



**LEAGUE
DEVELOPMENT
AND RETENTION
BEST PRACTICES
GUIDE 2012**

**Proprietor Best Practice Programs
Compiled from the 2011
Business Trends Survey
Developed by the BPAA
League Development Committee**



The following pages contain the culmination of submissions from proprietors around the country with Best Practices in the area of League Retention and League Development. At the completion of the 2011 Business Trends Survey, which was developed by the League Development Committee, proprietors were given the opportunity to share their Best Practice in either League Retention or League Development. Over 635 centers were represented in this year's survey with over 120 Best Practice submissions received.

Led by the League Development Committee, BPAA staff reviewed the submissions and selected 49 to be shared with the industry – 20 in the section of League Development and 29 in the section of League Retention. It is important to note that many of the submissions spoke to the need of customer service as a center's main retention tool. The League Development Committee recognizes that providing exceptional customer service in today's business world is an imperative in retaining ALL customers including league bowlers. However, the intent of this document is to share ideas and league formats outside of providing exceptional customer service.

The result is this two part guide. The first section is League Development (pages 3-16) and the second is League Retention (pages 17-34). Each Best Practice is presented in the same four question format that it was asked. In some cases where a question was not answered, the category is omitted.

The survey consisted of four questions:

Describe your Best Practice.

Why does it work?

What are your steps to success?

What has been the financial impact?

Thank you to all BPAA members who took part in the survey and submitted your Best Practice. Your participation is appreciated and your input will go a long way in helping your peers increase the profitability of their centers. It is the hope and goal of the League Development Committee that somewhere in this guide is a new idea for your center to try or an old idea that you just haven't thought about for some time.

If you did not have a chance to complete the survey this year, but have an idea you would like to share, we welcome your suggestions as we hope this will become an annual publication.

League Development

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

For a lot of proprietors, one of the leading problems/complaints in developing leagues is “Season Length.” I call my program “Let’s Get Rolling.” It is a 12- to 16-week league/club that targets open play bowlers ages 18 – 54. The program is priced between \$12-15 per week and is bundled to include:

- Bowling Fees (2 or 3 games)
- Rental Shoes
- Weekly Instruction
- Large Pizza & Pitcher of Beverage
- End of Season Party
- A New Bowling Ball or,
- A \$25 - \$50 Gift Card (depending on weekly fees and season length) to local businesses, restaurants or theme parks. While there is no traditional prize fund, small cash prizes are awarded for High Game and Series for both individual and team. I floor these programs on a continuing basis on Tue., Wed., and/or Thu. at 7:00 p.m. This program does require an experienced League/Club coordinator.

WHY IT WORKS

It matches what the open play customer wants and not what we want.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

- Lane-to-lane solicitation.
- Social networking.
- Telemarketing follow-up.
- Outside sales.



League Development

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Sponsoring 8-week, \$10.00, “Have-A-Ball” leagues are very popular.

WHY IT WORKS

New bowlers want short commitment programs. We still run our 35-week programs for 65% of our league business.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Targeting companies/groups willing to let us pitch the idea when they are in the center during paid or free company bowling outings.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

We have seen a increase in 10% of gross over the last 2 years.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We offer a Sunday night league special that is bowling only, no prize money, priced at \$8.00 per night. The cost makes it affordable for people—some do it as a second league—and we offer it at 5:00 and 7:00 p.m. We also use this format at 8:00 p.m. one night during the week.

WHY IT WORKS

It’s not expensive and it is just for fun. Not having prize money makes it very affordable for bowlers that can’t afford the \$15 or more weekly fees needed to offer prize money. Plus, at that price, couples are able to bowl at almost 2-for-the-price-of-1.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

We make it a point to let the casual bowler know that is strictly for fun. It assures them they can compete in a fun league if they’re not a good bowler or are just a beginning bowler without any pressure or skill self-esteem issues.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Sunday night was always a hard spot to get a league together. This format has given us DOUBLE shift leagues where we couldn’t get many bowlers during that time period before.

League Development

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Contacting non-profit organizations and encouraging fundraisers in the center during our off-peak times, then making an effort to turn interested bowlers into league bowlers.

WHY IT WORKS

You know bowlers are available at the time you're looking to fill and, if you can pick up a team or two from each event, you can field a league in that time slot after only a few events.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

One-on-one contact combined with helping individuals bowl better while they're in your center. If they see they are having fun, they are more receptive to your sales pitch.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is little up-front investment and revenue on the backend from each fundraiser we book and any subsequent leagues we might form.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We find key people within local businesses or organizations that have an ability to form teams or people who have influence on the social happenings within that company.

