

Go-Kart Operators Stop Throwing Away your Revenue!

By Peter F. Olesen, P.E.

I have to say that most of the concession go-kart tracks I've visited in the past ten years are dropping the ball when it comes to potential revenues. This is due to situations that can easily be corrected, although some solutions may require infusion of capital into more karts or track repairs. Staff training, more diligent maintenance and similar solutions, however, can address many of the issues.

Too Few Karts Available on the Track:

My comments are addressed to those owners and operators committed to profitability. Many of you are missing the boat so to speak. Revenues are generated by karts on the tracks, being driven by your paying guests. They cannot bring in revenue parked in the maintenance building awaiting repairs. By the same token, long lines waiting for karts may be okay if you have reached the track's capacity, but they are not a good idea if you have more track capacity and aren't utilizing it. This doesn't refer to situations where the long lines only occur once in a while and only for an hour or so.

If you regularly experience long lines for several hours on a regular basis, it is time to seriously consider buying more karts, adding a second set of pit lanes and filling them with new karts. By going to a dual pit operation you can increase track capacity by approximately 60% during your peak hours without adding a second track. Single pit operations with 4-minute rides generate approximately 8 turns an hour while dual pitting allows 13 turns an hour.

Bad Mix of Single and Double Karts:

This is an especially telling problem in facilities where there is an imbalance in single karts and double karts. I've observed delays in loading due to the mix of guests in the queue lines not being able to efficiently move around people waiting for the two seat karts. Track having this problem should seriously consider obtaining more two-seat karts and crating specific lanes for them and/or creating a separate queue line for two seat riders.

I have witnessed people leaving a pit area without riding because the wait for two seat karts was three times as long. In one instance I left a track with my grand children because the track only had four two seat karts in the pits and the older grandchildren were riding two times to the younger ones and we were on a travel time schedule. Fortunately the track refunded our unused two ride tickets.

Another solution for this would be to change the track fleet to all two-seat karts (types that are configured to appear as a single seat kart when one rider is in it). This method permits a continuous flow through the pits and guarantees that those riding two to a kart have no longer waiting time than anyone else. We suggest that our clients strongly consider this format and those that instituted it have had nothing but praise for the system.

Too Few Staff Members, both in Pits and on Track:

I've personally watched staff members at one track lose two or more turns per hour because they took too long to get people seated and belted properly as a result of only two people working the pit during peak periods. Where is the math? By avoiding employing one more person to assist in the loading and unloading of guests in the pits resulted in the loss of more than \$200.00 per hour in revenue. During non-

peak times the supplemental pit staff can perform site cleaning or other overhead type operations. Proper scheduling of staff to cover peak days and peak periods can keep the staff to a reasonable level

Reduced runs per hour can easily occur if there are too few staff members on the track to address stalls and untangle spinouts. The presence of more personnel on the track generates a feeling of confidence and safety in the minds of many parents and guardians while at the same time reducing the temptation to misbehave on the part of many guests.

Poor Training of Staff:

Many facilities assign staff members to the go-kart track without sufficient training in how to best assist guests in entering, belting and leaving their karts, giving instructions prior to karts leaving the pits, addressing unruly drivers and related issues both in the pits and on the track.

Hopefully no major accidents or weather related problems occur when lightly trained staff members are in control of your track operations. The go-kart operation should employ your most dependable staff members in order to maximize guest experiences and return visits.

Tolerating Misbehavior on the Track or in the Queue Line:

It's your facility, your equipment and your guests. Why let the misbehavior of anyone, staff or guest result in reduced safety, damage to equipment or injury to guests or staff. While some idiot guests may feel they paid \$5.00 or 5.00 for a license to damage your equipment and disrupt the enjoyment of your facility by others, this is not the case, and you should prohibit such behavior from the beginning. Removing a bad actor or two from your track and facility is one of the best marketing tools you can use. Other guests see that you are committed to operating a safe and entertaining facility, and the good will you generate will result in far more repeat visits than the lost business of the few people you ban from your track.

