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Dave Husted operates two centers in one of three Oregon counties keeping bowling centers shuttered in mid-October, citing the coronavirus pandemic.

BENCHED

Frustration Over Mandated Closure:
'We Have Done Nothing Wrong'



Transform a Visit to Your Venue Into an Experience

How to use sound, lighting and video to create social media-worthy moments and drive additional traffic.

Courtesy
DFX Sound
and Vision

By Barry Sparks

It doesn't matter if it was 1995, 2005, 2015 or yesterday. The goal for proprietors has been to use sound, lighting and, more recently, video to create a memorable, exciting and distinctive experience for bowlers.

Although the goal has remained the same, the equipment available has changed dramatically over the years. The first generation of “glow bowling” appears rather rudimentary today.

Proprietors can bathe virtually their entire center in an endless array of colors, pipe quality sound throughout the facility, and show eye-catching videos on gigantic screens. Touch-control boards enable operators to program countless color and light shows.

“The wow factor has always been important, and it still is,” says Dan Kibler, lighting/sound/video specialist at Bowlers Supply. “But it takes more to wow your customers today. The entertainment aspect of bowling has evolved greatly.”

Teens and millennials are accustomed to living in a world of sophisticated cell phones, high-definition video games and highly customized music playlists.

“They thrive on change and excitement,” says Kibler. “They have short

attention spans and their expectations are high. You can't afford to be stagnant with this group. If you are, they will move on to another venue.”

Steve Szabina, Vice President of Sales for ZOT ColorSplash, says, “You get one chance to make a first impression. And through the effective use of sound, lighting and video, you can create a brighter, fresher, more interactive and more fun environment.”

Gene Esposito, Vice President of DFX Sound and Vision, comments, “Customers are looking for the complete experience — sound, lighting and video. They want it all.”

With all the options available, proprietors can easily change the atmosphere any time of day, or for any particular group. Birthday parties, corporate parties, fundraising events and theme nights can all easily have different atmospheres.

With so many color options and programs, the atmosphere never has to be the same twice. Additionally, Szabina says every month has special colors. For example, October is Breast Cancer Awareness (pink), November is Thanksgiving (orange and brown) and December is Christmas (red and green).

Some proprietors are using sound, lighting and video to upgrade their VIP lanes, particularly if they are separated from the regular lanes.

Experts recommend upgrading the sound system, increasing the size of the video screens and programming unique light shows in the VIP area.

Szabina points out that glow bowling doesn't have to be limited to the weekend evenings.

“Try it during the day with your open bowlers,” he suggests. “It's as simple as flipping a switch. With leagues on the decline, it gives you more opportunities. Be flexible and creative.”

Enhancing the experience for bowlers is something most centers and FECs can do. Szabina recommends adding pin deck and cap lighting as initial steps.

If you want a different effect, consider extending your lighting over the concourse area. And there's no need to stop there. You can add special lighting to the outside of your facility to attract more attention.

Szabina says the advent of LED lights has revolutionized the experience. He says the VersaLamp features a system of five independent LEDs — red, green, blue, white and ultraviolet in a single light fixture that can produce millions of colors. It also gives proprietors independent task lighting during normal or standard activities, and special effects when needed.

LED lighting offers a number of benefits, according to Szabina. They include:

- Much longer bulb life, lasting up to 80,000 hours.

- Eco-friendly light bulbs, which contain no harmful substances and are safer to use and can be recycled.

- Low-temperature operation, giving off virtually no heat at all.

- Increased durability, lasting four to 40 times longer than traditional lighting.

- Energy efficient lighting, converting 80% of electrical energy into light energy.

- Huge savings on your lighting bill since it uses up to 90% less electricity than standard lighting. Plus, your utility company may offer rebates and incentives for installing an energy-efficient lighting system.

Szabina recommends replacing traditional lighting with LED lighting as one of the first steps in upgrading.

“You can decrease your number of light fixtures and increase brightness and color options while saving money,” he says.

If you’re overdue for a sound-and-lighting upgrade, what should you do? Industry experts agree that you don’t have to tackle everything at one time.

“The most important thing is to get started,” says Esposito. “You can have a five-year plan and add something new each year. As your revenue increases, due to your upgrades or additions, you reinvest the money into adding more new features.”

Kibler is a strong advocate of adding some new feature every year. While lighting and video receive a lot of attention, he cautions proprietors not to overlook upgrading their sound systems.

“Sound may not be as flashy as light and video, but it’s the backbone of an entertainment system,” he says. “Kids and young adults know and appreciate quality sound. Just listen to the stereo systems in their cars

and bedrooms.”

Adds Esposito: “Sound should be everywhere in your facility — on the concourse, in the lounge and in your birthday party rooms. You can control the volume and music source for each location.”

Music is key to creating a nightlife atmosphere. It’s important that the music you play is what your audience wants to hear. They, most likely, are interested in hearing the latest

hits, the hottest artists and an engaging variety.

One size, however, does not fit all. The music must match the demographics you’re hosting. Music services can help you deliver what audiences want, as well as provide an advertising vehicle for your center.

Centers can make a strong visual impact with 180-inch video screens, which cover nearly three lanes, with HD projectors. The

screens can show one music video across all lanes or a section of lanes. Different videos also can be shown over a section of lanes.

Showing music videos engages your customers, creates a more entertaining environment and gives customers something to look at besides their cell phone. The less time a customer spends on their phone, the better the experience you’ve delivered.

Kibler believes proprietors can take greater advantage of their glow bowling programs, particularly when it comes to promotions.

Glow bowling already creates a fun atmosphere. You can enhance it with special events such as a Frozen Turkey Bowl (using real 8 to 12-lb. frozen turkeys), a Halloween Costume Party, a Secret Santa Party (at which guests bowl for secret prizes) and a Beach Party (featuring plenty of beach balls). Star Wars is another popular theme (imagine all the fun

that can be had with lasers).

These special events also create ideal social media posts from your center, as well as your customers. That’s a ton of free advertising and a great deal of buzz.

“Add sound, lighting and video, and you’ve created a much more memorable experience,” says Esposito. “Plus, those participants may want to return to your center to have a similar experience.”

Kibler says that prior to the coronavirus, a number of proprietors were expressing an interest in the Clutch Bowling system, which combines vibrant graphics, motion tracking, special effects on the lane surfaces and ball trails along with bowling.

“Although it appeals to all ages, it particularly appeals to the video-game generation,” he says. “It’s very interactive, and it brings together so many elements. It’s extremely entertaining. It takes the emphasis off the pins and focuses on the fun element. Bowlers can have a completely different experience each visit.”

Why is now a good time to invest in your sound, lighting and video system?

“With league bowling declining, proprietors have more opportunities to promote their glow bowling programs,” says Esposito. “If you make your investment now, you will be ahead of the curve when business picks up after the coronavirus concerns. It’s also a great time to wow your regular customers and attract new customers.”

Sound, lighting and video have been part of the bowling scene for decades. Industry experts predict they will play a greater role in the success of centers in the future.

“There’s still a considerable untapped market,” stresses Esposito. “The younger generation craves excitement, fun and engagement. They have expendable income, and they are very willing to pay for an enjoyable experience. If proprietors can deliver that, they can be successful.”



Courtesy Bowlers Supply