WHY IT WORKS

Being in a small community, we compete with larger towns and cities in the area that have better drawing capabilities so it is important for us to identify the local "movers & shakers."

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Foster relationships and keep in contact with these people once we have established who they are and possibly get some teams from those organizations or businesses.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Investment is only the time needed to talk. There is no cash outlay except for maybe flyers being sent to these people. Through this program, we have just recently gained two teams of three for a league. At the cash register, we have seen a weekly increase of about \$100 per week and they are here for 27 more weeks.

League Development

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We offer 9-Pin No Tap Leagues short season consisting of mixed trios and fours.

WHY IT WORKS

It's a short season with an increased prize fund and weekly prizes. We see a lot of high scores which makes bowlers happy.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Promoting early signups such as March for a May league.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

During each league every night, we have a different evening fun thing. One week might be NFL jersey night, or pink shirt night, or college night, red, white, and blue night, etc. We have a wheel with donations from sponsors like Chick-Fil-A, McDonald's, plus free games, popcorn, soft drinks, whatever else. If they participate in the night of fun, they get to spin the wheel an extra time. We also have special incentives for extra spins like someone getting a strike in the 5th frame of the second game and getting an extra turn at the wheel.

WHY IT WORKS

Because it's so much fun and changes every week, we've seen an increase from 7 teams to 11 teams to 26 this past summer. What is also special is the league bowls at 9 p.m., second shift. It works because everyone has fun.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Call everyone back the next year to thank them and invite them for the new year. Send out reminder cards, tell them to bring friends. During the summer, people come in to watch, see what is going on, and get interested in participating.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

We realized an increase of nearly \$6,000 this summer plus incremental spending. Most of the bowlers have remained in the leagues for fall, and say they will return next summer—that's 32 lanes full!

League Development

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

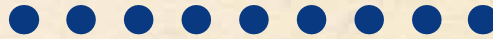
We are in the process of surveying open bowlers and listening for what they want. After we compile the results, we will respond by offering the league they want in January.

WHY IT WORKS

We don't know yet. We should have a better feel in early 2012.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Listen to the bowlers and respond to their needs. Making sure we have a plan. Executing the plan. Following through after execution to insure the program is running as we intended.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We tell our league bowlers if they bring in a new bowler, we will pay their dues and the new bowler's USBC dues for that year.

WHY IT WORKS

It gives the bowler an incentive to ask friends to join them next year.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

We make announcements at all league meetings and when we hand out the card rebates.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

It keeps our league participation up at a cost of about \$40/bowler. Revenue per new bowler should be \$500. Hard to track, though, which new bowlers would have joined without the incentive.



League Development

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We call it Zodo's Summer Kidz Club.

WHY IT WORKS

It brings lots of new youth bowlers into our center, some of whom we convert to Jr. League Bowlers. It also increases F & B and arcade sales.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Good planning and paying attention to the new customers to see what they are looking for.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Increased F & B and arcade sale plus a small growth in our Youth Program.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We have developed a 10-week Cook-Out 9-Pin League through the summer. We prepare all the food and the bowler gets to show up to bowl and have fun with a layout of food ready for them when they arrive. They love it!

WHY IT WORKS

Sunday nights through the summer the bowlers get to come bowling without having to fix dinner.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The league has helped create new bowlers for a short season league although it is not sanctioned.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We had a 15-week Team USA league for our youth this summer. We ran 3 different patterns and educated them on each pattern. Net gain was 32 new bowlers.

WHY IT WORKS

Kids liked the challenge.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Face-to-face selling to Fall youth bowlers.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

We only added about \$6,000 to revenue but the kids would not have bowled otherwise.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Sports League Scoring: Footbowl, Basketbowl, Basebowl, Hockey. Team wins calculated as touchdowns, baskets, goals or runs batted in using appropriate sport scoring (6 points TD, 1 run batted in, 2 points for a basket, etc.). Scoring is calculated by individual bowler, bowler vs. bowler and team, depending on which sport you are bowling. There is also a Most Valuable Player award given to the bowler with the most individual points for the league.

WHY IT WORKS

The season can be tied to the actual sports season (Baseball for summer leagues, Football and Hockey for fall/winter and Basketball for Winter/Spring. There is lots of action and lots of ways to win. League teams can enter or individuals from several teams/leagues can form a team or participate. Payouts based on per-person entry fee and can be large in some instances.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Promoting the leagues and getting all the paperwork/scoring sheets in order is the most important thing before the season starts and making sure records are kept up to date every week. Pay attention to detail since there are so many variables.

