

ICE Heats Up

Games, HQ Upgrades, Team Additions & Travel Are Just the Tip of an Impressive 2024 ICEberg

Innovative Concepts in Entertainment, known throughout the industry as ICE, reports that 2024 brings the busiest and most exciting agenda in its four decades. Never resting on their laurels, aggressively pursuing new game development and opportunities, they say this year will be a particularly special one for ICE on a few fronts.

The company has already released two new games, *Quarterback Pro* and *Double Dribble*, both of which hit production in March. Four other games are in the pipeline, slated for testing by late summer with hopes of having at least two of those at the EAS Show in September and IAAPA Expo in November.

Back at their headquarters in the Buffalo, N.Y., suburb of Clarence, they're reimagining and improving their front office space and have added many new members to their team, updated their website, improved parts ordering and much more.

Sports-Driven Roots

Starting with their iconic *Chexx* hockey, ICE has been manufacturing sports games for decades and, at this year's Amusement Expo, introduced two new titles to their lineup: *Quarterback Pro* and *Double Dribble*.

Back in 2010, ICE released its first football game, *NFL Two-Minute Drill*, and since that time, the development team has made significant improvements to the game, creating a more intuitive football experience that incorporates three different gameplay modes using pop-out targets. With their latest American football game, *Quarterback Pro* (available now), the R&D team has taken it to the next level, and football fans are digging it, lining up to test their



ICE's *Quarterback Pro* can be set up as a single unit (left) or paired with a big marquee to really make it pop on the gameroom floor. It's the first American football game from the company since their *NFL Two-Minute Drill* that debuted in 2010.

speed and accuracy.

"What's really special about this piece is that players are ranked on passing yards, accuracy and touchdowns thrown, which will then give the player a real QB rating, just like the pros," explained company sales representative Ryan Coppola. "That QB rating is then equated to a ticket payout. It creates great excitement between players. The skill-based action promotes competition between friends and families."

Company VP Dan Coppola added: "We heard many compliments from customers on the size of the game, ease of assembly and the price. The built-in service trap door was well received by service technicians, too." He said the game also works great when placed within an "ICE skill wall of games," a common gameroom floor layout using many of their carnival-style amusements.

The other early 2024 debut is *Double Dribble* (also available now), the factory's third basketballer built for kids. ICE's first two kids' hoops games – *Mini Dunxx* and *Hoop Troop* – were successful, but execs say *Double Dribble* has quickly proven itself to be their best. And since it's a 2-player game, they report earnings are close to double those of the earlier titles.

Those brand-new titles join *World Football Pro*, a soccer game in production for over a year. The concept was originally brought to the ICE team by the U.K.-based GB Amusements and, they say, has quickly proven itself to reach all demographics in the arcade industry. (GB Amusements, founded by Gordon Crompton and Ben Wilson, has a proven and successful track record, having also worked with ICE on the popular skill redemption game *Whack N Win*.)

“Our *World Football Pro* continues to be a great earning game,” said Dan Coppola. “The gameplay complements our existing games nicely – whether it’s our classic carnival games like *Down the Clown*, *NBA Hoops*, or even our brand-new *Quarterback Pro* – the physical and competitive ball games are proven winners. Players love throwing balls, knocking down targets, making baskets, or scoring goals and competing against one another.”

ICE believes much of the success of *World Football Pro* stems from the fact that it’s not a tethered ball, which separates it from previous soccer games.

Coppola emphasized: “We have seen great collection reports across the board with *World Football Pro* – from seasonal beach spots to year-round FECs. Most recently, we’re in the process of shipping a new *World Football Pro* to every Round1 location in the U.S., with the assistance of Betson Distributing. It’s a true testament to the confidence and success that they are experiencing with this game.”

Games for the Street, Too

Don’t fall into the trap of thinking that ICE’s games are “just” for redemption operators. Sure, that’s where the



Double Dribble is the latest hoops game designed for kids.

company finds global success, but route operators successfully embrace the skill and sports games, too.

David Leichus, owner of Sunstar Vending (which boasts a route of over 10,000 pieces of equipment in operation in the U.S.), said, “We saw an opportunity a few years ago to expand our presence in locations across the country and started putting ICE sports and redemption games in non-redemption locations. We saw that even games like *Whack a Clown* or *Whack N Win*,

which traditionally are played to win tickets, can be put on an amusement-only setting and still generate excellent revenues.

