



SUCCESS WITH ONLINE RESERVATIONS

To the tune of doubling online business! **By Corrie Pelc**

Although 48 Bowl Inc. already used an online reservation system for its two bowling centers, Hollywood Bowl and Parkway Lanes in Lincoln, NE, staff realized it needed to meet their needs.



Jennifer Davis-Korn

"Our older online reservation system wasn't 'live,' meaning the reservations that customers made were not connected to our online live availability," explains Jennifer Davis-Korn, marketing director for 48 Bowl Inc. "People would have to make reservations at least 24 hours in advance, and then we would manually have to go block out those lanes and names in our paper calendar."

After installing Brunswick's Sync scoring and management system in both centers in late 2021, Davis-Korn says they decided to switch to Sync's online reservations capability that provides "live" reservation booking capability.

Doubling Online Business

Davis-Korn says regular open play lanes at both their 24-lane bowling centers are available to reserve online through 48Bowl.com, or guests can come in and make a reservation through a kiosk at the centers.

"It is all tied together. Customers can reserve lanes online from their phone, tablet at home, or directly in the center," she details. Since using Sync's online reservations capability, Davis-Korn says they have seen their online business at least double. "It's easy for people to see when they can do it immediately — it's an easy yes for them," she adds.

Not Just for Open Play

People wanting to book birthday parties are encouraged to do so through the online reservation system. "Many of our reservations are three- and four-lane birthday parties or teen celebrations. They reserve a group of four lanes online," Davis-Korn explains.

To help take some workload off their booking coordinator, 48 Bowl Inc. allowed daycares, camps, and schools to book field trips through their online reservation system.

"Often, the camp director would want to book for a certain date, with a certain number of kids, at a specific time. They would have a list of ten dates throughout the summer; we just put it all in their hands," Davis-Korn says. "The other great thing about that is when their park trip gets rained out,

and they don't have another place to take kids, they just hop on our reservation system and make the reservation for the bowling center instead of the park."

League Make-Up Sessions

Davis-Korn says they were also able to customize their online reservations portal to allow bowling leagues to schedule their make-up sessions. "During the league season, we have so many make-up sessions, and they became a burden for our staff to figure out if they could schedule the sessions," she continues. "Now it's automated for our league bowlers. They go online, pick their league make-up time, and boom! It's right in the computer like any other reservation, and our staff doesn't have to deal with it at all."

Top Tips!

1. **Start small and ease into "live" mode.** For any center considering implementing an online reservation system with "live" reservation capability, Davis-Korn suggests starting small and easing staff into it.

"Each of our centers has 24 lanes," she explains. "We started with just six lanes that we made available for reservations. We did that for several months so that we could make sure that the reservation system was working out and easy to manage. We got used to it, and the demand was so high we were selling out of all our reservations all the time, so we opened up more lanes for reservations."

2. **Create a plan for what you want to offer guests with your online system.** For example, 48 Bowl Inc.'s two centers have set times that people can reserve a lane.

Think of this like choosing a movie time: guests choose from a set time when lanes are available, making it easier for staff to manage. Davis-Korn explains, "The staff knows this block of lanes is going to have reservations come on at this time, and they're going to have a little grace period to clean up before the next group of reservations come in."

Online reservation systems are now the norm. In 2022, Brunswick's online reservation system did a total of 1.4 million online reservations across all their customer sites, providing more proof that customers expect it in today's tech driven world. Coupled with the benefits of less workload for your staff and the probability of doubling business, offering online reservations makes sound business sense. ●