League Development

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

For the past number of years, we have taken out 4 full-page ads in the local newspaper, featuring a photo of a satisfied league bowler, along with a testimonial of why they like bowling at our center. The ads are run in mid- and late-August to attract new league bowlers. One ad (published twice) is targeted to adults and 55+ league bowlers, while the other ad (also published twice) is targeted to the parents of youth. At the bottom is a *bowl one game, get one game free* coupon.

WHY IT WORKS

In order to be noticed in a newspaper, an advertisement has to be larger than 1/2 page. There is too much clutter of smaller ads, so people are far less likely to stop and read them. The photo also increases ad recognition. People are 75% more likely to read an ad that has a photograph in it. It works because we get more people stopping to read the ad. The coupon helps people to act on the ad because it brings them into the center.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

The gist of the campaign is to find the right person—it needs to be a “Raving Fan”—who spreads the good word about league bowling to everybody they know. Also, it helps to get the ad out early enough that people have time to act on it, but not so early that we are not ready to field calls from prospective league bowlers.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Between new league bowlers as a result of the ad and extra monies spent by coupon-redeemers (shoe rental, extra bowling, food & beverage), it is a short-term, break-even initiative. More often than not, the league bowlers play more than one year, so the long-term implications are extremely positive.

League Development

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We start the second half of youth leagues December 1st which helps us grab soccer, football and cheerleaders at the end of their season. Length is seasons varies: Youth 1st half is 10 weeks and 2nd half is 20 weeks.

WHY IT WORKS

Parents tell us in August that the kids are playing a fall sport and will enroll after they are finished. They are not left with nothing to do in December waiting for a new season after the holidays.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Don't let the kids sit at home with several weeks of nothing to do. We call and track the kids plus get 2nd half flyers out to the schools.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Thousands in extra income in December.



League Development

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We introduced our “Bring a Friend” promotion in the 2010-2011 season to encourage existing league bowlers to introduce friends or family to the sport they like to participate in. Our surveys show that 8 out of 10 people who join a league were asked by friends or family members.

When an existing bowler introduces a new bowler to their league, they earn a \$25 gift certificate to be used towards their weekly bowling fees. For every additional bowler, they receive an additional \$20. Incentives are paid after the first 6 weeks of league play (to ensure the new bowler stays with the league). The recruiter is asked to complete a card providing us their name along with the new bowler’s name and their league.

Once new bowlers are verified, the recruiter receives a certificate for the amount they earned which is placed in their league payment envelope for credit. The new bowler receives a welcome letter along with a “Rewards Card” which is pre-loaded with \$25 for them to use during Open Play.

A new bowler is defined as someone who has not bowled in a league in the past 3 or more seasons. Top recruiters are recognized in the center during their league bowling.

WHY IT WORKS

We encourage and provide incentives to our most loyal customers who are with us for a minimum of 36 weeks and when they help bring in new customers. Prior to introducing this program, we did not do a very good job at tracking new bowlers. In the 2010-2011 season, 31 new bowlers were introduced to a league. This season, to date, 42 new bowlers were introduced to a league, which is matching the loss of bowlers in those leagues.

By encouraging customers to bring in new bowlers, it is helping to keep teams together without the worry of teams splitting. A few dollars go a long way. The top recruiter for this season is able to pay 4 weeks’ worth of bowling for recruiting 5 new bowlers to his league.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Direct mail continues to be a large piece of our marketing plan and we have successfully used full color postcard mailings which include a bowling coupon to promote our leagues and programs.

Our 2011-12 Fall/Winter League mailing drove in a 3% redemption rate (to-date), which covered the cost of 10% of our mailing. Our mailing goes to a database filled with current league bowlers and previous league bowlers (going back about 10 years), while it also includes coupon redeemers and other customers.

This program is outlined in each of these mailings, along with our monthly e-mail campaigns prior to the start of the season which helps drive league awareness. It is also mentioned in our social media outlets (Facebook and twitter) and announcements prior to league starts. And, it is included in all materials provided to our league officers for their meetings and distribution of league materials at both the end of the prior season and beginning of the new season.

The true key to success is making sure to inform bowlers that the program exists. Most importantly, tell them how to take advantage of the “free money” to pay for their bowling.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

A new bowler to a league is worth a minimum (on average) of \$504.00 for a 36-week season, which is just the lineage income and not including other spending in the center like Food & Beverage.

If all 42 of our new bowlers stay for the full season, that's at least \$43,000 in revenue (minus the cost of the program which is less than \$1000 in incentives) that we could have potentially lost, if we did not encourage our bowlers to bring in new bowlers. I would say, that is a pretty good ROI!