“Combine these games with ICE’s air hockey and sports games, and it’s a great mix. Players just love to compete and not having to put manned redemption counters in every location really opens tremendous possibilities for our route.”

Added Greg Kania, who works in U.S. sales at ICE: “Since I can remember, the typical set up of games in a bar, restaurant or tavern has always been a basketball, jukebox, ATM and *Golden Tee*.

“However, in the past couple of years that trend has slowly been changing due to the savvy and aggressiveness of the younger-generation operator.

Today you can find many of our extremely popular carnival games like *Down the Clown*, *Bean Bag Toss*, *Whack a Clown* and even *World Football Pro* in street locations across the nation.”

Kania, who works closely with Bar Partners out of Austin, Texas, got feedback from one of their founders, Darren Delp: “We have had a great experience with ICE for well over a decade and bought many of their different games. We’ve been extremely pleased with the

results we have seen on *Down the Clown*, *Whack a Clown* and *World Football Pro* in bars and other street locations. The fact that they are interactive and are games that both adults and kids love to play is a big win. ICE has some great games that have been earning and hold up to the beating they take on the street.”

Operator Jason Rubin, the owner of Entertainment Experts, agreed, explaining that *Whack a Clown* “has a timeless appeal that brings out the competitive spirit and nostalgia in people.” He added: “It’s a crowd pleaser in any bar game lineup.”



Football of the other sort – soccer – gets the ICE treatment in their *World Football Pro*.

Have it Your Way

ICE games are brightly colored, appealing machines from the get-go, but Kania detailed that another key component of their U.S. sales success “has been our ability to design and create customized games for our customer base.

“Over the years, we have worked closely with customers to help design graphics, incorporating their company colors, logos, theming, etc. It’s a great way for operators to promote their brand and help separate them from their competitors, too. This has been a huge win for both ICE and the operators in securing locations that may otherwise have chosen not to get into the arcade amusement business.”

Dan Coppola said games from *Air FX* to basketball games to the iconic *Super Chexx* can get the custom treatment: “The possibilities are endless. The branding, along with the highest quality-built games, can be a real difference maker.”

Joey Mucha, who operates at Thriller, a brand-new location in downtown L.A., worked with ICE on custom games this year, saying the process was “an absolute breeze.”

He explained, “They were extraordinary to work with and the finished product exceeded everyone’s expectations. Our project wasn’t the typical adding of a logo. We wrapped games with a classy wood grain to elevate the aesthetic for an upscale arcade bar.”

Bringing Cool Games to the World

Domestic sales are key to the factory’s success, but so is their global presence, and the ICE sales team has been taking their energy on the road, traveling to important international trade shows to kick off 2024 including EAG London, IAAPI India, DEAL Dubai and FEE Bergamo.

“Each show demonstrated that our industry is alive and well as we saw both experienced and new operators look to take many dif-



For Thriller, a new location in Los Angeles for operator Joey Mucha, customization meant upscaling the arcade games with wood grain treatment to the cabinets.

ferent FEC concepts to new levels,” said Ryan Coppola. “EAG London was a great show, particularly for *World Football Pro*, as the game is the number one single-player game in several FECs throughout the U.K.”

The company’s European distributor is Sega Amusements International. “Justin Burke and the sales team at Sega have done an unbelievable job getting

behind a game they knew would be a hit in their markets,” commented Gene Brogowski, ICE’s international sales director. “It’s a great feeling being able to give their sales team a winner on all accounts and we look forward to hearing more about how *World Football Pro* is enhancing locations all over not only the U.K., but Europe as a whole.

“We are extremely fortunate to have Justin, Martin, Maria, Darrell and Steve represent our product across the pond as they are truly an extension of the ICE team.”

ICE’s presence at the IAAPI show in India was in partnership with their distributor CSML. They showed *NBA Gametime* for the first time ever in addition to *World Football Pro* and *Super Kixx*. Over the last few years, ICE said the Indian FEC market has been growing and expanding rapidly, as well as other social entertainment concepts throughout the country.

