crewmembers who came to Baton Rouge from the Metairie location, spoke very highly of Davor and Patricia.

"We (the crew) are all family," Saunders said. "I can't imagine better people to work for. Davor and Patricia open their home, arms, and family to everyone. They also show an amazing amount of support and respect for their employees and are willing to invest in

the business to keep it growing and make it a better place for the staff and the customers."

Laser Tag of Baton Rouge went through a half million dollar renovation starting in 2011 that included network-



Frank Seninsky is the President of the Alpha-Omega Group of companies, which includes Amusement Entertainment Management (AEM), Alpha-Omega Amusements & Sales, and Alpha-BET Entertainment. He is Co-regent for Foundations Entertainment University and a Past President of both the Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA) and the International Association for the Leisure Entertainment Industry (IALEI). Seninsky can be reached via e-mail ([fseninsky@aol.com](mailto:fseninsky@aol.com)).

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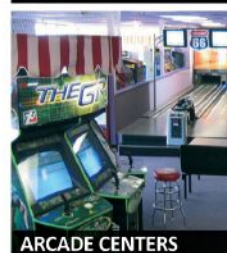
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# Playtime in Little Rock

**P**izza is the quintessential amusement food. And what better combination exists than entertainment and pizza?

Co-Owners David and Heather Boothe had a vision of a family entertainment center (FEC) with indoor and outdoor attractions that centered around a pizza buffet. After setting up a business model in Branson, Ark., the Boothers relocated the business to Little Rock, Ark., and Playtime Pizza has since thrived.

The location, once frequented by tourists in Branson, enjoys a steady clientele of locals and those living up to two hours away. Church groups, birthday parties, sports teams, and corporate meetings flock to Playtime Pizza to enjoy the hand-made pizzas and take advantage of one of the eight party rooms and corporate center, which seats up to 65 people.

The corporate center has full AV capabilities. Typically when a business comes in, Playtime Pizza provides donuts and coffee in the morning, the meeting is conducted, and the attendees spend the afternoon having lunch and playing the different attractions. Party packages include unlimited buffet, game cards, attraction play, bonus tickets, all party supplies, and setup and cleanup.

The facility's focal point is the all-you-can-eat buffet that includes delicious pizzas, a full salad bar, Pepsi products, and a dessert bar. Other main attractions include the indoor go-kart track and the laser tag facility.

The circular go-kart track features Formula K karts and takes up one



#### **Facility:**

Playtime Pizza

#### **Location:**

Little Rock, Ark.

#### **Attractions:**

Go-karts, laser tag, bumper cars, blacklight mini-golf, Highway 66 bowling, arcade

#### **Contact:**

(501)227-7529; [www.playtimepizza.com](http://www.playtimepizza.com)

***Playtime Pizza advertises that there is something for everyone, from toddlers to grandparents.***

side of the building. The facility's two-story arcade has around 135 games, with the top performer being Big Bass Wheel from Bay Tek Games.

Playtime Pizza advertises that there is something for everyone, from toddlers to grandparents. Games include: toddler rides, ticket games, merchandisers, motion theater, dance games, and more. Visi-

tors enjoy playing for popular items like character hats and inflatable balls. Rhode Island Novelty supplies a majority of the facility's merchandise. All of the FEC's attractions are run on Embeds card system.

The FEC's mini golf course, Pirate's Treasure, is blacklight-lit. Players go on an adventure with pirates and undersea creatures. Stunning computer generated images make it a must-see for the entire family.

Playtime Pizza's Darklight Laser Tag allows players to play in teams or individually. The latest high tech equipment provides maximum laser tag excitement. Highway 66 from QubicaAMF provides mini-bowling fun, no bowling shoes required!

Playtime Pizza believes in utilizing social media for its marketing needs.

Bill Stuart, Sales and Marketing Manager, said "We use both Facebook and Twitter. We do quite a few Facebook promotional posts. The day that promoted posts became available on Facebook we started doing them. We've got about 12,000 Facebook fans all together. I think Facebook advertising is the most effective thing we can do. When you do radio, you have no idea who's listening. It might be eight percent of our clients that listen to that station."

He added, "On Facebook, you only pay IF they see it. As soon as Facebook realizes this is working so well, I'm sure the price will skyrocket. We centralize what's going on on our Facebook page and also on Foursquare. It's a lot more effective than traditional media." ▲







# COINMAN

## Dawn and Mike Brower



Merlin Amusements  
Lakeland, Fla.

Florida has been one of the hardest hit states during the recession, yet this family business has kept pace, made adjustments as needed, and continues to serve its market well.

Merlin Amusements recently celebrated its 15th anniversary. *Play Meter* checked in with Owners Dawn and Mike Brower to find out how the couple built the company together and how they maintain it considering the significant changes that have taken place at the player level and the location level.

It's been a long road traveled, from the early days using borrowed vehicles to serving about 30 locations in the greater Lakeland, Fla., area today.

**What led you to enter the amusement industry?**

Mike worked for Murrell Amusement Co. in Lakeland for about 10 years, mentoring under a great man named Cliff Cheatwood. Cliff was in semi-retirement for the last few years, and Mike had been nursing the aging route along with little or no investment in new equipment by the owners.

When the building housing the business was sold to accommodate the city widening the road, the partners decided to close and sold the route to a competitor. Mike went to work for the new owner.

Unfortunately, the work ethic of his new coworkers disappointed him and the customers he'd served for so long. He'd promised his mentor he'd stay for a year during the transition, and he did, but he was miserable. After coming to an impasse with the owner about staying on and making things better, he resigned. The first two Merlin Amusements locations were set the following week.

**Is there any special significance in the name Merlin?**

The name Merlin was chosen as a sort of tribute to the Murrell route. Murrell was the primary coin-op company in Lakeland for over 50 years. It was clear that anyone looking for Murrell would find Merlin.

It was also a tip of the hat to Mike's teen years, as he was an avid *Dungeon and Dragons* player as a kid. Once the name Merlin was an option, there were simply no other choices. It was clever and would be a reasonably easy name to market.