The key is measuring the number of bowlers that were new in the previous season and that stuck around the following season. For 2010-2011, we retained 85% of the new bowlers that were recruited.

League Development

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

To develop leagues, we use a multimedia marketing approach. Targeting a specific industry or group, we use direct mail offering a free party and mention the new league that is being developed. We follow up the mailing with a telephone call campaign to book free parties, develop contacts, screen out poor prospects, and register/floor teams. We also target common bonds to develop interest—i.e., auto suppliers bowling and networking league.

WHY IT WORKS

We find when the target has a discernible common bond, the mail campaign loosens up the prospects who accept the free party offer which gets them in the door. Personal phone contact builds goodwill, and establishes the chain of command and contacts. This allows a strategic follow-up that includes dates and possible referrals. This personal *foot-in-the-door* is key to continued contact. Don't just mail and don't just call.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Develop a solid target that shares a common bond, i.e. restaurant employees, auto suppliers, hospital/health workers, local merchants, etc.

Ensure that the product offered will meet the needs of the targets (time of day, length, cost, perks, etc.).

Direct Mail must be professionally designed and appeal beyond the intended league that is being formed. It should also include a free party invitation and special coupons as well as describe other center services. There needs to be a benefit beyond the league information so that it will be more appealing at the target business, organization or association, i.e., offer a free summer bowling party to the business employees and guests. This makes getting a phone contact easier.

Personal phone calls must be made by a qualified professional sales person to gain access to names and referrals, and to secure follow-up agreements until the league start-up date. Don't put your new, low-wage counter person on this task—owners or general managers should be performing this important work.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

We have generated over \$150,000 annually in new business by flooring new leagues.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Our Instant Gratification League is the only league that has grown this year. We award lottery tickets in certain frames, \$10 dinner certificates if you roll 3 strikes in the second game, oil change certificates if you pick 3 splits in a 3 game set, etc.

WHY IT WORKS

Individuals like the challenge and it is fun. The bowlers don't have to be good bowlers to participate and prizes are awarded right away.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

We go out and solicit area businesses for prizes that are awarded and offer opportunities for them to market their business to our patrons.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

It's the only league program that has shown an increase; they have fun and socialize. It's every other week and no pressure.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Two years ago, we created the Flex Singles league. It is a short season league where bowlers can bowl anytime they wish between Monday and Sunday. Standings were processed each Monday. The league was so popular, we were able to create two more leagues. This past summer, we created a Flex Doubles league that had 22 teams of 2 bowlers each.

WHY IT WORKS

It allows bowlers to be flexible with their schedules. It's great for shift workers or for people who tend to work a lot of overtime or travel in their jobs.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Flex is the answer. If a bowler knew that they could not bowl a particular week, they were permitted to pre-bowl as well. Centers need to be more flexible with their bowlers.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Due to the flexibility of the program, we charge 10% - 15% higher rate for their league play. We retain bowlers that normally would not bowl because of their schedules.

League Development

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Church league “Holy Rollers.” Teams bowl three games for 12 weeks and all money goes to the church as a fundraiser.

WHY IT WORKS

It gives churches a social event for their members and helps raise money through a fun activity.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Need to get out and speak to church officials in person. This league concept is not done through mailings.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Our league bowling has been up the last two years. This year alone, we have 1130 (excluding juniors) league bowlers for 24 lanes.



League Retention

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We offer our bowlers rebates on sales at the snack bar plus an additional 10% off to all league members, 20% if they bowl 2 leagues, and 30% if they bowl in 3 or more leagues.

WHY IT WORKS

It works because we show league bowlers that they mean something to us.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Nothing really. They turn in receipts to us for rebates and we pass out cards to reflect the # of leagues they bowl.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We host a League Officer Appreciation Dinner. Once a year, we invite the league secretaries, presidents and their spouses to dinner in our hall.

WHY IT WORKS

We give them V.I.P. treatment. We make them part of the “team.” Key staff welcome everyone to the “social” hour prior to dinner. Just before dinner is served, we have a 2-3 minute explanation of upcoming programs. After dinner, it’s free bowling. We don’t have to solicit suggestions because they readily volunteer their ideas throughout the evening. This dinner gives us another opportunity to socialize with our league officers. They feel that their input is welcomed and appreciated. If any league issues arise, they notify us promptly.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Plan early and execute, invite the spouses, make sure to thank them often, don’t skimp on the event.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

We have a league bowler retention of 95+%. Some leagues grow due to “selling” by the league officers. Happy league secretaries mean happy leagues and that makes my job easier.

League Retention

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We think it is the personal touch, i.e. greeting them at the door, interacting with them on a consistent basis.

