

Strong foundations

Redemption: the industry's backbone

THE amusement industry has gone through many changes over the decades – technology improves, tastes change and trends develop.

One of the aspects of it that has never changed, however, is redemption's importance. Its broad appeal and eye-catching presence on a games floor has formed the spine of the industry for decades, and this only looks to continue in the years to come, said Bay Tek's Mark Lense.

"I think looking at the current percentage of redemption games compared to others, like video games, in a space speaks volumes to the popularity of ticket redemption.

"When I first started selling redemption games in the early 1990s, most game rooms were only 30-40 per cent redemption games. Video was the most popular and represented the highest percentage in most rooms.

"As the years progressed, we have seen the percentage of redemption games in rooms increase to 50 per cent, then 60 per cent, and now I would say that rooms could see as much as 80 per cent of the games in a family entertainment centre being ticket redemption games. It is safe to say the revenue follows this trend as well."

The company offers 25 different ticket redemption games to the market, with newcomers Axe Master, Rock the Rim and HyperNova joining legacy products such as Big Bass Wheel and Ticket Monster.

"I've always said that competitive games do very well in most countries," said Lense. "People like to compete against one another. We provide them the opportunity to do this with games like basketball, axe throwing, air hockey, strategy games, videmption, baseball throwing and others."

Videmption, the short form version of video redemption, is an example of the format being adapted to more modern, tech-centric sensibilities.

"We do offer several videmption products currently, with more to come," said



Lense. "Grand Piano Keys, Willy Crash, Pop the Lock. Some of these titles have a strong mechanical aspect to them but use a video to accentuate gameplay."

In its various guises, redemption is arguably the full package for an operator. Daniel Coppola of ICE agrees, saying redemption offers the ideal mixture of everything a location would want in a successful game.

"We have seen upwards of 70-80 per cent of a location's game-based revenue associated with redemption games," he said. "For the foreseeable future, we see the redemption sector remaining healthy.

"A lot of what drives the redemption market is twofold: great games that have rewarding ticket bonuses, and the location's redemption counter.

There can be a direct correlation between a location's redemption counter and the earnings of the redemption games, no doubt about it. Furthermore, the redemption games are timeless, appeal to all ages and demographics and the whole experience cannot be replicated in any way at home."

ICE's vast array of redemption games covers several categories.

"Our group games like ICEBall, Down the Clown, Centipede, All In, Tons of Tickets and Whack A Clown are experiencing an uptick in location-based collections and sales," said Coppola.

"We also have a category of games that we classify as quick play and ticket bonus driven, like our Monopoly, Hoop It Up,



Whack N Win and Treasure Quest.

"It is important to have a balance of such redemption games in a location - a good mix of group play and quick play. The competitive



Prizezilla

Self-service prizes from Amusement Connect

THE Prizezilla redemption machine is a self-service product aimed at enhancing or taking the place of a staffed redemption counter. A 43ins HD touchscreen gives customers access to over 40 prize options, with a maximum prize capacity of 630 items. A wide variety of prize types is supported, from plush to electronics and gift cards.

When not in use, the screen has an Attraction Mode that displays prize choices, high scores and special messages/advertising for the operator.

Players simply scan their card at the reader, are shown prizes they have sufficient tickets to redeem for, and collect their prize. Tickets

can be combined from multiple cards. To avoid the

disappointment of a "sold out" notice for a customer, the system automatically removes any sold out items from the menu.

The software supports unlimited email or mail-only prizes. Inventory can be tracked and prices managed using web-based admin, giving the operator more time off-site.



nature of our group games keeps players coming back for more and encourages repeat play while some of our other skill redemption games offer the ability to win lots of tickets."

ICE also offers redemption titles in partnership with the likes of GB Amusements, Play Mechanix and Raw Thrills.

"Right now, we offer a few video redemption games, like All In, Centipede and Monopoly," said Coppola. "Our research and development team is continually focusing on video redemption, as these types of games really have a niche in FECs.