**What games did you start with, and how many employees? Compared to today, how much have you grown and how many employees at the present time?**

The first two locations were set with CD jukeboxes and pool tables, then a few "B" stops with 45 rpm jukeboxes. It was Mike on his own at first, with a little help from friends and family and Dawn doing administrative work after her regular work hours.

Mike didn't own a truck, so he borrowed vehicles from family and often pulled a trailer with Dawn's car before he could afford to purchase an old orange county work truck at auction.

Now there are two trucks, Dawn works from home, and Mike has part-time help with the heavy lifting. The route has expanded and constricted with the economy. The company currently serves about 30 locations in the greater Lakeland area.

**Much has changed since Merlin Amusements opened in 1997. What are the major changes you've seen at the player level and the location level? What is your equipment mix**



### today and how has that mix changed over the years?

The biggest changes at the player level involve the importance of the Internet and social media combined with the proliferation of hand-held devices and their impact on what the patron wants to do while they're spending time in the location.

When Merlin Amusements began, touch screen bar-top games were the new big thing. Now, many of the best touch screen games are available on patrons' phones. That's certainly impacted earnings. The best locations for that type of equipment now are where players are consistently involved in competing for prizes.

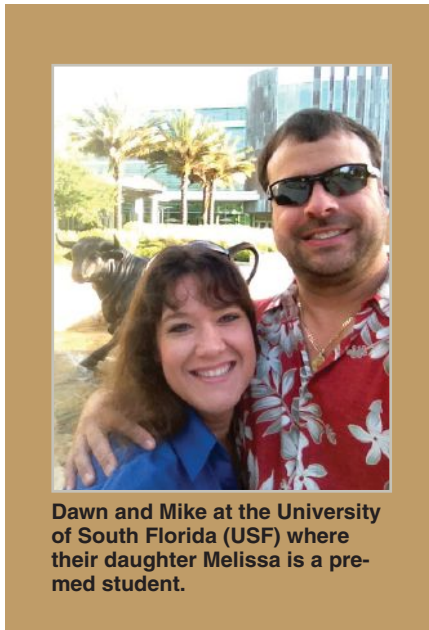
Social interaction, prize competition, and the related bragging rights provide incentive for them to pull money out of their pockets to play games they'd otherwise not be terribly interested in.

Patrons also expect their experience to be interactive and convenient for them. They really enjoy being able to do things like play the jukebox without leaving their seat, post Golden Tee "great shots" on YouTube, and check in at locations via various apps.

For their part, location owners have much higher expectations for the services provided by amusement operators. But when they get what they perceive as "free" Internet service, can offer a wi-fi zone for customers, and the equipment helps ensure that the name of their location will pop up on their patrons' Facebook and Twitter feeds on a regular

basis, how much they receive on collection day is of lesser concern to them.

These changes are evident in today's equipment mix as well. When Merlin Amusements was founded, it was an amusements-only route—no prize games. But as time went by, the demand for quality operators of those games increased and fewer amusement games became available from manufacturers.



**Dawn and Mike at the University of South Florida (USF) where their daughter Melissa is a pre-med student.**

Merlin has kept pace. Cranes, bulk racks, and self-contained redemption pieces are now route staples. They key to operating successfully in this market is to provide something the patron in the location simply cannot get at home, and prize games are a big part of that.

The most notable change in the industry since the company founding is having another

hand in the cash box. While gross revenues have certainly increased over time with added-value features, manufacturer fees are an enormous expense that have shifted the expectations of both locations and operators in terms of what they can expect to take home.

### What equipment is the most stable at the present time and why?

Jukeboxes and pool tables have been the most consistent, long-term earners for amusement route operators for a long time. For most bar locations they are the primary sources of entertainment, and there's no sign that's going to change anytime soon.

For family sports bar locations or other places on the route where there isn't a jukebox or pool table, prize games are consistently the best earners.

Patrons want immediate gratification, something more than the experience of just playing a video game. They want something they can walk away with.

### Do you have any redemption equipment?

We do not currently operate in any redemption-only locations, but we have had great success with "self-contained redemption" equipment in bar and restaurant locations.

### Are you running leagues and tournaments of any kind; any special promotions? How successful have they been?

Prize promotions have been critical for maintaining local player interest in bar-tops, Golden Tee, and Silver Strike. Merlin Amusements has a small but loyal player base that actively participates in monthly contests. They like that they're competing locally, usually against people they know in nearby bars.

Although the prizes are small, ranging from \$125 gift cards to \$5 free play cards, they know they have a good chance at actually WINNING because they aren't competing against thousands of players of varying skill levels across multiple states.

Without those promotions, earnings would be stagnant. In this small local market, the trick is to keep the contests new and fresh by changing the criteria so the same players don't win every month.

### How has the economy in Florida affected your business in the last few years?

In a word, the economy here in Central Florida has been brutal. Reports say the foreclosure and unemployment rates are some of the highest in the country, and it shows on collection day.

Many businesses that thrived for decades have closed their doors. Sometimes these are existing locations. Others are major employers that affect the player base.



Lakeland is a bedroom community. It doesn't rely on the tourist market. That's both a good and a bad thing. There's not the free flow of cash from people on vacation, and when a major employer has a layoff the route reflects it.

On the other hand, it's pretty much the same people in and out of the same locations all the time. We know our patrons and they know us. People do their best to continue their routines, to show up to the bar, but they decidedly put fewer dollars in the jukebox, play

explore more this year.

**You are regular attendees at trade shows. What do you feel are the biggest benefits of attending these events?**

The biggest benefit of attending shows and other events is the networking, by far. Getting hands-on experience with newly released equipment and putting names with faces of distributors and suppliers is fun, but having frank and open conversations with operators of all sizes and types who are

important over time. Law classes helped with drafting contracts and negotiating disputes. Insurance classes helped with understanding liability and coverage needs. Communication classes help on a daily basis in dealing with clients, patrons, and even with each other!

The Notre Dame Management Program is really the only continuing education for the industry. It's proven to be simply invaluable, one of the best investments an operator can make.