WHY IT WORKS

People seem to feel more comfortable and want to come back.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Personal interaction with all participants old and young.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We do a promotion with our employees. The person who signs up the most bowlers wins a 32" LCD TV.

WHY IT WORKS

Material items seem to motivate our staff better than money.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Make sure your staff knows about the promo.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

32" LCD TV = \$350, 64 league bowlers over 2010 season = \$15 / bowler per night including food and beverage: $\$15 \times 64 \times 33 \text{ weeks} = \$31,680$.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Our league coordinator is on the lanes every night. She collects league fees going from lane to lane. This way, she can spend time with each team especially the new ones to ensure their satisfaction.

WHY IT WORKS

Personal touch.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Hire somebody who everybody loves.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

We have very low turnover. Once we get them in the building, we make them feel very comfortable. The impact is our leagues seldom lose teams.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We offer a gift book for each league bowler that includes free games of bowling, discounts in our snack bar, and discounts for birthday parties.

WHY IT WORKS

No other center in town has a program that says “Thank You” to their league bowlers.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Go lane to lane and give to each bowler personally. Explain what it is and tell them thank you.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Increased food and beverage sales, as well as improved birthday party bookings.

League Retention

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Sending an email coupon to my entire contact list monthly.

WHY IT WORKS

It lets people know what is coming up.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Making sure that the idea is promoted in plenty of time before the event or promotion.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

I have been retaining my core league members.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Continually building a database for use in email promotions.

WHY IT WORKS

High number of contacts at low cost.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Gathering email addresses from bowlers. Send an email every week with a benefit.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Revenue up over 5% in both centers.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Our best retention is sending postcards to each of my league bowlers from the year before with 2 free games to use at their convenience. Then a follow-up phone call if they don't show for meeting.

WHY IT WORKS

I think this works because the bowlers know that we personally want them back. The postcards and phone calls come from us directly.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Call back after meetings.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Offering the entire league a free week of bowling for every new team added.

WHY IT WORKS

It's a true win/win and nothing is as effective as the league bowlers in charge of soliciting growth in their own league.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Sharing the promotional idea with the league before they hang up their shoes for the summer, so they spend several months identifying new teams.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Impacted by the length of season and the base number of leagues, the payoff has been anywhere from 3-10% increase in total lineage for the league adding teams and, F&B goes up as well.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Starting to "touch the table" more with league bowlers and thus have a personal relationship with "my" bowlers.

WHY IT WORKS

Creates a sense of belonging; a sense of community; a sense of "we-ness."

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Being there, being engaged.

League Retention

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

League-Only Benefits. Besides discount pricing for open play and pro shop, we also do fun events throughout the year for our league customers only. We have a B&B Singles Champion (Men and Women) yearly. We do March Madness with our top 64 bowlers (separate for men and women) and we do a house championship tournament each year.

WHY IT WORKS

Gets everyone in other leagues involved and builds bowling friendships

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Keep good records and plan early.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

If our leagues bowl a 32 week season, they pay the same amount for week 33, but it all goes into the prize fund. We take no bowling fees out of week 33.

WHY IT WORKS

Really gives a boost to their prize fund.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Make the offer at league meetings.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

An extended season = more spending.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

All winter bowlers get a game free every day in summer, specials every night.

WHY IT WORKS

They don't just bowl one game.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We now have all of our leagues split into at least two divisions: high and low averages. They all bowl at least three parts—most four—where each division has four teams bowling in the roll-off for the league championship.

WHY IT WORKS

With the low average bowlers making the playoffs, it keeps them involved into who will win the league championship.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Put a small amount of prize money aside for each quarter's winner. If the same team wins more than one quarter, then whoever is second gets the playoff spot, but the actual winner still gets the money. Also set aside money for the roll-off. Each division has a TV style roll-off with each team being able to win some money. Again, a small amount of money is set aside for the final match—division winners against division winner. Everybody likes to make the roll-off. In a 12-team league, 8 teams make it and it creates excitement and, at least half the time, the low average teams win and that makes them want to bowl again next year.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

I have cut my low average dropout rate to almost zero. They don't complain about handicap because it is what you do in your division that counts. We have added bowlers who move to our community over our competition because of this.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

League bowlers get a “preferred bowling card” good for a free game a day—50 games total.

WHY IT WORKS

League bowlers love things for free, plus I hope to get them to come in more often and spend money in the cafe or bar areas. No one bowls just one game. The game can be redeemed during slower times.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Provide good value to our league bowlers and make changes/upgrades so that we create a good environment for open play bowlers.

League Retention

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Sending out birthday cards to league bowlers.

