

Keeping Up The Momentum

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I just returned from the IAAPA show in Orlando, and was once again favorably impressed with the volume of attendees and the breadth of new product introductions. In essence, IAAPA proved to carry forward the enthusiasm and rejuvenated interest initially seen at this year's AMOA/FUN EXPO, with many new faces standing shoulder-to-shoulder with our industry's veterans. It was also a show that saw a significant amount of purchasing occurring on the show floor. My firm had three of its manufacturing clients exhibiting new products at the show, with all three reporting very strong purchase order volume right from the very first show day. Could it be that our industry has turned the corner? My vote is a resounding "yes!"

There were a series of product concepts that caught my eye, and hint at the philosophy that you can still build a better mousetrap. In particular, I liked the concept of adding falling water to the traditional climbing rock, which helped convey an entirely different dimension and appearance to this popular but predictable attraction. Also of interest was interactive softplay, which combined the traditional contained play unit with interactive electronic devices positioned throughout the unit. And how about the lasertag-style bumper cars? This idea offers an enhanced level of entertainment, especially for those facilities that may not have sufficient space or budget to operate each attraction individually. Finally, the ride manufacturers have made great strides in bringing high capacity amusement park- sized rides to the indoor market without losing the impact of the experience. In particular, the new "free fall" drop rides looked impressive and now offer much greater capacity and weight ratings than earlier versions, making them ideally suited for medium-sized family entertainment centers.

Variety also seems to have returned to our industry. Whether you're shopping for automated card systems, redemption merchandise, amusement games, or food products, there were a significant number of vendors present for each category. Price consciousness was also the order of the day, with most manufacturers offering "price controlled" versions of their products that were more apt to appeal to today's budget-minded purchasers. Essentially, if the entertainment value is high and the price is right, the buy decision becomes a "no brainer". Isn't that how it should always be?

Last but not least, I continue to be impressed by the volume of overseas entertainment development occurring throughout South America, the Middle East, and the Eastern European countries. Attendees from these regions were in full force at the IAAPA show, and represent what I believe to be a substantial market opportunity for U.S.-based amusement businesses. In fact, the IAAPA show proved to be a literal melting pot of cultures, which lays testament to the fact that entertainment continues to be a constant in modern day society - how you showcase it is ultimately what makes you different.

I'm excited to see that, as an industry, we're picking up speed - I can only imagine what it will be like when we hit high gear.

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