**Is it helpful to be a husband and wife team, to understand the demands of the coin machine industry and consult with each other?**

Being a husband and wife team has proven to be both a blessing and a curse. It takes a lot of patience. You have to really like the person you're married to in order to work together full time. There really is no line between when it's work time and when it isn't.

It definitely helps with understanding when it's date night and an important call comes in, or when route schedules have to be carefully arranged to accommodate a few days off.

Life is lived differently when you're a small business and customer needs come first, up to and including a service call that comes in when the couple is on the way home from the hospital with their newborn (true story!).

Like any other couple, you can't always agree on everything, and each partner brings a different perspective to the table.

It's tough when those big disagreements you have with your business partner about what location to set (or not) and what equipment to buy (or pass on) bleed over into the relationship, but it's doubly rewarding when the conflict has passed and the final decision proves to be a good one.

**This industry is well known for multiple generations working together. Are any other family members working at the company?**

***“The biggest changes at the player level involve the Internet and social media combined with the proliferation of hand-held devices.”***

less pool, and give their kids less money for the game room.

As the overall economy has declined, the emphasis has been on continuing to provide the best possible service while keeping expenses down as much as possible. That translates to things like streamlining collection cycles and handling any outstanding issues at nearby stops when called out in that direction by another location. These are simple changes that help reduce wasting time and money.

**Are you doing anything differently in 2012 than you did in 2011?**

The biggest difference between 2012 and 2011 so far has been investing in some new and different types of equipment and having the ability to do so. This year's busy season couldn't compare to six to 10 years ago, but it was decidedly brighter than expected.

The market for money seems to have loosened just slightly, so financing has been more readily available. Equipment lease programs have been more readily available from distribution as well, and that's a new option to

not competitors has proven invaluable over the years.

Having the ability to glean information from people whose success you respect and admire is priceless. A local competitor is highly unlikely to help with a problem, and more likely to use whatever information you reveal to their own benefit.

At a trade show, you can exchange ideas and ask for help from people who do what you do in an environment where sharing your struggles and successes is less likely to bite you when you get home.

**You are members of AMOA. Have you attended the AMOA Notre Dame Management Program? How has that helped your business?**

Enough great things cannot possibly be said about the benefits of the AMOA Notre Dame Management Program. (Dawn attended Class XII plus one session of the Masters Class; Mike completed Class XIII.)

This is another place where networking is half the benefit, but the classes themselves have proven to be very



One of the biggest changes in the business during the last few years has been the involvement of our two sons: Anthony, age 21, and Andrew, age 15. Andrew is home-schooled and has been helping to run the route (with Dawn) for about three years.

He helps with collections, loads machines with plush and other toys, performs basic trouble-shooting and repairs, and has become Mike's eyes and ears for technical issues on his Mom's side of the route.

Anthony returned home to Florida last fall after attending the Job Corps in Indiana. At 6'5" and 290 pounds, he's proven exceptionally helpful with equipment moves and sometimes lends a hand with service calls.

As a small operator, it mostly boils

down to having a small budget. Some jobs require extra hands above the regular part-time help, and it's much more convenient to throw a few bucks at the kids than to hire someone you don't know and hand them keys to your livelihood.

As an added bonus, they're learning about the business, learning to shake hands and be personable to customers, and experiencing a little of the good and bad sides of self-employment.

The hope is that it will help them figure out what they do and don't like so they make good decisions about their own working futures. (Daughter Melissa is a pre-med student at the University of South Florida.)

**Based on your experiences, do you have any advice for newcomers**

**to the industry?**

The best advice to newcomers would be to ask questions, talk to other operators, attend trade shows, and get a coin-op education. Learn about what works and what doesn't and then get to know your market and respect your local competitors.

Competition is great when it keeps you on your toes and helps ensure that everyone maintains high service standards (or else), but it doesn't do local guys any good to beat each other up and incur the expense of moving equipment in and out of locations when the other guy is already providing quality service.

For more information on Merlin Amusements, call (863)607-6305; fax (863)607-4090. ▲

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**Stern Pinball wows kids:** Stern Pinball attended the San Diego Comic-Con International held July 12-15 at the San Diego Convention Center. The newest game from Stern, X-Men pinball, was on display and on free play for the entire convention. The booth had a line of enthusiasts, X-Men fans, and hundreds of kids wanting to play. CEO Gary Stern said, "It's always a pleasure to see the youth interested in our new games. They are our future customers!" Stern Pinball also hosted a tournament at the event.

**National meeting:** Lynn Lazar, wife of Dale Lazar of H. Lazar & Son Inc. in Pittsburgh, Pa., and President of the Women of Reform Judaism, was one of 17 leaders invited to meet recently with Jack Lew, Chief of Staff for President Obama. Lew met with leaders of reform and reconstructionist movements to discuss international and domestic issues.



**Baby girl:** Brandon Hedley of Rich & Junnie's Coin Inc. in Dubuque, Iowa, and his wife Natalie welcomed their first child into the world on July 23. Little Evelyn Mary weighed 7 lbs. "We have been blessed with a precious little girl and are cherishing every possible moment," said the proud parents.



Brandon is on the Board of Directors (Class of 2014) of the Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA).

**Baby boy:** Chris Brady, Vice President of Brady Distributing Co. in Charlotte, N.C., and his wife Erin welcomed a new family member on June 4 when little Stratton Charles was born. Stratton weighed 6 lbs. 7 oz. "He is our first child and the grandparents are very excited," said Chris and Erin. ▲



# Tokens galore



Sheila Dellacona, Outside Sales Representative.



Hoffman Mint Sales Department, (l-r): Nika Singh-Sookoo, Samantha English, Helen Cianciaruso, and Barbara Shefter.

Almost every family entertainment center (FEC) operator across the country has the same answer when asked about their most popular indoor attraction: the arcade. The hub for video, redemption, and coin-pushing games attracts kids of all ages.

Children delight in a pocketful of tokens that make these entertaining games come alive. FEC owners love tokens too because they're relatively inexpensive to install and they generate revenue from walk-aways. The play-money system on which the business of fun operates has been around since the heyday of the amusement industry and Hoffman Mint has been along for the entire ride.



