

Ringling the changes in FECs

ICE's redemption pieces a key part of the market

THE emerging trend in the North American amusement machine market is the blend that has come about between value play games and quick redemption pieces, says ICE's Ryan Coppola.

"This blend is now very important. It can be seen with the popularity of having a skill or sports wall, where players have the opportunity to compete with one another, playing skill-based games where ticket winnings may not be the most important factor."

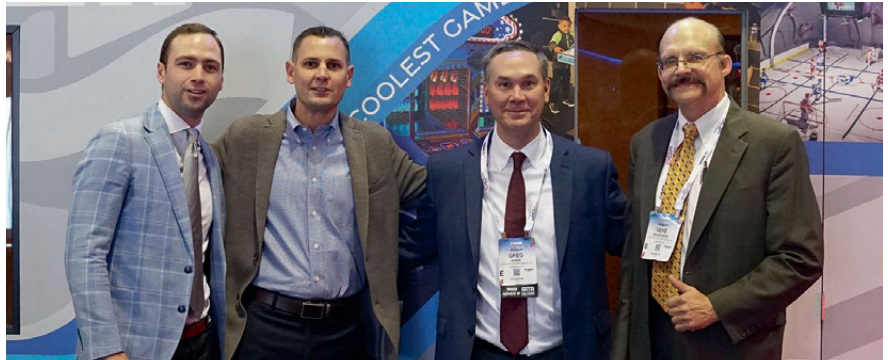
Coppola, who is working closely alongside ICE's well-known director of international sales, Gene Brogowski, has made a keen study of the global market, but has not lost sight of the fact that the premier market for ICE's wide variety of novelties and redemption games is the domestic sector.

"We've seen the North American market change quickly over the past couple of years," he said, "as traditional locations in strip malls have seen a drop in footfall. We all know that this has been caused by the rise in online retail and accelerated by the pandemic. Ecommerce has changed the landscape of shopping malls and hopefully FEC operators can continue to cut strong lease deals to bring in new businesses to these centres."

One of the side effects of major retail stores closing their doors in shopping malls has been the growth in amusement destinations. Former department stores are now being taken over to be used for wide varieties of entertainment.

"There are numerous examples of this throughout North America. Take for example, the Carlisle Sports Emporium in Pennsylvania, with go karts, Hologate VR, mini-golf and batting cages. Then there's the Clubhouse Rochester in New York, with arcade, batting cages, soft play and mini-golf. Another example is the Funplex in New Jersey or NEB's in Canada which has over 100 games, 50 bowling lanes, VR rides, arcades, ropes course, mini-golf and F&B.

"Go look at the Boondocks Food and Fun in Utah and Colorado, they are prime examples, with go karts, arcade, ropes course, mini-golf,



ICE's sales team: Ryan Coppola, Dan Coppola, Greg Kania, and Gene Brogowski



Monopoly Mega Bonus

bowling and F&B. There are many examples of redundant retail being taken over to create entertainment destinations.

"They do an amazing job, blending other attractions into the FEC concept. Most of the places have both indoor and outdoor activities. Those I have mentioned are but a few that have pushed the boundaries in the US and Canada to lay down the foundation of the FEC of the future.

"We look forward to supporting all of these locations in any way possible as they continue to pave the new path for the FECs of tomorrow."

Add to these new trends the spread of the bar arcade concept with retro games bringing their youth back to the older generation, with the addition of a bar. "Operations like Sunstar Vending and Bar Partners have done an unbelievable job taking our products and finding a way to maximise the earnings of those games in bar-like settings. For us, games like NBA Gametime, Air FX and ICEBall have done really well in the bar arcade setting."

Coppola points to the staying power of VR/AR this time around as another factor which is positive for the FEC business today. "The technology in VR has proved to have longevity now and is still evolving positively. How we rid ourselves of the masks is more of a question for the manufacturers that make VR games. It is not a sector in which ICE has become involved – we know what we do best, redemption and sports games. I certainly still have a hard time telling an operator that any VR requiring an attendant is a good business move. There are plenty of other arcade games and attractions that do not require added labour. The business model really needs to be right if an operator is thinking about introducing VR that will take up a lot of space and which needs an attendant. It's not the right move for everyone."

In the past year, said Coppola, North American operators have been shown to be mostly concerned about aftersales service and choosing the right swipe card system. "These are the two biggest headaches for the industry right now. Both are areas that can provide big problems for operators if they do not go about it correctly. I think operators are seeing now more than ever that aligning themselves with a distributor and card swipe system that has their back is very important.

"There are certainly operators out there now specifically buying our product due to the aftersales service side of it. For us, that will continue to be a selling point for our games as we take pride in keeping ICE games up and running on location as best we can."



A skill wall from ICE