"We were fortunate to have introduced Deal or No Deal, which, at the time, revolutionised the industry. It gave locations the ability to get a higher price per play on a game than ever before. Our Harpoon Lagoon was a great group-based game in the video offerings. We also have great new video redemption products in the design phases now where we are collaborating with Play Mechanix and Raw Thrills."

The ability to offer such a varied product offering is key to redemption's enduring appeal, said Electrocoin's John Stergides.

"Different games appeal to different players and we can see during the current period that family entertainment is increasing. We believe the income will be steady over time but the appeal for players to play a game and be rewarded with points, which are converted into tickets and then exchanged for gifts, will

increase. So, redemption income will increase over non-redemption/prize games.

"Ticket redemption is more widely acceptable on the international markets than the UK but that's because there is more to offer in the UK. The UK also has amusement with prizes machines with low stakes and low prizes and, of course, the British invention, pushers, which can be found throughout the UK but not in many international markets."

Family entertainment is the driving force behind Electrocoin's product offering, said Stergides.

"They reward a small gift for their skill or when competing against other players, like the Hit and Smash in which players must throw the balls to drop a series of targets to be awarded accordingly, and two units can be linked for competitive play.

"Our Skill Cut Winner can reward players if they are unsuccessful in winning the big prize and our latest product, the four-player Ball Paradise, offers a community feature whereby if one player wins the prize, other active players are rewarded with tickets, thus everyone in a family can win together.

"We are marketing and developing a few games in the pipeline, with them all aimed at family entertainment. These include a basketball-type game, a shooting game and a new series of Mr Do titled games. Our other focus in terms of games is pinballs, which are targeted at families, like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Avengers Infinity Quest and Ghostbusters."

Over at Sega Amusements International, quick fire interactive games are the hot ticket item as far as redemption is concerned.

"Redemption games are a core part of any arcade or FEC and can account for 50 per cent to 70 per cent of a location's revenue," said the company's Lester Travasso.

"Quick fire redemption games have always been popular, however right now they are shining brightly. Games such as Power Roll, All In and Monopoly Roll N Go all offer a quick game



with instant win-every-time ticket winnings. And based on the success of these games in recent months, it seems like players are looking for this kind of game right now.

"At Sega Amusements International, redemption games have always been an essential part of our product portfolio and we look to offer a diversified offering for operators. Our interactive games get players moving with ball toss games such as in Pixel Chase, Snowball Toss and Let's Bounce; or interaction by rotating a wheel with Maze Escape and Treasure Quest or using a mallet in classic whacker games such as Whack A Clown and Whack N Win.

"For players that want the fun of a crane and win tickets we offer games such as Tons of Tickets and Ticket Time. And we could not conclude this list without current hit quick-fire games such as Power Roll, All In, Monopoly Roll N Go and Hoop It Up."



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The visual appeal of videmption is also a good way of spicing up a games floor, continued Travasso. "Combining video with redemption has been a cool way to offer players a unique and rewarding experience. Games such as Centipede Chaos deliver a visually exciting gameplay with various levels as well as boss challenges, then it combines the rewarding experience of winning tickets, which heightens the overall experience.

"In a similar way, Hot Racer brings this same experience to younger players in the family."

The lay of the land according to BANDAI NAMCO Amusement Europe is less clear-cut, citing "many different variables" in regards to redemption's impact on a location's bottom line, although its presence as a positive force is undeniable.

"We all know it's a strong sector in the market and always has been," said the company's Steph Jones. "There's been a small surge in production of redemption at this time, but it has always been a busy market with no signs of slowing.

"On the manufacturer side, the cost of development is more favourable than traditional video games, and on the consumer side it appeals to have the opportunity to win something back other than simply exchanging coins for straight-up entertainment.

"The increased demand will keep growing in current markets and hopefully further markets will open to redemption. In terms of the game content, there's an increased volume of licensed/branded goods coming to the market."