*Hoffman Mint continues to provide customers with generic and custom tokens to meet their every need.*

## HISTORY

Hoffman Mint opened its doors in 1980 as Hoffman and Hoffman. Brothers Michael and Charles Hoffman opened the business in Monterey, Calif., primarily to serve the amusement industry. They started with just tokens for the amusement industry and then added to their capabilities with coins, medallions, and key tags.

The brothers soon increased the depth of their product offerings and started to serve other industries like transit, car wash, and laundry. In addition to functional tokens, the company

produces commemorative coins.

In 2006, American Changer, a bill changer manufacturer, purchased the company. American Changer continued to operate the facility in California for a year before moving the entire facility to its headquarters in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Today the company has around 50 employees in sales, art, manufacturing, and die-making departments. All art and die-making is done in-house and all of the manufacturing is done under one roof. The facility itself is around 43,000 square feet.

Hoffman Mint has one outside sales office in Rhode Island, where Sheila Dellacona, Outside Sales Representative, is located. She has been in the amusement token industry for 32 years. For 20 years she was with Roger Williams Mint, which closed its doors in 2006.

Hoffman Mint manufactures both generic and customized tokens, where customers can have their logo or image placed on their tokens. The company's focus is on high coining and it uses base metals such as various copper alloys, nickel based alloys, and zinc.

There are a few different ways to make dies (little metal blocks that contain the logo or design to be pressed

into the token). Some are computer generated, some are sculpted in clay, and some are hand cut. Hoffman Mint has the capability to do all three depending on customers' needs.

## TOKENS ENDURE

Tokens haven't changed too much throughout the years. Combining the two companies has been beneficial for Hoffman Mint. Dellacona said, "The combination has been good for us. We're serving the same customers with two types of products, the bill changers as well as tokens."

With many larger new facilities switching to a swipe-card system, the token industry has felt a bit of an effect. Dellacona said, "We find that brand new, very large facilities in general favor the card systems so the growth isn't as great as it could have been. But those same facilities still use tokens on a smaller scale for coin action games. They're just not using as many in a new facility."

In the industry's hey day there were five amusement token companies and now there are only two. Because of this duopoly, Hoffman Mint's business continues to grow every year despite economic concerns.

Dellacona said, "There is always going to be a place for tokens and we have customers that move to a card system and abandon it and come back to tokens. It may not be for everyone, but regardless, the token business continues to grow every year."

For more information, call (800) 227-5813; Web ([www.hoffmanmint.com](http://www.hoffmanmint.com)). ▲



# On the hunt for fun



Josh and Zach Sharpe

*A new redemption game waiting in the wings, while a classic video game receives a face-lift.*

**O**n the pinball front, Stern Pinball Inc. was at the most recent San Diego Comic-Con Convention to hold its second annual International Comic-Con Pinball Tournament.

Players and fans alike had the opportunity to play Stern's latest game which was "X-tremely" appropriate for the crowd/location. The X-Men pinball game was inspired by one of the most popular comic book series of all time. Hundreds of thousands of San Diego Comic-Con attendees were able to compete on X-Men for the chance to win cash prizes and other Stern goodies. The show and tournament were successful. Soon we'll be able to cover this game in more depth.

For this month's column we will take a look Namco's latest redemption game, Cascading Balls. We'll also look at a game that has stood the test of time and recently received a bit of a face-lift, Raw Thrills/Play Mechanix's Big Buck Hunter HD.

## CASCADING BALLS/NAMCO

Namco is typically known for its arcade games, but in the rare cases the company has created redemption games, they've been quite successful. Some of our favorites are Flaming Finger and Jumpin' Jackpot. Namco still has its redemption game magic with its latest in-development game, Cascading Balls.

**Analysis:** In the same vein as your typical plinko-style set-up, Cascading Balls gives players the skillful challenge of timing the release of the ball on top in the hopes of interacting with an oscillating bucket as well as other scoring holes as it descends to the bottom.

If a player successfully drops the ball through this bucket, they get the tickets they would have won on that ball's travel down to the bottom and the subsequent five balls that are released. All scoring holes these additional bonus balls fall through also award players tickets.

**Pros:** Our favorite aspect of Cascading Balls is definitely the oscillating target up top. It adds a nice variation to the standard ball drop game and the payoff is well worth it. While this was an early version, we were very impressed with the cabinet design. Namco usually does a great job housing their games/equipment and this remains true with Cascading Balls.

**Cons:** While it might not be fair since it was an early design, we would love to see/hear more out of the sound package than what is currently in the game. This especially rings true for "drop the ball" games since the action







is over fairly quickly. If a player doesn't succeed in releasing the staged balls (Pro: nice sound effect there), the entertainment value should still be present with flashing lights, speech if necessary, music, the whole works.

**Overall:** We really enjoyed Namco's effort on the redemption front with Cascading Balls. We're used to the company's consistent output of quality video and arcade games (look no further than Pac-Man), but it's always fun to see a company stretch its creative muscle and Namco did just that.

While this could have easily been a generic drop-the-ball game, they brought a nice twist to the genre with the bonus multi-ball release. From a replay perspective, this will easily capture that next coin when players just miss out on dropping through the oscillating bucket. We haven't seen any finalized details on the company's Web site for this title, but hopefully it'll make it past the initial unveiling at the Amusement Expo and into full production. This game has a lot of potential if the company applies a little polish.

**Overall Rating:** ★★★ 1/2

### **BIG BUCK HUNTER HD/RAW THRILLS/PLAY MECHANIX**

The Big Buck Hunter franchise is definitely the bread and butter of Raw Thrills/Play Mechanix. Let's see how their latest iteration stands up against the rest with their latest, Big Buck Hunter HD.

**Analysis:** We'll keep the analysis section fairly short on this game since we feel it's safe to assume that everyone knows the rules/ideas behind the Big Buck Hunting franchise. The huge difference between this game and the previous versions is the introduction of the high definition graphics.

Additionally, all games are online, allowing for real time head-to-head competition/tournaments, location finder, and social networking capabilities including Facebook and Twitter. For ease of paying, it accepts all major credit and debit cards.