WHY IT WORKS

It's the only time a lot of them get acknowledged.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Getting the dates and getting the cards out in a timely manner.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Leagues are up.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We give all new-to-league bowlers a free month of practice bowling. We also give teams in traditional length leagues that consist of all new league bowlers an entry-level bowling ball for each team member (or a certificate for an upgrade). Existing league bowlers who sign these people up also get the same rewards.

Example: New-to-league bowler joins a short season or full length league – they get a free month of practice, so does the current bowler who signs them up.

Example 2: A new team of new-to-league bowlers joins a traditional length league – it doesn't matter if playing strength is 2 or up to 5. They all get a ball and so does the current league bowler who signed them up.

The biggest thing is to make your leagues fun and not boring.

WHY IT WORKS

This program gives the new bowlers practice time and practice makes them better, and with handicap, allows them a better chance to compete with existing league bowlers. When they come out to practice, it allows us to give them a couple of tips in a non-stressful environment. It also gives us cars in the parking lot in the fall when we are fighting football. We look busy and more fun and this brings in additional open bowlers that want to be where the crowd is.

By giving new teams a free ball for each of its members, it also helps with the competition factor. If they upgrade to a higher retail value ball, it is better for us and better for the bowler and can attract people back who quit bowling league in the past. If they have their own equipment, they are also less likely to drop the next season.

By rewarding recruiters of these new bowlers, it turns your existing customers into part of your sales force. They help you sell league bowling. Just like testimonials work better than advertising so does one bowler telling another person to join in on the fun.

Again, people want to have fun and league bowling must be fun or they will drop.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

- Meet with your staff get them on board with program and ask them for suggestions on improvement.
- Meet with league officers and then the entire league to get them on board and ask for suggestions on improvement.
- Market to everyone. Monitor ads, flyers, email, Facebook, snail mail, phone calls, and outside sales person and, most importantly, talk to your customers.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Before we did this program we had 4 of our 6 traditional length leagues that were in real trouble. All have seen a significant increase of teams but one, and that one league has the same number of teams as before. We now have a waiting list in 2 leagues; it's been almost 25 years since that has happened.

Our short season league participation has increased and has truly become a feeder program to full season leagues. These leagues have also become a choice for a 2nd or 3rd league for traditional length league bowlers.

The free practice has helped us increase fall open play revenue as people with passes bring friends with them to bowl. Other people who come into open bowl see other lanes bowling, so it adds to their experience instead of being the only people bowling. People who drive by see a busy parking lot. This helps to keep bowling awareness in their mind. This is a great way to help fight lost business due to high school football on Fridays, college on Saturdays and pro's on Sundays during September and early October.

League Retention

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Our best league retention tool is management and staff developing a personal relationship with as many of our league bowlers as possible. Our most successful recent league building tool has been reaching out to the developmentally disabled in our community and providing them with a league competition format.

WHY IT WORKS

A personal relationship with our league bowlers makes it much easier to recruit them each fall and also in getting them to help in filling holes. It's easier for us to talk to them, harder for them to say "no" to a friend. We discovered the developmentally disabled in our community are looking for activities that a large number of them can participate in. Bowling fills that need.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

To develop a personal relationship with our league bowlers, we try to have key management and staff personnel consistently working the same leagues so they have the opportunity to get to know the bowlers. Then we encourage socialization outside of the bowling center to strengthen that relationship. In establishing leagues for the developmentally disabled, we have used the "key person" method. By inquiring within the community, we determined which individuals and organizations supported and worked with our target group. Once we found the key people, we convinced them of the benefits of league bowling and they recruited the bowlers.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The positive financial impact of retaining league bowlers is tremendous. Not only do we have the continued income from those customers, the costs associated with retaining a league customer are minimal compared with the cost of attempting to recruit a new league bowler. Our developmentally disabled leagues have gone into time slots normally difficult or impossible to fill with traditional leagues, providing a revenue stream where none had existed.

League Retention

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We schedule captain's meetings in July. We offer pizza and beer for those who take us up on this offer. Also, leagues which hold their meetings in this month are given priority in finding new/replacement bowlers.

WHY IT WORKS

It gets the league thinking about things a month early and helps to identify trouble spots before potential new bowlers start to inquire about league availability. Knowing who needs bowlers/teams as soon as someone contacts me enables me to get people matched up quickly . . . before they go somewhere else.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

First, inform the leagues about a month before the season is over that they can sign up for specific dates. Next, contact the league secretaries 2 weeks before the meeting to confirm. Finally, be there for the meetings to get an idea of who is returning in full strength and who is not.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

We try to spend a significant amount of our time/money on keeping our center fresh and new. So far it has paid off well; however, we are just beginning to make financial gains because we have finally been able to slow the pace of capital improvements.