“This year, IAAPI was the largest ever in terms of exhibitors and attendance,” reported Rohhit Mathur, CEO of CSML. “We observed that there were many people from smaller towns and suburbs looking to enter the FEC business. Most were aspiring to buy

new games and interested in higher quality games as well. The larger operators have big growth plans for this year.”

While Brogowski handled the IAAPI show, Ryan Coppola took on the new show in Milan, the FEE Bergamo. “It was refreshing to see so many operators come to the show from both the north and south of Italy. ICE has always enjoyed a very special relationship with Roberto Marai and his distribution company in Italy, Faro Games.”

Company topper Joe Coppola added: “Roberto really brought redemption games and the idea of redemption locations to Italy. He introduced ICE product to the Italian market when video was booming, but not many operators were running redemption games or setting up redemption counters. ICE has been working with Faro



At DEAL in Dubai, International Sales Director Gene Brogowski is greeted by Mr. Abdulrahman Falaknaz, the president of International Expo-Consults. He presented Brogowski with an award thanking him and ICE for their long-term commitment to the show and customers of the region. DEAL 2024 marked ICE’s 30th year at the show.



At IAAPA, Ryan Coppola, Dan Coppola, Greg Kania and Gene Brogowski.

Games in this market for over 10 years and we are appreciative of everything they are doing to try to expand the FEC market and ICE’s high-quality games into the country.”

The ICE team transitioned directly from the Italy and India shows to the DEAL show in Dubai, with a booth showcasing 15 different games, including *Double Dribble*. This was ICE’s 30th year exhibiting at DEAL, a substantial milestone for the company. They showed their games with their distributor in that region – Warehouse of Games.

Sales director Gene Brogowski also received an award for his loyalty to this show over the last three decades. Ryan Coppola said, “Gene’s dedication to growing this market, and providing his vast wealth of knowledge to the operators here, has been a proven recipe for success for ICE in the MENA territories. We look forward to seeing what this market holds in the years ahead as there are so many projects in the works throughout the Middle East.”

Meanwhile in Buffalo

While ICE was active on the road getting in front of customers, the company was also making tremendous progress internally at the ICE offices in the Buffalo, N.Y., suburb of Clarence.

The parts service department has

been working with their local website partner, Clevermethod, to make significant technological updates and create a more user-friendly after-sale service and parts ordering experience for customers.

Furthermore, ICE launched a new website back in January that created a seamless viewing experience of their product range online. A couple examples of these enhancements include images of ICE games on location in FECs around the globe. Additionally, operators can now see renderings of what multiple units with marquees look like, as well as both setup and shipping dimensions for all ICE games.

From the parts side, ICE upgraded to Shopify 2.0. Parts department manager Lenny Hayes explained: “We’ve made enhancements across the board. First, the ability to now give customers real-time shipping costs is a huge upgrade. In the past, we had to give estimates with shipping charges and now a customer will receive an accurate freight quote during checkout.

“Also, Shopify allows us to enter all the dimensions and weights for all the parts we sell. Finally, using Shopify will allow customers to easily track their orders and allow us to serve them better because it will be integrated into Zendesk, another component which will assist customers with their technical service needs.”

Service director Dave Bartel added, “Our new support website has many new features. You can access important service bulletins on our games, learn about software updates, access manuals and review articles on how to repair various faults you might have with your game. We have a new support system that tracks your progress and gives you direct access to our support team, streamlining the entire support process.

“The reporting and analytical side of Zendesk will allow us to identify problems with new game releases, identify issues we have with certain parts, and allow us to service customers better by identifying technical service issues sooner and with more information.”

ICE has also expanded resources within their service department. Timothy Finney, ICE’s GM and human resources VP, said, “On the technical side of ICE we are thrilled to have added James Williams and John Sadler. James works with customers globally, answering technical-related questions and partnering with the parts department when necessary. After-sales service has always been a major focus at ICE and James is helping maintain that top level of service ICE has prided itself on. John provides technical solutions support and repairs to our clients globally. He’s been instrumental in the repair side of our business.”



James Williams

Over the last 18 months, ICE has taken on over 100 new employees. This includes additions to all major departments at ICE, with most of these additions joining ICE’s production team. The company credits Tim Finney for his dedicated and focused efforts in onboarding many new qualified individuals who have made ICE better over the last two years.