**“Raw Thrills shows us that there's plenty of life left in the Big Buck Hunter series.”**

**Pros:** It seems more often than not that the best ideas in the industry are also the most simple and logical, starting you right in the face...literally. LCD displays added to a successful shooting game to replace outdated CRT monitors, no brainer.

Taking this same exact game and utilizing technology to create the gaming experience in high definition made it visually stunning. After playing Big Buck Hunter HD, the previous versions look dated. The game play is as fun as ever, but the crisp visuals really enhance the overall experience.

**Cons:** Our biggest gripe by far would be the amount of time it takes to start an

actual game. We completely understand the idea and positive aspects of storing your player info, keeping tabs on everything a player is doing, and all of the other bells and whistles.

However, for every one person who wants to store that information, we can easily point you to two people that simply want to play a super quick game of shooting some deer. It was definitely annoying to have to go through the “sign-in” process and we noticed this similar frustration on other player's faces at the Amusement Expo.

**Overall:** Raw Thrills shows us that there's plenty of life left in the Big Buck Hunter series. In what really is a simple and elegant solution, Raw Thrills has done a fantastic job of bringing an already successful Big Buck Hunter franchise game into a 21st century visual shooting feast.

The difference in visual pop this new Big Buck Hunter HD game has over the previous iterations from the series is amazing. It will surely pave the road for other companies to emulate in the future.

We're actually surprised this hasn't been implemented more recently across the board, but like with any industry, it usually takes that first ball rolling to gather momentum. We can even remember when it was “OK” to have a non-high definition television or for some of us (cough...Zach...cough) it's still “OK” to not have a smart phone.

But as with any type of evolution, we feel the high-definition bug will definitely move the industry forward, which is a great thing for all.

**Overall Rating:** n/a

With a father like Roger Sharpe, the original “Cornered Critic,” it is probably no surprise that sons Josh and Zach share a true passion for the coin-op industry. Former pinball champions, both are recognized as being two of the finest players in the world. But their interest and skills have grown far beyond the silver ball to embrace video games and attractions of all types.



# Negotiating a commercial lease



Jerry Merola

*Merola is back with tips and principles to keep in mind when obtaining space for your FEC.*

**“As with everything in life, if a transaction is not fair, one party will ultimately walk away unhappy.”**

As the uptick in new entertainment center development continues to take hold throughout most quadrants of North America, the availability of commercial retail space has taken center stage.

Those of you that are presently developing new centers know that family entertainment centers (FECs) gobble up real estate at an alarming pace, often requiring 20,000 to 40,000 square feet to properly house a suitable portfolio of attractions and games. With this in mind, the carrying cost of real estate typically becomes the second greatest expense of the business, rivaled only by the cost of labor.

More importantly, rent, or “occupancy cost” as I like to refer to it, is generally fixed in nature, unlike labor or marketing, which can be tailored to actual revenue volumes. This single condition often positions occupancy cost as the most important variable in the development process, and one that requires a clear understanding of its current and future impacts on the business model.

For most new developers today, leasing an existing structure makes sound business sense. For starters, a project can often launch much quicker, as the structure and associated site improvements are already in place.

In addition, many existing commercial boxes are already suitably located on well-traveled roadways, and may possess the added benefit of being positioned among other established retailers.

Finally, total development costs are almost always considerably less, as a tenant does not have to bear the costs (and associated financing hurdles) of design, permitting, construction, and certification.

Instead, a typical tenant will sign an agreement to occupy a retail bay for a stated number of years at a predefined rent rate. On the surface, this might sound like a fairly simple transaction, but in practice, commercial leasing is far more complicated. Below are some elements to consider before signing on the line.

## KNOW ALL COSTS

Often times, the rent rate is merely the baseline of a tenant’s true cost of occupancy. During the heyday portion of the last decade (2003-2006), savvy landlords began layering additional tenant expenses into their lease agreements in an effort to pass-through typical landlord operating expenses.

These expenses may include: real estate taxes, common area maintenance charges, administration expenses, healthcare costs for landlord’s administrative staff, infrastructure repair or replacement of HVAC, roofing, parking lot lighting, and audit expenses associated with a review of tenant’s financials (for percentage rent provisions).

In essence then, a base rent of \$10 per foot might easily become \$20 per foot if the charges noted above remain unchallenged by the tenant.

## BE CAREFUL OF TENANT OBLIGATIONS

As with everything in life, if a transaction is not fair, one party will ultimately walk away unhappy. When it comes to commercial lease agreements, it’s critical that the document be reviewed very carefully, as most examples are easily 15-20 page manuscripts containing 50 or more sections.

Legal representation is a must; however, don’t rely upon your attorney to determine what’s best for you. Provisions that might be deemed



acceptable for a “light” tenant user, may have devastating effects on a tenant that’s more closely defined as a “heavy” user.

For instance, while a “percentage rent” provision might work acceptably for an apparel retailer, it may be completely unsuitable for an entertainment tenant. In the same sense, a lease that requires the tenant to “maintain the existing HVAC system” may quickly prove to be more than the tenant bargained for, particularly if the system is already more than seven years in age.

If one was to sign a 10-year lease today on such a structure, it’s quite probable that the HVAC system would have to be replaced eight years into the term at the tenant’s expense (most HVAC systems will last 15 years).

### **IMPROVEMENT ALLOWANCES/ FREE RENT OFFERS**

In recent years, more and more landlords have been offering tenant improvement allowances as an inducement for tenants to accept second-generation space (i.e. space that has been occupied previously). In theory, the improvement allowances are provided to permit a tenant to make modifications to a space to improve its effectiveness or appearance.

Generally speaking, the larger the allowance, the more worthwhile the deal is for the tenant, as improvement allowances often offset costs already present within an entertainment developer’s capital budget. The problem arises when a landlord opts to offer “free rent” instead of an improvement allowance.

These two elements are not the same, and have very different impacts on a project. While a tenant improvement allowance helps to reduce the total project budget, free rent has no impact on the project budget. Free rent merely reduces operating costs once the facility is open.