League Retention

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We offer league bowlers the “Returning and Recruiting Credit” to all the bowlers of our “Lousy Bowlers League.” This is a 16/17 week casual league for bowlers who do not think they are “good enough” to bowl in a “real” league. How does it work? If you are returning to the next league session (that starts the week immediately following that last week of the current league session), you receive a one week credit on your bowling fees. If you recruit NEW bowlers (they have to be NEW to the league, not just skipping a session), you receive a one week credit for EACH bowler you bring in.

WHY IT WORKS

This program keeps new bowlers entering the program all the time. As we all know as we get better at the bowling game, we want to move into more competitive situations (leagues). The nice part is it keeps a core group of “I just bowl for fun” bowlers, bowling year round.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Keep the bowlers aware of the “value” of the recruiting.... If they recruit enough new bowlers, they COULD bowl the whole season for FREE!!!

FINANCIAL IMPACT

This league program is enjoyed by the good natured bowlers who LOVE to enjoy a night of bowling fun and libations. \$\$\$\$ Great for the F&B department.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Unlimited free summer bowling while you are in a summer league.

WHY IT WORKS

Develops new fall bowlers.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Talk open bowlers into joining a summer league to try out leagues for free bowling and get them to continue in the fall.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

It is huge.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Bowling center does the secretary work for the leagues, thereby putting all secretary fees back into prize fund.

WHY IT WORKS

Bowlers come back every year for the increased prize fund.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Sell it to the customers.



League Retention

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

League Appreciation Day and Tournament. At the end of fall season, we take a Saturday in May and say thank you to our league bowlers. This is an event that costs our bowlers nothing!

It starts with a mixed team tournament. Our league bowlers can mix and match teams and are encouraged to bowl both squads. Between squads, we have a buffet lunch that we cater ourselves. In-house catering allows us to have a nice menu that looks like a million bucks, but is easy and inexpensive. In years past, we have had BBQ, Italian, Mexican and sandwich bar. If you can work a trade out with a local caterer, that works great as well.

This is a great time to walk and talk and have some one-on-one time with the bowlers in a relaxed atmosphere. Before the second squad bowls, we have a drawing for the chance to win \$10,000 by converting the 7-10 split or the Big 4 split. This is publicized for more than a month prior as the hook for the tournament. It creates a lot of buzz in the center as well as in the newspaper. The insurance costs a couple of hundred dollars if you don't want to risk paying it out yourself. The atmosphere in the center when we draw the ticket(s) is electric. People know the odds of picking it up are slim, but \$10,000!

Awards for the tournament are about \$80 worth of cheesy trophies. When the winners are having their pictures taken, you would think that they won the High Roller Tournament.

WHY IT WORKS

Bowlers remember it and talk about it all year. It's not something that we have to do and they appreciate it.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

One-on-one time with each bowler to make sure that they attend this free event.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The investment is minimal, \$600 tops.

Our bowlers are glad that they spend their recreation time with us. We do not lose bowlers to other activities. They enjoy bowling with us and do not feel the need to look for alternatives. It is MUCH cheaper keeping a guest happy than to find, develop and "train" new ones.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Our monthly “Play Pass” for league bowlers allows them to practice an unlimited amount of games for a low monthly price.

WHY IT WORKS

It works because league bowlers that bowl better keep bowling. It adds incremental income to monthly lineage fees. On average 17% of league bowlers practice, and with this product it rises to up to 30% of league bowlers that practice.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Make it easy and allow them to pay monthly with cash or credit card. Don't have too many dark times like entertainment bowling, etc.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

This program is a retention tool and we have been able to keep overall participation attrition to fewer than 2% for the last three years.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We practice all aspects of our business. We continue to offer many leagues and specialty leagues. We offer birthday parties, corporate parties and tournaments on every weekend of the summer and monthly events throughout the year. We teach bowling. We run specials. We do not put all of our bowling eggs in one basket. Our management team is 100% responsible to contact bowlers and not left up to league officers.

WHY IT WORKS

Like the stock market, when league play may be down, casual play may be up. Most centers in our area do not offer tournament play very often. The bowlers in our surrounding area know that we ALWAYS have something going. With our community involvement, our birthday parties are growing. Our management always goes through the lanes during league play to greet and talk with customers. We know their names! We get to know their families! Basic business skills and customer service! We have been here since 1963.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Be active! Put a flyer in the customer's hand. E-mail and Facebook. In some cases (Seniors), the letter in the mail works best for some events. For league retention, personal phone calls from us.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

We just had our best year ever!

