

SUCCESSFUL OPERATIONS WITH TEENAGE GUESTS BALANCING FOR SUCCESS

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Balancing Target Markets:

The challenge each operator of a family entertainment center, be it small or large faces, is the challenge of maximizing attendance. Selecting the right target market is always a challenge, be it for a children's, family or adult facility. Properly addressing a single age group is always easier because there is no need to balance attractions that appeal to different age groups in a format that doesn't alienate everyone. The challenge becomes even greater as it involves creating the right mix of attractions to maximize attendance and guest satisfaction for several target groups. In most instances this involves developing a mix of age oriented attractions that can appeal to the broadest target market and thus generate maximum revenues.

It is important to attain both the maximum attendance and providing maximum attraction thru-put during peak hours of attendance. The ability to handle more guests per attraction per hour increases the revenues that can be generated. It is important to select attractions that draw the maximum number of guests to the FEC, as well as having a balance of attractions that provide the capability to maximize the number of guests that can play or utilize the attractions during peak hours. This will result in the ability to increase per capita spending. The combination of attraction capacity will, over the long run maximize attendance will result in a greater potential for success.

Maximizing attendance and per capita spending involves not only the selection of the correct mix of attractions, but also requires careful placement of attractions within the facility. Proper placement will increase impulse play and increase revenues. This is especially true when the target market includes attracting teenagers and families with younger children.

Incorporating Teens into the Attendance Mix:

While it may be true that many parents of younger children are not comfortable visiting facilities that attract large numbers of teenagers, there are many ways to reduce or eliminate the concerns of these parents. It is possible to greatly reduce the concern when sound planning is done at the start and followed through with once the facility is opened to the public. Standards of acceptable conduct and the expectations of management should be posted in a prominent location. It should be stated that violators of these standards will not be welcome, and will be asked to leave. Congregating in the parking lots and outside the entrance should be **prohibited and the prohibition enforced.**

When a facility opens with clearly defined standards of acceptable conduct, and enforces it fairly, the message will get out to the community rather rapidly.

The exuberance of teenagers, when not realistically controlled, may create an atmosphere that may cause some parents of younger children to become uneasy when they are in close proximity. Proper planning both from the standpoint of attraction placement and management's approach to controlling guest behavior can alleviate many potential concerns by establishing, posting and expecting adherence to reasonable expectations of the guests visiting the facility. Having specific rules against loitering, use of profanity, horseplay and other unnecessary activities and enforcing them, can result in a comfortable environment for all.

Dress Codes and Expectations:

In certain metropolitan areas, gang colors, gang signs and inappropriate fashions may also enter into the equation. This applies to staff members as well as guests. A strict dress code for staff members, as well as expectations with respect to hair, body piercing, etc. are also elements that should be carefully considered. The important factor to recognize is the importance of establishing ownership of your facility. Put your imprint on the image your facility presents to the community.

Establishing and enforcing no-tolerance rules for attire, language and loitering can reduce the number and severity of any infractions that require specific responses. Set written policies and procedures that help minimize confrontations. Instruct all staff members in the protocols and procedures to follow in dealing with any challenging situations involving unsuitable and unsavory guest behavior; and strongly support them when they do so.

Yes, you want as many guests as possible in order to improve your bottom line; but no, you won't accept undesirable behavior from some, because it will leave you with a half empty place in the future.

Its "Your Home and Castle". You have the right to establish rules of behavior, and to enforce them. Setting expected standards for guest behavior establishes "the rules of engagement". Teenagers may arrive in exuberant groups, and some will take advantage of any situation, if allowed to do so. This does not mean that they won't abide by rules of decency and decorum when placed in an environment that dictates that they are expected to follow a set of rules or they will be asked to leave. You don't have to accept foul language or behavior, anti-social actions, risqué dress, gang colors, fighting, drinking, use of drugs or other unacceptable behavior, whether by teenagers or adults. To do so is to invite ultimate failure.

Faced with the option of complying or being asked to leave, most teenagers and adults will readily comply. Those that fail to comply should never be welcome. By establishing that your guests are welcome to enjoy your attractions and amenities as long as they behave and respect others, you will establish strong support from the vast majority of the people you welcome to your facility. Having clear guidelines as to the atmosphere you wish to maintain is an important key to your future success.

If you allow the unruly guests to take over your facility, it will be difficult to reclaim a family friendly image. Allowing an unruly few to push the limits, accepting loitering, unsightly dress, unacceptable language and rough-house behavior will only accelerate the same by others; creating a negative image of your facility. Accept this and kiss your future success goodbye.

Establishing a "No Tolerance" policy with respect to miss-behavior or anti-social behavior is the first step in creating a positive reputation in the community. Keeping out uncooperative guests may be painful in the short run, but is of the utmost importance in your ultimate success. The initial loss of revenues due to asking undesirable guests to leave will result in much larger revenues in the long run. Say no to such activities from the beginning and the atmosphere of your facility is established. If it takes escorting unruly guests from the facility, so be it. Those who witness your commitment will become your repeat guests, often becoming outspoken supporters of your commitment a family friendly operation. Their comments to their friends and acquaintances becomes a part of your word of mouth marketing network.

Losing the revenues from unappreciative guests will be more than compensated for by the positive support you will gain through “word of mouth” marketing throughout your community by the vast majority of your guests that will applaud your creation of a family friendly environment.

Prosecuting Offenders:

Don't be afraid of prosecuting offenders that do not cooperate. In the event the offenders at your facility are guilty of theft, assault, vandalism or other criminal activities, be they staff members or guests, it is important that you prosecute them in order to maintain a safe facility. This indicates to staff that you will not tolerate or ignore criminal behavior, and makes guests with illicit intent, that you will prosecute them.

Should you experience serious infractions of your established guidelines, use your community's police forces in the rare event you cannot establish control by yourselves. More than one facility has failed because management took a “back seat” and allowed their guests to rule.

The wise selection and placement of age appropriate attractions can often greatly increase the separation of teenage guests from the attractions that are appropriate for toddlers and younger children. This can be accomplished for both indoor and outdoor facilities.

Establish a Relationship with Community Leaders:

Meeting with people within your community that deal with the public can serve not only to the community aware that you intend to operate a safe and family friendly environment, but also enable to get community input into possible unhealthy social conditions that you should be aware of in order to create a favorable environment for guests.

Plan to keep undesirable guests away from the facility and still provide a facility that can be family and teenager friendly. It is important to post expectations and to enforce them. Failing to do so serves as a rallying call to those individuals and groups that have no respect for rules or the comfort of other guests. There are a number of consultants in the industry that specialize in staff training and the establishment of operating manuals. They should be able assist you in developing a program that best serves your specific circumstances and help training your staff to follow your expectations from the start and making them better equipped to anticipate and defuse potential situations.

Utilize the Services of Professionals:

Employ an experienced consultant with the experience and knowledge to plan the placement of indoor attractions to minimize interaction between toddlers and other younger guests and teenagers. When possible, group attractions such as laser tag, mini-lane bowling, food service, teenage arcade elements such as dance and guitar units, basketball units, racing simulators away from the redemption games, birthday party rooms, soft play and toddler areas.

Professional Consultants often have specific suggestions with respect to matching different age groups, social and ethnic groups in ways that enhance your facility environment through their past experiences and industry contacts.

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indoor, stand alone go-kart tracks and miniature golf courses, bumper boat ponds and related attractions. The firm has been at the forefront of go-kart, miniature golf course and bumper boat 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, FunExpo, 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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