That means that the developer would still need to borrow the maximum amount of funds to complete necessary improvements at the site, as the landlord would essentially have no stake in the construction transaction. Given the challenges with financing today, it’s highly recommended that a tenant push hard to obtain an improvement allowance instead of a free rent period.

### **LANDLORD SPONSORED FIT-OUT CONSIDERATIONS**

There are many instances whereby a landlord will agree to provide a specific level of improvement for a tenant in exchange for an increase in the base rent rate. This commonly occurs with elements such as restrooms, kitchen stubbing, electrical panel upgrades and distribution, and storefront remodeling.

As an example, a landlord might provide \$250,000 in fit-out enhancements for a 20,000-square-foot structure, and in turn ask for an increase in rent of \$2.50 per foot.

While this might be seen as a fair deal, it only remains fair provided the rent rate reduces by \$2.50 at the start of the sixth rental year, as the “loan” for improvements would have been paid back in full by the tenant at that point.

Most landlords seem to forget about this simple provision and instead look to increase the then-current rent rate using the Consumer Price Index rate or a specific percentage rate. In essence, the landlord has served as your banker for the past five years, but now that you’ve repaid the borrowed amount, your rent rate should be reduced accordingly.

### **CHOOSING THE LEASE TERM**

Sometimes, the signing of a longer lease term will encourage a landlord to offer improvement funds, as they’d essentially be making a long-term investment in the tenant relationship.

A long-term lease by today’s standards is commonly 10 years.

While you might be inclined to believe that you’ll stay in the space forever, it is often unwise to commit or obligate yourself or your organization to a longer term. Instead, you can request “option periods” which will give the tenant the right to extend the lease if they choose to.

Commonly a 10-year lease might be initiated, with a tenant being provided with two five-year option periods, which would ultimately extend the lease to a full 20 years. If business is great, a tenant might initiate the option period. If not, the lease can terminate without further obligation to the tenant.

### **LEASE NEGOTIATIONS TAKE TIME**

Signing a lease is a big commitment, often with very specific obligations on the tenant’s part. It’s important to not rush through the process, as the best space in the world can prove to be a nightmare if the terms of the transaction can’t be supported by the business operation.

Don’t be afraid to play the “eye for an eye” game when negotiating the lease, whereby each party’s wish list is identified and a suitable median solution is reached.

Landlords want tenants, and tenants want space; the only thing that separates them is the language within the lease agreement. Once it’s signed, it becomes a document to live by, so please take your time. Chances are, the space will still be there tomorrow. ▲

Jerry Merola is the CFO of Amusement Entertainment Management (AEM) LLC, a subsidiary of Alpha-Omega Amusements. He has conducted feasibility studies in almost all regions of the United States and Canada. He can be reached at (732)254-3773; fax (732)254-6223; e-mail (profitwizz@aol.com).

# Tweet Tweet

**T**witter: some people love it, some people hate it, and there are probably a lot of people that don't know how it applies to their life or their business.

In this month's Social Studies, I intend to enlighten you on how Twitter works and how your business can actively and effectively participate in online conversations.

First, it's good to have an idea of what we're talking about. Twitter is an online service that combines social networking with micro-blogging. It allows users to send and read messages up to 140 characters, known as tweets.

To start with, every person/business should have a profile. This consists of your name, a brief biography, your Web site, and a profile picture.

These should help identify you to people who are searching for you. Your profile picture should best represent who you are or who your company is (your logo). You can also customize your background on your own page to add your own personal touch.

Tweets are the foundation of your communications on Twitter. Here is the structure of a tweet.

■ **Hashtag (#):** A hashtag is any word beginning with the #sign. People use these to arrange conversations around a specific topic. (#Gaming,

#Music, #Pooltables). There should never be any spaces between separate words.

■ **Mention (@):** When sending out a tweet, you can use a mention to bring it to someone's attention. Include the @username of whomever you want to mention in your tweet. All @username mentions link back to their profile. There should never be spaces between separate words. If you are not sure of the person's correct Twitter handle you are mentioning, you can look them up in the 'Search' function.

■ **Reply:** You can respond to a tweet by hitting the reply button. When you reply, it will be public and everyone can see it on your timeline as well as the person you are responding to.

■ **Retweet:** Use this to forward someone's tweet that you find share-worthy.

■ **Favorite:** Allows you to save a tweet for reading later or keep it as a reference for future use. If you don't have the time to respond to a tweet, you can mark it as a favorite and visit it later. It's also helpful when there is a link to a video and you can't view it on your mobile device until later.

■ **Links:** You can paste any link into your tweet and it will be con-

*Romine shares how Twitter can be an essential part of keeping your business in the public eye.*

densed to 19 characters, which saves space.

■ **Direct Message (DM):** is a private message. You can only have DMs to individuals you follow and who also follow you.

## LET'S GET STARTED!

The right content can convert people into customers and customers into advocates. If you are brand new to Twitter, I always recommend that you start following people or companies that you have an interest in.

You will start to see their style and you see what works and what doesn't work for them. Consider them as your own personal guides on what works.

To "Follow" means you have subscribed to someone's tweets, and they will automatically show up in your timeline. When someone follows you, your tweets will show up in their timeline.

When you are tweeting on behalf of your company, keep it friendly, and be causal. Over time, you will find your own style and your personality will make its mark. Use Twitter to demonstrate how you are different



Wes Romine is the Owner of A(Wes)ome Media, a company dedicated to helping small businesses use social media to their advantage. Romine has been an industry member for over 11 years. He got his start in the industry working as Director of Social Media Sales for Ecast. He can be reached via e-mail at (wes@awesomemedia.biz).

than your competitor. Show them your uniqueness and personality through your own words and pictures. Remember, people respond best to friendly, conversational tweets.

When you are first starting out, try to tweet about once a day. Over time, you will determine what works well for you and your business. I follow news outlets that interest me, I sometimes retweet them, and give my followers some interesting stories.

So, how are you going to use Twitter? Here are some ideas and suggestions you can use to show your personality on Twitter.

- Do you have a promotion or tournament going on? Are you carrying a new machine? Tweet about it!

- Helpful hints are always informative. Tweet something a client can do to prevent a service call.