BNAE's redemption roster is numerous, said Jones, with plenty to choose from the leading suppliers in the business.

"Our DC Comics Pushers are the gifts that keep on giving for us and for our customers, and with a licence as perpetually strong as DC to back it up, it has become indivisible with the arcade.

"Red Zone Rush is one of our latest entries, which had the misfortune of releasing as the markets were near shutting down through lockdowns, but we're pleased to see an acceleration in popularity as more venues note its attraction and repeatability. Some



games appear to snowball like this while their recognition and trust develop, and others pack a punch from first entry.

"Speaking of which, Raw Thrills' Bust-A-Move Frenzy was released during the pandemic but managed to cut through the market fiercely, firstly on various test sites and then flew out of production straight to venues across the regions.

"We have more fun games coming in from TKM who have excelled with Ball Madness – they're incredibly intuitive with customer needs, making adaptations and also quickly implementing high-quality UV cleaning systems to combat Covid-19 fears, should customers want this function.

"Lastly, Adrenaline Amusements have so many wonderfully bright and creative machines – their latest release to the sector being Zombie Smasher, and also many with strong licences like Rabbids and Ladders and Hot Wheels."

Some strong titles head up the videmption side of things for BNAE, too.

"Raw Thrills' Bust-A-Move Frenzy alongside Space Invaders Frenzy, and Adrenaline Amusements cover video redemption with the previously mentioned Rabbids and Ladders and Hot Wheels.

"We still have plenty of interest in Crossy Road after such a long time on the market, because the game is simply that good. New games are great for progressing the market with more advanced tech and new innovations, but

when a game has the aptitude for longevity, it becomes such a valuable asset – we're not keen on wastage for countless reasons and it's always a welcome factor to see a game still piquing sheer interest without brandishing a 'new' stamp or investing in any ads and marketing to push stock."

The universal popularity of redemption can still be hindered in markets that do not permit it, however, said Allison Timberlake of LAI Games, although the ones that do see high demand.

"There are still plenty that are, unfortunately, unable to operate these games. Mature markets can see anything up to 60-70 per cent of their revenue derived from redemption games. It could be that this figure has now peaked, with some potential decline for the near future.

"We're starting to see manufacturers evolve more attraction style games and products. LAI Games was no different, where we launched Virtual Rabbids: The Big Ride nearly four years ago to huge success. Many are imitating this and creating a new trend for centrepiece attractions.

"Our award winning HyperPitch is in high demand, along with HyperShoot, Let's Bounce, our classic Speed of Light and the family friendly Toy Frenzy. We're also seeing high interest in our newly launched Angry Birds Coin Crash redemption pusher and Slam 'n' Jam Ultra, our modern evolution of the street basketball game.

"Toy Frenzy is our current videmption game – something for all the family to play together. Simple carnival style gameplay with three positions that allows competitive or co-operative play. Its compact footprint and price point make it outstanding value for any location."

Although some markets are prohibitive, one international market that does permit it is Italy.

"Ticket redemption has the bigger income inside Italian arcades," said Tiziano Tredese of Italy's Elmac. "I can say 60 per cent ticket redemption, 20 per cent cranes, 20 per cent video games.

"The Elmac offer now is mainly based on: Rainbow, Fast Gunman, Willy Crash and Splash Fun, a four-player water game."

From a US perspective, Elaut USA says it is difficult to determine the amount made by redemption in locations (likely not helped by the sheer size of North American sites). That said, the company's Anthony Maniscalco is positive its presence is likely to increase.





"With the lack of video game development, video offerings are less and less in a location. I'd say redemption and claw cranes would naturally increase in their revenue percentage by that alone, as the new game options, redemption and claws, will be needed.

"Interactivity and group play seem to be becoming more popular than in the past," he said. "Bigger is still always better in most cases.

"Our Monster Drop Extreme and Power Drop Extreme continue to be staple products on all new location equipment lists."