Faulty Equipment:

Many tracks I've visited fail to have a full complement of karts on the track during peak periods. This can result in the loss of \$40.00 to more than \$50.00 per hour per missing kart on the grid. Some facilities apparently do this on purpose because it makes it easier to operate the track. This is fine if you don't have to address the bottom line, but doesn't make sense from a business point of view.

Other problems include poorly tuned karts that have to be restarted, faulty seat belts that require extra time to adjust, poor tire maintenance resulting in flat tires on the track or in the pits and other mechanical problems that could be avoided with basic maintenance procedures.

Failure to maintain the tuning of all the karts can result in large speed differentials among the karts on the track. This can result in sizable guest dissatisfaction with your facility

Bad Areas on Track:

For some tracks, the excessive occurrence of spinouts at a given corner can be due to reverse cross slope, too steep a banking of the track, an overly polished surface or wax build up on a slick track. Each of these situations has a solution.

Almost every track has a point at which more spinouts occur. These have the potential of reducing the number of turns per hour, each of which can result in the loss of \$50.00 to \$150.00 (depending on the number of karts on the track and the price per ride). When the average track has from 16 to 24 peak hours per week, this is a loss that usually cannot be made up.

Not only does the track generate less revenue, during busy periods it can result in potential customers being turned off because of excessive waits for rides. Some people have set time limits for their visits (possibly due to other commitments, travel distances or other individual reasons). Being unable to enjoy go-karts due to long waits and the wrong mix of karts can be the reason for some guests to not return.

Bad pavement surface can result in accidents by causing drivers to lose control, high tire wear and in some instances when track surfaces are in poor repair fragments of pavement can strike guests or staff members.

There are many ways to drive guests from your facility, but you certainly want to minimize the number of instances where it occurs. Don't let your track operations be the source of lost revenues. Remember! The only guests you can afford to lose forever are those that are unruly.

Failure to Repair Faulty Track Elements:

Not all problem areas on a given track can be remedied, but most can. This may require redesigning and reconstructing a curve, a section of barrier rail, track drainage, bad pavement or other relatively minor revision. The cost of accomplishing this may well remedy an ongoing disruption to peak operations and the resulting continual loss in revenue.

Worn, bent and rusty guardrail can cause accidents, as well as leaving the appearance that management doesn't care. This may be an image only impact, but it can impact on return visits, which your facility emphatically needs. It is even worse if your track has plastic pipe (Driscoll Pipe), steel plate beam guardrail, timber rails or even worse, loose tires. All of these elements are potential lawsuits waiting to happen. Phillips Petroleum, the manufacturer of PVC (Driscoll) pipe sent out a letter in the early 90s asking that the go-kart industry not use the product for track barriers, as it was not suitable for the purpose.

It's a "no-brainer" to know the hazards of highway steel plate beam guardrail or timbers. The impacts are very hard on both karts and riders. Loose tires introduce a whole range of potential track hazards, including but not limited to causing karts to go out of control, bouncing up and striking drivers or track staff, sliding out of the way and permitting karts to run out of the track into parking lots and getting caught beneath kart bodies. Loose tire systems have been responsible for number of fatalities and should never be used.

We will address the safety issues in more detail in a separate article.

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pond design, having brought about many innovations in safety, geometrics, design and construction methods that are now widely emulated throughout the industry. The firm has performed more than 410 projects in 41 states, Angola, Brunei, Canada (Alberta, Ontario and Quebec), Cuba (Guantanamo Bay), Kazakhstan, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Saudi Arabia. These projects span feasibility, concept development, master plans, final design and construction engineering. He is a member of the faculty of Foundations Entertainment University, has presented seminars at the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions, Fun Expo, Kart Expo and Leisure Expo as well presenting go-kart safety seminars for the State of Ohio. He has, and continues to write articles for industry magazines and internet newsletters.

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