*“The right content can convert people into customers and customers into advocates.”*

- “Behind the scenes” tweets are always fun and interesting. Most of your customers only know you or someone on your staff. Show them your work area or your showroom with a picture. Talk about all of the things you do to keep their business/machines running. This shows your personality and shows how hard you are working for them.

- Focus a tweet about someone on your staff, or post a picture of them working.

- Forward a link to your followers and set it up with a question. For example, “Have you played any golf lately?” Then add a link to a golf game.

- Retweet positive stories about you or your industry that your follow-

ers will find interesting. Make sure to mention the @username!

- Encourage your followers with a quotation related to your industry, something historical, or pop culture. By doing this, you might get some followers to retweet you!

- Besides photos, you can also add videos to your tweets!

- Add your Twitter @username to your business cards, e-mail, Web site, and other social media pages. Anywhere your customers interact with you or your product is a great place for you to encourage them to follow you.

I hope this has been helpful on understanding a little more about Twitter and how it can work with your business. ▲

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Gregg Elliott

**What operators say about VNEA pool leagues:**

- "Leagues provide regular, steady play over long periods, often on slow nights."
- "Better locations seek out our company to use our equipment to join the league."
- "Leagues increase collections from all machines."
- "Leagues foster location stability."

*If you're in the amusement business and you're not running pool leagues, you're missing the boat and the boat-load of revenue they generate.*

# Don't miss the boat: Start VNEA leagues



Your ship has come in and the name on the side of the ship is VNEA Pool Leagues.

Everyone is looking for a safe, solid investment these days. We invite you to invest your time and efforts with the Valley National Eight-Ball Association (VNEA) and continue to reap, or begin to reap, the enormous benefits others have enjoyed for over 30 years.

Simply stated: If you run leagues your tables will make more money, your location owners will make more money, and your location owners will become very loyal to you because you bring them business on their slow nights when they need it the most.

We believe that when it comes to playing pool, enjoying their favorite beverage, and socializing, our players are committed. What better way to drown your economic sorrows than with a weekly ice cold beverage and a few

games of pool with a group of like-minded friends?

People may not have enough money to take that family vacation, but that doesn't mean they can't scrape together enough for their favorite pastime.

**COMBAT TOUGH TIMES**

During hard times operators are looking for ways to keep their coin boxes full. Operators who run leagues and want to get more involved with league promotion, as well as operators who haven't run leagues before, are now calling for information on how to get started or enhance their program.

The benefits of being a VNEA Charter Holder include: increased table revenue, improved location relationships, table control, a complete line of league materials, new locations, operator assistance network, LeagueSMART Conference, software, and more.

Pool league services are an extremely affordable way for your customers to share with their friends and everyone wants to be where the action is.

The VNEA is a non-profit organization established to promote the game of pool on coin-op equipment owned by operators. The VNEA League System currently sanctions nearly 100,000 pool league players in over a dozen countries and nearly all 50 states. For more information, call (800)544-1346; Web (www.vnea.com). ▲

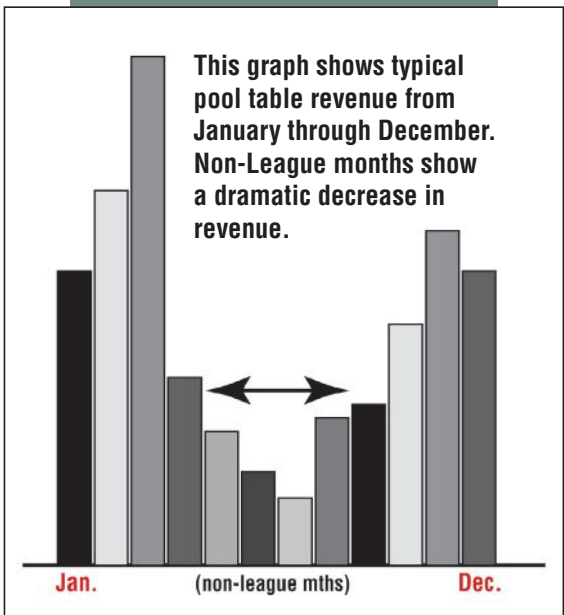
**TIME TO GET INVOLVED**

There is no time like the present to get involved. Maybe you were a member of VNEA in the past. If so, now is the time to come back. Maybe you just haven't taken the time to review VNEA's benefits.

Maybe you think you don't have the time to make it work. Your business will clearly benefit; making the time will be well worth it.

Maybe you don't think your players would be interested. Ask them on your route tonight... you might be surprised!

The season is just getting started; it's time to get on board. Times are tough. This isn't the first economic downturn that we've witnessed at the VNEA. And it always seems that when times get tough, the VNEA leagues hold their own, and possibly even prosper.



Gregg Elliott is the Executive Director of the VNEA.



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China Import and Export Fair Pazhou Complex  
tel: +866-2-2760-7407-10  
e-mail: gametime@taiwanslot.com.tw  
web: www.gtiexpo.com.tw/cnen/

**October 1-4**

**G2E**

Las Vegas, Nev.  
Sands Expo and Convention Center  
tel: (703)840-5662  
e-mail: inquiry@reedexpo.com  
web: www.globalgamingexpo.com

**October 3-4**

**World Waterpark Symposium and Trade Show**

Las Vegas, Nev.  
Paris Hotel  
tel: (913)381-6734  
e-mail: patty@waterparks.org  
web: www.waterparks.org

**October 4-6**

**Atlantic Coast Expo**

Myrtle Beach, S.C.  
Embassy Suites Kingston Plantation  
fax: (919)249-1394  
e-mail: info@atlanticcoastexpo.com  
web: www.atlanticcoastexpo.com

**October 7-10**

**NACS Show**

Las Vegas, Nev.  
Las Vegas Convention Center  
tel: (877)684-3600  
e-mail: show@nacsonline.com  
web: www.nacsonline.com

**October 9-11**

**Euro Attractions Show**

Berlin, Germany  
Messe Berlin  
tel: (703)836-4800  
e-mail: europe@iaapa.org  
web: www.iaapa.org/eas