League Retention

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

League pricing. Although we have to charge a premium rate for our leagues, one way we ease them into extending the number of weeks the bowl is by offering a 50% discount on lineage fee for each week beyond 30 weeks they bowl.

WHY IT WORKS

It enables the leagues to add a considerable amount of money to their individual league prize funds at the end of the league season. Most leagues opt to bowl for 32 weeks.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Use the phone. I still stay personal with all my league bowlers, making lots of phone calls in the fall. Give your league bowlers some freebies once in awhile – beer, pop, sandwich, gift card, etc.

WHY IT WORKS

Makes them feel welcome, feel special. You can't treat your open play bowlers the same as a league bowler who is there 30 weeks!!

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Keep the staff well informed. They need to treat everyone the same as the owner.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Cruise Director. Our league business is built on short season clubs. These clubs are structured as 8-16 weeks long for a price of \$8-\$14 per week. Each club is themed around a common prize or game and each club is assigned a "Cruise Director."

The Cruise Director is an employee who is paid to bowl in the club, learn the names of all the other bowlers, play games with the club (to keep it fun), and encourage bowlers to get better and keep bowling. This person is typically a young, energetic person who is outgoing, has a basic understanding of bowling, and is willing to occasionally embarrass themselves.

WHY IT WORKS

We recognized that people only go bowling because someone asked them to, and they typically quit bowling because no one paid attention to them. By assigning someone to ask them to bowl and keep bowling, and provide them with the affirmation they need when they are bowling, we are eliminating the number one reason they stop bowling.

In the past, our industry has simply handed someone a ball or a lesson and sent them on their way. But ongoing human interaction is a much more powerful tool.

We are using club bowling as a forum to develop relationships. People don't join leagues/clubs anymore just to bowl. They are joining them to create friends, memories, and relationships. We are trying to provide them with a means to do that.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

- 1) Find the right person! This is without a doubt the most important piece. The cruise director must be fun, creative, outgoing, etc. They must understand it is their job to be everyone's buddy. We find this is typically a character trait that is inherited not trainable.
- 2) Give them the freedom to be creative. Our cruise director is the face and voice of the club, what they say . . . goes. Our cruise directors have come up with some very unusual and fun activities and games that we probably would have not allowed, but they have turned out to be staples in our club programs.
- 3) Make it fun. With or without a cruise director, league and club bowling should be fun. We want to make sure that everyone who bowls in a club or league would say it was fun and they would do it again. If it's not fun, they won't continue to bowl.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

We are a Friday, Saturday, Sunday business. Nearly 60% of our revenue is taken in on these three days of the week. Unfortunately, this means that we are limited in our profit potential by the amount of people we can service in that window of time. By developing this club structure, we have driven business to days and times where we used to sit empty. This has allowed us to continue to survive as a business and has helped us develop a "next level" for our casual bowlers.

We would not be in business today if we didn't have a successful club bowling program.

League Retention

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Assign one employee as “league host” who works with a specific league during the entire season. The host mixes with bowlers to insure all paperwork and money are handled correctly and in order as well as keeps up with who is there on a particular week and who is not. Call those who are absent and find out why (i.e. working late, babysitter, health, etc.) and note on bowler sheet. Host then announces the special game for the night. Examples:

- Spin Little Wheel (drink specials)
- Spin Big Wheel (if number stops on lane number your team is bowling on, team wins a free pizza).
- Mystery # - pick a random number from 1 to 199 and announce to bowlers. Tell bowlers if they have that number in their running score to come to the counter for a free game coupon
- 3-6-9 Strike Game – If bowler strikes in the 3rd, 6th and 9th frames of any one game, they win a free game of bowling and complimentary shoe rental.
- 1-10 Strike Game – Strike in the 1st or anywhere in the 10th frame and get a free game coupon.
- 3 Strikes in a Row – Anytime a bowler strings three in a row, get a coupon good for a \$1.00 game of bowling
- Crazy 8’s – Get 6 frames in any one game with an 8 count on the 1st ball of those six frames and get a free 16 oz. draw beer.

WHY IT WORKS

Anyone can participate and anyone can win. It doesn’t make a difference on skill level or age. There is always a prize of value offered and it’s easy to play.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Having a host who loves working with people. Keep it simple – only one game per league night or at most, two. Keeping tabs on what games you are playing, when to insure a quality experience. Also, play up the games to the bowlers frequently to keep the excitement going and to keep interest high. Good idea to mix up prizes to keep the game fresh.



**“It is what we think we know already
that often prevents us from learning.”**

Claude Bernard



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