Joe Coppola added, “Elie Harfouche,

Mark Conlon and Gary Ball have been instrumental in ensuring all the new employees get proper training and are given all the resources to be successful in their new roles. ICE's production has been able to reduce new game lead times from six months to 3-5 weeks as efficiency has improved immensely, allowing us to get more product out the door."

Mark Conlon, one of ICE's production managers, declared, "A big focus for us over the last year and a half has been our production efficiency. There were many contributing factors to this. The supply chain leveling out has certainly helped us, but that was largely out of our control. To focus directly on what is in our control, we conducted a deep analysis of our labor and its trends. As hiring personnel has normalized, we have made a concerted effort to upgrade our workforce as much as possible.

"Keeping a close eye on output and quality, we feel we have put 'the best team on the field.' We have also staffed our internal vendors to the point that we can build more to the 15-week projection and not the weekly schedule. This allows the internal vendors to just 'top off' levels, which creates increased efficiency and allows the production team to ebb and flow between game lines that may be affected by outside vendor issues or other variables. As we stand today, our efficiency is at peak performance."

ICE's focus on the workforce over the last 24 months has also been supported and driven by the company's veteran production manager, Elie Harfouche, who detailed, "Recruiting the right talent and offering professional development opportunities did help in supporting our growth. We've also optimized the workflow to increase our production efficiently, identifying bottlenecks and implementing processes without compromising quality."

Harfouche, who is mainly responsible for scaling the production side of the business as sales have grown over the years, had this to say about the company's growth and how he has adapted

from a production standpoint: "As we grew, we put a major focus on our quality standards and assuring quality remains consistent. We established a new process and we put systems in place to handle production. We invested in the best tooling and machinery available in the market today. We also implemented an ongoing preventative maintenance program into effect."

Starting in 2021, ICE embarked on the most aggressive hiring initiative in its history to meet



the most significant game backorder situation they'd ever faced. In the process, the real challenge was making sure its "tight-knit family" culture was not lost while expanding the workforce so substantially.

"The ICE family has grown throughout our 40-plus years in business," Finney said, "and with growth comes change. We are proud of ICE's commitment to diversity and have always felt that our employee population should be as diverse as our portfolio of customers. We sell in over 75 countries and now within the walls of ICE have over nine different languages spoken. We have aggressively recruited diverse employees through our resettlement partners here in Buffalo. Our diversity at ICE challenges the status quo with new thoughts and ideas that lead to the creation of more efficient systems."

New Front Office Remodel

With all those new employees, it was time for an upgrade of the front office of their manufacturing facility. Other than a mid-2000s expansion, the 10,000-sq.-ft. space hasn't seen many updates since

the initial move-in in the late '90s. The project got underway in April and should be complete by December.

"The idea is really to utilize the space much better and more effectively, and move our game showroom to the forefront, making newly-developed ICE games the focal point of the entrance to our building," said Joe Coppola. "We live the amusement and entertainment business every day at ICE and, that will be reflected in a new energy and vibe we hope to create in this new space.

"We're also opening up the entire front office to better represent our collaborative culture," he continued. "Make no mistake, our admin, sales and accounting teams work very intensely at what we do, but we also genuinely enjoy each other very much and feed off the energy of others in the office."

The new layout will be more open and better-lit and feature new conference rooms, kitchen area, server room and much more open office and workstation layout.

Coppola said another major factor for such an extensive remodel is their desire to "continue to bring our valued customers, suppliers and development partners from around the globe into ICE to both learn how we can better work together, as well as educate them on our extensive product line of amusement games and attractions."

In closing, Joe reflected on how far ICE has come in just a few short years since they were heading into 2021 during a time of great global uncertainty when so many organizations and industries faced incredible challenges.

"We feel incredibly energized and, at the same time, very fortunate. We are coming off the best sales year in our history: 2023. Getting there took tremendous focus and tons of very hard work by the individuals mentioned above, and so many more who make ICE what it is today, including our fantastic suppliers.

"And the real reason ICE looks so optimistically forward to the next 40 years: our incredible customers from around the globe who have always been so supportive. We are genuinely grateful."