**October 17-19**

**ENADA Rome**

Rome, Italy  
Roma Expo Center  
tel: 00390-5417-44250  
e-mail: s.bodellini@riminifiera.it  
web: www.enada.it

**October 17-21**

**Pinball Expo**

Wheeling, Ill.  
Westin Chicago North Shore Hotel  
tel: (800)323-3547  
e-mail: brkpinball@hotmail.com  
web: www.pinballexpo.net

**October 18-20**

**Surexpo**

Warsaw, Poland  
tel: 48-71-359-6271  
e-mail: office@wigor.wroc.pl  
web: www.wigor-targi.com

**October 24-26**

**RAAPA Autumn Expo**

Moscow, Russia  
VVC, Pavilion 55  
tel/fax: +7(495)234-52-42  
e-mail: raapa@raapa.ru  
web: www.raapa.ru

**November 1-3**

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tel: +86-20-2831-4758  
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web: www.zsgaf.com

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web: www.iaapa.org

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fax: (312)704-4140  
web: www.vending.org

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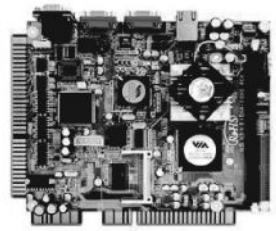
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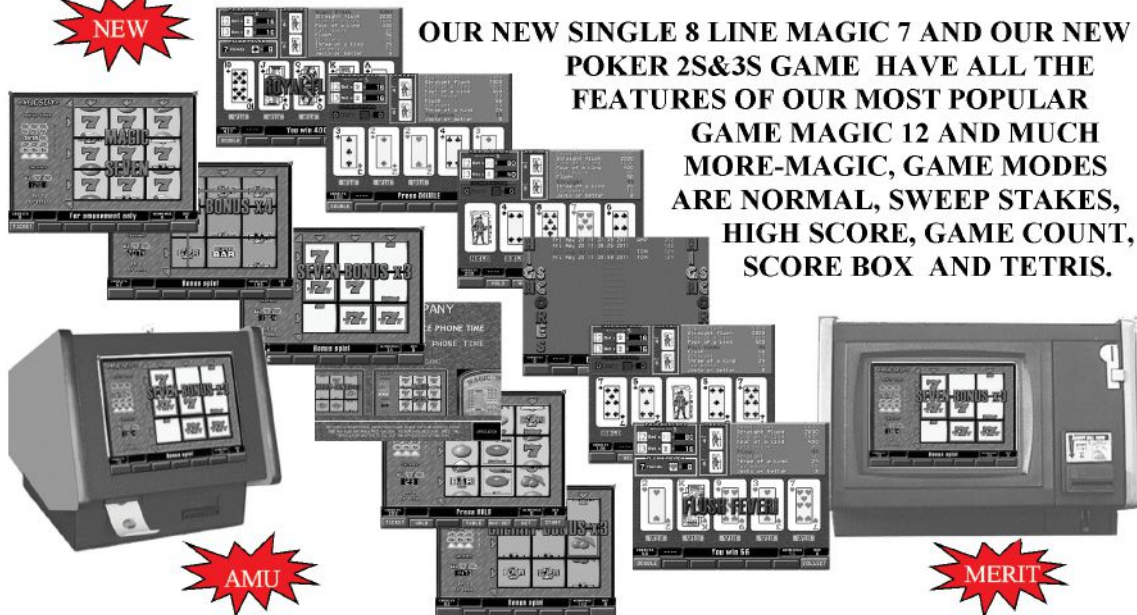
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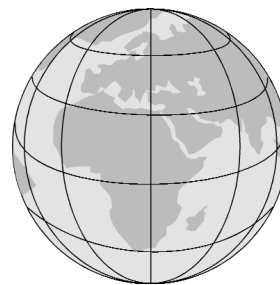


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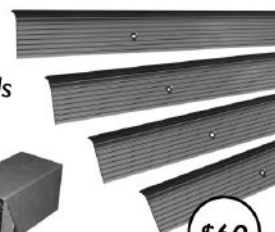
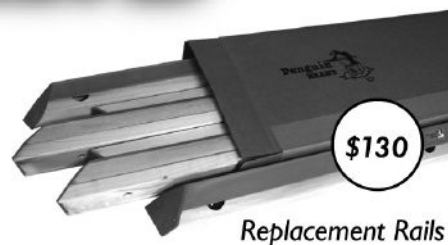
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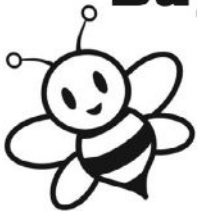
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# CLASSIFIED AD INDEX

Alex Henriquez	108	C.B. Sales & Distributing	107	Pelican Group	111
American Amusement Auctions	101, 104	China Star Games	110	Penguin Amusement	106
Amusement Entertainment Management	106	Coast to Coast Entertainment	99, 107, 108	Play Meter classified ad rates	100
Amutronics Inc.	105	CoinOp Warehouse	111	PNL Inc.	108
Auction Game Sales	103	Eldorado	108	Quartermtime Amusements	104, 107
Baton Lock	102	Jamma Boards	101, 104	Reel Spin	104
Big D's & Fat Pat's Graphix	102	Kids Marketing Factory	102	Seegurg Digital	101
BlazingQuarters	102, 104	Locking Systems Intl.	110	Suzo-Happ	100
Blue Bar Corp.	107	On the Ball Vending	101, 104	Two Bit Score	111
C & P Dist.	99, 101, 102, 108	Peach Auctions (GNB Am)	109	Zanen Elect.	108



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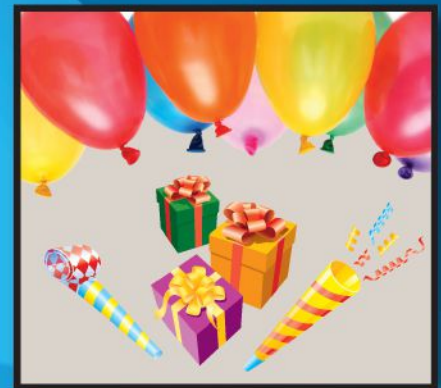
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