

Are You Selecting The Appropriate Games For Your Guests?

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These days, it seems as though the "information super highway" has permitted both small and large businesses to analyze anything and everything about their customer base, from effective target marketing to the profiling of would-be consumers. It has come to the point where most of today's manufacturers of consumer goods are designing products to effectively reach niche markets, using specific criteria to describe their ultimate purchasers such as, "male age 34-39 with 2.2 kids, a family income in excess of \$75,000, a B.S. degree, and who buys fertilizer 1.9 times per year. For years, marketing experts have embraced niche-specific advertising campaigns on the theory that fewer advertising dollars would be wasted by avoiding contact with the wrong potential purchasers for a given product. You might be asking, "how does this relate to amusement games?" In short, the type and style of games in which you or your operator select for an entertainment facility will dictate the type of consumers that will ultimately utilize them.

Now that our industry has blossomed to include the childrens entertainment center, edutainment center, adult entertainment center, and the more traditional family entertainment center, special care should be taken to insure that the amusement game portfolio is consistent with the desires of the facility's guests. If you're operating a childrens center, do you know the physical and mental capabilities of children in each of the various age groups that you're catering to? Have you selected games that are too easy or too complicated? Does the current game lineup include game units that contain violent content that would detract from the facility's main theme or message?

To answer the above questions, it's best to start by defining the age groups most likely to visit the facility. This will typically be dictated by the type of core attractions present, such as soft play units, indoor rides, arts and craft stations, beverage concessions (such as alcohol), and food offerings. The pricing structure and operating format will also play a part, with some facilities requiring age minimums (as in the case of adults) and/or high-end pricing for food and attractions. Let's say that, for the purpose of example, our center is designed to appeals to children from age 3 to 12. How can we select a game portfolio that provides enough for everyone without alienating, offending, or ignoring anyone? To help us arrive at a supportable conclusion, here's a summarized list of common traits among the age groups we're targeting:

Age 3

- recognizes three colors
- can match colors
- enjoys guessing games

Age 5

- enjoys group games
- insists on four players
- likes to display knowledge and skills
- likes to use fine motor skills
- likes active games
- throws ball 44 feet (boys); 25 feet (girls)

Age 4

- wants to test self
- cooperates in groups of two or more
- throws ball 10-15 feet

Age 6

- enjoys group play
- better sense of others
- small group play against one another
- enjoy games with simple rules
- high motor skill improvement

Many redemption games will serve as favorites for these age groups, such as Cyclone, Smoken Token, Loose Change, Skee-ball/Iceball, Ribbit Racin, Spider Stompin', Pirates Revenge, and Round n Round, to name a few. These games offer an easy learning curve that permits the 3 to 6 year old to grasp the goal quickly and achieve reasonable success the first time out. The required motor skills needed by the child to play these games is not high, however they are high enough to encourage repeat play, especially for those whose aspirations are to achieve an improved score.

Children between age seven and age ten seek games that offer a higher level of interactive entertainment and demand higher levels of skill, which may include enhanced reasoning, motor, or aptitude capabilities. Below is a listing of common

attributes and preferences of these age groups:

Age 7

- ability to relate to the world of skills and tools
- group games important
- involved in improvement of physical skills (e.g. - hand/eye coordination)
- like group games with sides, not actual team games

Age 9

- fair amount of organization in games
- children play in pairs or groups, but not groups of three
- eye-hand coordination levels off

Age 8

- enjoy games they can both observe and participate in
- increased interest in competitive athletics

Age 10

- active play is paramount

Many children in these age groups enjoy the competition associated with games such as Cruisin' The World, NFL Blitz 2000, and NBA Showtime, or the coordination required for Big Haul, Super Shot Basketball, Treasure Falls, or Tower of Power. Multi-player games are well-received by these age groups, and promote friendly competition, particularly on models that have linking capabilities.

The real challenge then, is to keep the pre-teen interested in what you have to offer, particularly the eleven and twelve year olds, who have become somewhat independent, but still fall under the watchful eyes of their parents. These pre-teens have something to prove to the world and to themselves, and seek games and entertainment that satisfy their quest for new experiences. Common traits of these age groups are as follows:

Age 11

- competition becomes more intense
- spurred by great appetite for new experiences

Age 12

- tremendous intellectual growth
- natural urge to exercise intelligence
- enjoys athletics and games for their own sake, not so much for the competitive involvement

What games will appeal to this group? Perhaps Interactive Light's Kick It, Devecka's Drumscape, or Nova's Addams Family Generator. Many of the males in this age group are intrigued by sports, gun, and fighting games, such as Silent Scope, House of the Dead II, Tekken Tag, Top Skater, and Crisis Zone. This is not to say that these players will not utilize other equipment such as Triple Jam Basketball, 18-Wheeler, and others but rather, that their focus has changed somewhat to include games of higher skill and perhaps, of more mature content.

Now might be a good time to confirm the typical age groups that are frequenting your facility, as they may have changed over the last few years. Earnings trends from the amusement game portfolio will also help to identify the preferences of the guests, and when reviewed in conjunction with age-related attendance data, can provide a sound basis for purchase decisions in the future. Understanding the needs of the guest is just one more strategic advantage that will help to separate your entertainment facility from the rest of the competition.

NOTE: Information relating to the attributes of various age groups was obtained in part from research and findings published by Dr. Jack Samuels, a professor at Montclair State University, Montclair, New Jersey.

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