

Compact efficiency

Lee Wild discovers how the next generation of smaller, compact bowling varieties are gaining popularity

IT'S safe to say that one of the most recognisable names in the bowling industry is Brunswick, with its long history in the game making it recognisable to even the most casual of players. It's vice president of product solutions, Brandon Meigs, told us that this well-established game is the perfect attraction to lead in the fast-growing space of competitive socialisation.

"The main premise is to provide various easily understood forms of entertainment with low barriers of use," said Meigs, namechecking the likes of beer pong, axe throwing and pickleball to combine with bowling, creating an attraction destination that will draw in a wide audience.

While the likes of the tenpin game are ever-popular, modified and gamified versions of the traditional game are gaining fans across the world. Brunswick's Duckpin Social, which features lower weight and smaller balls, is quickly becoming a popular attraction for operators.

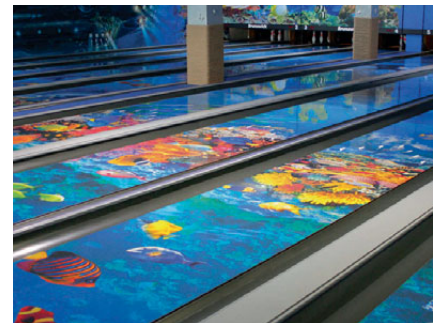
Meigs believes: "The smaller bowling balls mitigate intimidation of large, heavy tenpin balls, so all guests can participate.

"Virtually everyone knows how to bowl and has had some experience bowling. Overwhelmingly, these experiences are good memories for most people.

"The [duckpin] game is quicker than the traditional tenpin bowling, which fits today's fast-paced lifestyles. Guests can get a real bowling experience in a shorter period of time while enjoying great food and cocktails, and engaging in friendly competition in a social setting.

"Bowling is the ultimate form of social recreation and entertainment, and Duckpin Social allows access to the product of bowling in many more types of facilities compared to traditional full-length bowling."

Whereas once the game was traditionally restricted to large commercial spaces, those that could accommodate 60ft of polished wood and a large, stringless pinsetter, now smaller FECs are discovering the delights that these new, shrunken games can deliver. "Where Duckpin Social excels



is the ability for more facilities to offer bowling as an option, especially in existing facilities where space isn't being added," said Meigs.

"The biggest barrier to entry with traditional bowling is the space required. As cost of space continues to increase, operators continue to look for ways to maximise revenue per square foot, while providing the right mix of product."

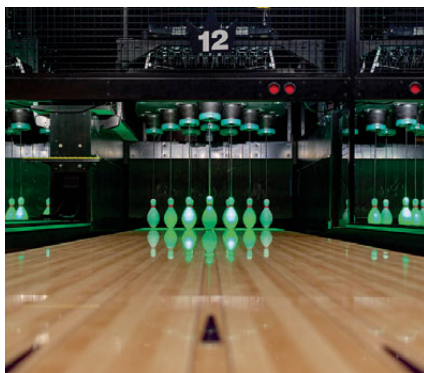
It's not just at the point-of-sale where bowling can grow revenue, happy and engaged guests take part in more secondary spending, buying meals and drinks or playing on the arcade games. "Duckpin Social has proven to generate very impressive revenue per square foot just on bowling revenue, and when combined with the increased food and beverage revenue generated while customers bowl, the numbers are extremely positive."

Occupying just one third the space of a traditional tenpin lane, the duckpin game can theoretically accrue three times the ROI, with Meigs saying that operators can't get enough of the innovation. He said: "Many operators see duckpin bowling as the biggest competitive advantage they have over competition and a leading reason why consumers choose their facility over others. Also, because the facilities offering duckpin bowling typically install a smaller number of lanes than traditional (8-12

lanes is common), the demand-to-supply ratio is favourable to operators in charging premiums and creating waiting times during which guests will spend money in other areas of the facility while waiting."

Of course, the traditional game still has its fans. There aren't many better sounds than the clack of all ten pins falling at once, and the game still has a strong following from those that play in leagues or tournaments. Meigs says that, if you have the space, tenpin is still a sound choice: "Traditional bowling is still the popular choice for new construction where buildings are designed for bowling, especially large FEC models with 40,000-50,000sq.ft-plus of space. If an operator is looking to offer bowling as a sport, traditional bowling is the option. Both forms of bowling attract a very broad audience, it is the business model and space available that typically dictates which is more appropriate.

"The majority of bowling centres that exist today are still 'traditional' (70 per cent revenue derived from bowling) models but there have been virtually no traditional centres built in the past 15 years and older traditional facilities are failing at a much higher rate each year. Older traditional facilities can still exist in some regions because their cost structure is relatively low and typically have little to no debt."





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Brunswick

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