From the perspective of developer Bob's Space Racers, which makes and sells games for the arcade and FEC markets, redemption will be evergreen as long as the market invests in it.

"At BSR, we feel redemption will always increase as long as the operator puts a priority on the redemption merchandise and keeping the equipment updated with the best games," said company president Jack Cook. "The proper merchandise and pay out percentages used can be even more important than the actual games themselves, at times.

"I don't think some operators put enough priority on the merchandise, and look at it as only an expense and not necessarily the powerful tool that it is to add to revenues."

BSR currently offers over 20 redemption games in many different versions in the redemption sector.

"We currently have nine new redemption machines that will be available within the next 60 days as 2022 models," added Cook.

Similarly, supplier JNC Sales can see the popularity of redemption from the perspective of the distributor.

"As global machine suppliers, we've certainly seen an increase in the demand of redemption games in recent years," said the company's Sam Coleman. "I think a heightened customer demand for prizes or tickets reflected on their gaming performance, alongside increased development in redemption machines, means that there is now a lot more variety within this machine category."

JNC's position makes it easy for it to see what games are popular on the international stage.

"Games such as Keymaster and Balloon Buster, for example, have always been popular used items for us to sell overseas, and now we are seeing ticket redemption equipment become equally desirable for the international market," Coleman said.

"JNC always have a range of quality used redemption machines, from the likes of Down the Clown and Gold Fishin to Triple Turn and Slam a Winner, so it means we can offer machines of all sizes and prices to each customer.



"We've got a range of new and used redemption games that are all available to see on our website. JNC's new redemption games, such as Giant Prize Pod Pro and the Dino Land ball-shooters, have been very popular as they are high performing games at low prices, and they complement our range of used machines from some of the world's best known manufacturers."

In terms of videmption? "A quick look at our current stock shows popular video redemption games available such as Circus Jars (WIK), Pirates Hook (UNIS), Frogger (ICE) and Black Out (Adrenaline), to name a few."

According to the UK's Ideal One, an operator gets out of redemption what they put in. From game type and size to prize presentation, it's "go big or go home," said the company's John Vallis.

"For those who operate redemption games and prize shops, the income from these games can represent a significant amount of their overall revenue.

"Redemption has been on an upward curve for the past few years and you can usually gauge the popularity by the number of new games released by the manufacturers and certainly for the foreseeable future I think that redemption



will continue on an upward curve."

The company's key product in this sector is the Redemption Centre Manager. "RCM is a complete stock management system native to the Ideal One suite of products and can also work along side the One POS system, which can be used for guest registration, card management and integrated loyalty/reward incentive schemes," said Vallis.

"RCM could help an operator to reduce the number of employees it needs behind the counter, even in busy locations, as it enables the operators to serve up to 15 guests with up to four employees at any one given time, which is great for reducing queues at the prize counter. It has proved itself to be a valuable addition for operators to run their redemption operation whilst improving the operator and guest experience.

"Full inventory management, including digital purchase orders and digital goods receipt, streamline the process of ordering and receiving goods and removes some of the errors that can be caused by manually entering information. It also takes up a lot less of the staff's time and can be done at any time of the day, as everything is updated in real time.

"RCM also boasts extensive stock reporting, analytics and auditing features which will help a business make faster, better buying decisions in the future. Stock auditing can be done at any time of the day, which means no more late nights for staff having to run their audits after close of business. The backend UI is very easy and intuitive for the staff to use; new items can be created in the system and goods received for example in less than two minutes.

"All in all, RCM offers a fast, simple and effective way to manage your prize shop operations."

Redemption, whether in the form of ticket redemption, direct vend or videmption, has weathered every storm it has come up against, and has always emerged on the other side a stronger entity. Each area brings its own unique characteristics to the table, contributing to its status as one of the most bankable sectors in the amusements world, and that looks set to continue for the foreseeable future.