New Faces, Promotions at ICE



Voicu Nicorici

In March, ICE promoted **Voicu Nicorici** to vice president of research and development. Nicorici has been with the company for five years and previously served as the head of the electrical department and as a production supervisor, overseeing game builds for the likes of *World Football Pro*, *Hoops FX*, *NBA Hoops* and *Dodgeball*.

Drew Krouse, COO at ICE, commented on Nicorici's promotion: "Voicu brings a tremendous amount of electrical engineering knowledge and overall general leadership to the team. He will work closely with our R&D team to lead projects from the prototype stage through pre-production and eventually into production. I am personally very excited to evolve and grow our development team and this move will give me more freedom to focus on the initial ideas and creation of new product. We understand now more than ever we need that edge in new games ideas, we must stay aggressive and continue to bring out 3-5 new products every year. We have added significant new talent to the development department in facets from software to hardware, new mechanical engineers as well as Voicu now who brings us additional resources on the electrical engineering side."

Nicorici, who was born in Romania and worked in Italy for over 15 years, has brought to ICE an incredible work ethic along with new ideas, creativity and a genuine desire to be an integral part of the ICE team.

Joe Coppola added, "Voicu brings a fantastic and extensive work history and background to our R&D Department. His passion for our industry combined with his electrical engineering expertise brings another highly talented individual to our experienced development team. Voicu worked his way up at ICE from the technical service team to running our board repair area and harnessing, to running one of our production teams and now into this key position in game development. His 'roll up your sleeves and get it done' attitude immediately was a fit for

our company culture and his values and approach to business aligns very well with the leadership team at ICE. We could not be more thrilled to see Voicu and many others in the company continue to evolve and grow here."



Dean Popielski

Dean Popielski has filled Nicorici's previous role as one of the company's two production supervisors. Popielski, who has been with ICE for more than 20 years, will work with Gary Ball leading production of ICE's 20-plus product lines.

Mark Conlon, one of ICE's production managers, said, "Without a doubt, a real highlight in this first quarter of 2024 has been the promotion of Dean Popielski to production supervisor. Dean has been a go-to guy for ICE for many, many years and this opportunity couldn't have come at a better time. Dean is at the top of his game and his knowledge of the company and the energy in which he carries out his work is unparalleled. In my 31 years I have said many times, ICE isn't just a place to work. It's been our home and family, and so many of us have literally grown up here. Watching Dean move through the ranks has been a heart-warming experience for me. He is a good man and a top-notch human being, and we are better off as an organization for having him."

Popielski started at ICE as a game builder when he was a teenager and worked in various different roles over the last five years leading into his new role.

Front Office Additions

ICE has also added some new hires in their accounting and IT departments. Tim Finney, VP of human resources, noted, "Our corporate office is excited to welcome new personnel, **Aaron Wallak** and **Karen Stempniak**. Both have become integral to the accounting team, while **Tony Gutierrez**, has taken on a major role here at ICE leading our IT department.



Aaron Wallak



Tony Gutierrez



Karen Stempniak

ICE's sales and marketing department has also added **Kassi Lista** and **Nina Segarra**. Lista is focusing on home game sales and social media content creation, while Segarra is focusing on website design and graphic design work.

Ryan Coppola, who works with both Kassi and Nina daily, said, "As we continue to grow our e-commerce and online presence, Kassi and Nina have been instrumental in fine tuning the processes of our home games business. Nina has done an outstanding job in a relatively short period of time revamping our home game website to be more user friendly for customers as well as maintaining our social media platforms. Beyond that, her eye for design and creativity have helped ICE broaden and sharpen our brand image."

While Segarra is working closely with Coppola on ICE's websites as well as digital and social media marketing, Lista has been working closely with ICE veteran Greg Kania to grow home game sales both online and through resellers.

Coppola said, "Kassi is another great example of someone at ICE working their way up in the company and evolving in her new role in sales. Kassi's product knowledge and attention to detail with our home game customers and resellers has been an excellent addition to our sales team. She also continues to contribute significantly to the overall look and vibe of our websites and socials. I look forward to working alongside Kassi and Nina for many years to come on the sales and marketing side of our business."



Kassi Lista



Nina Segarra

