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Bowling Center Operations

Kit Paxton

Although bowling was an old sport at the time of Rip Van Winkle, recent developments have taken the sport away from the back-alley, all-male hangout as known in the past, and turned it into a recreation for the whole family. Attractively decorated, air-conditioned establishments have contributed mightily to this trend, as have also the automatic pinsetters which replaced the pin boy. Houswives have turned out in droves, Junior Leagues for youngsters are thriving, and many Senior Citizens also find participation in bowling well within their capacities.

The business year of a bowling center commences about the first of September with the opening of the winter leagues and ends with the closing of summer leagues, near the end of August. Therefore, a fiscal year based on this period is advisable, and it is helpful in making comparisons to divide the year into thirteen four-week periods. This makes any period comparable with any other period because each is based on the same number of days.

The winter season is usually represented by a curve starting upward at Labor Day, reaching its peak after Christmas, tapering off and dropping abruptly at the end of the winter league season about the middle of May. The summer season is apt to drop as low as 50% of the winter business. This need not apply in other sections of the country, which may differ greatly in climate, industry, tourist season or other ways.

Leagues, therefore are committed as early as possible so that new leagues can be built for open spots, and some fair estimate can be made of the business predicted for the coming year.

Line comparisons are useful in comparing days—each day has its characteristic pattern, once the season is set. The season is set when the leagues are signed up (the bread and butter); and it is then possible to calculate the revenue they represent, based on the number of weeks of bowling, and the number of lines bowled each week in all leagues. Open play (the gravy) fluctuates according to the day of the week, week-ends traditionally being the heaviest. The ratio of open play to league play is the base used for prediction.

Useful prediction factors include a break-even figure which can be derived in terms of the number of bowling lines per bed per day, or L/B/D. This enables management to worry daily or weekly or at whatever interval it pleases.

In the making of reports, costs and income can be expressed as “per 100 lines bowled,” to make comparisons more useful. An average price per line is arrived at, based on previous periods; or in the case of price changes, on a new computation of price for previous periods.

Today's bowling businesses are characterized by a substantial outlay for building and equipment, and a high payroll for supplying services to customers. Mechanics to maintain the automatic pinsetters; janitors and porters to keep the premises clean, general building and lane maintenance men; instructors to teach or help bowlers; a pro-shop to drill bowling balls, a nursery for small children; a coffee shop and taproom—all are considered necessary in most cases. Many include billiard rooms, beauty or barber shops, and help-yourself laundries. The auxiliary facilities are sometimes owned, sometimes leased.

The facilities which are supplied the bowler, (lanes, bowling balls, shoes) essentially a service, are traditionally priced by the “line” or game of bowling. There is a trend toward “time” bowling which would replace the line with a time unit, and create a different set of control circumstances, but we are concerned here only with lines.

A bowling business is essentially a cash operation, although some leagues do prepay for a season or a part thereof, requiring unearned income accounts; and tournaments are usually paid for after their completion, requiring accounts receivable.

Bowling suppliers make note of the seasonal trend of the business, however, by permitting summer buying with payments falling due in the fall.

In setting up the chart of accounts for a bowling business most of the items will be the normal ones for any business. Some of the following items, however, require special consideration.

Pins are used up in the normal course of business, and not depreciated. Manufacturers are offering pins carrying a 5,000 line guarantee. Cost of pins used can be based on the price for one line, by dividing the purchase price of a set of pins by 5,000, times the number of lines bowled during a particular period, and adjusted by the actual value of pins on inventory at the close of the period.

Quantity pin purchases should be set up as prepaid supplies, and the annual resurfacing of alley beds in a prepaid expense, to be written off as used. Monthly pin expense is charged at the cost of one line by the number

of lines used; resurfacing as 1/12 of the annual cost.

Automatic pinsetters may be purchased or leased. The prevailing lease is based on 12¢ per line. For depreciation purposes, a schedule of about 6¢ per line—unit of production method—can be adopted on purchased machines.

For office control of bowling, tallying pinlines is the quickest and probably the best way to check the desk operation. Serial numbers of the sheets are checked, and lines are tallied from the score sheets by price categories, then extended by multiplying by price. The desk is responsible for collecting the total. Reconciliation with the register and/or the bank deposit can be determined by searching for over and under-rings or errors in pricing.

Desk personnel also write sales slips for merchandise items and bowling shoes rent. Some operations sell candy and tobacco at the desk; others use vending machines for these items. Chief item of control in the use of vending machines is the key to the cash box. Receipts from these sources can be verified by inventory control, and the cash rung on the main register.

For controlling bowling only, the sheets would not have to be run through a register, as the over-all computation would check them sufficiently; however, for handling diverse items, the register is necessary.

Cash registers with an adequate number of totaling registers should be used, and it is essential that they be fast in operation—the drawer opening automatically with the motor bar, eliminating extra turn-over for single items, for example.

The bowler records his games on a score sheet, which is numbered serially, and he is charged for the number of “lines” he uses. Prices vary according to time of day or week—adult or child. Pricing by the “desk” on the score sheet shows the line break-down. The total collection is registered on the sheet by the cash register.

Lanes can also be metered, to record the number of times a full set of pins is reset by the automatic machines. This offers positive control to the desk as to the number of “frames” bowled. (There are ten to twelve frames in a line). By recording the meter readings on each sheet, the deskman can determine the difference between beginning and ending readings and charge accordingly.

Although acceptance by the general public has been widespread, acceptance of bowling businesses by insurance underwriters is only beginning to change. At the beginning, if mortgage money must be secured to help finance the business, it is found that insurance companies will invest in such undertakings if

money is not too tight, but consider such mortgages fairly speculative.

The number of people congregated on the premises causes companies selling liability insurance to look askance at bowling lanes. The lacquer which is used on wooden alleys and in coating pins; the public which smokes and is usually careless with cigarettes and matches; the unbroken sweep of space inside the buildings—all cause fire insurance companies to increase premiums. Hospitalization plans for employees are not carried by some of our major underwriters, because of a fairly rapid turn-over of employees, increasing costs. Fidelity bond insurance for bowling lanes is rated somewhere between that of a traveling carnival and of the confidence man—it can be secured, but no one is anxious to write it.

Changes in attitude are slowly being reflected in rates. Since the disappearance of the pinboy, and the appearance of automatic pinsetters, the Workman's Compensation Insurance rate has had a decided downtrend. Installation of sprinkler systems so effectively reduces the fire insurance rates that they rapidly pay for themselves. In addition, a good record of retaining employees gains special consideration in the matter of group insurance plans.

Social and technological changes have created the modern bowling center, given more leisure time to housewives, and shaped the “poor man's country club” into its present form. Future trends undoubtedly include more automatic machinery. Automatic sanding equipment is used for the annual resurfacing of lanes. A machine dresses them daily with a fine spray of alley dressing. Installations have been made of coin-operated lanes and billiard tables.

In an atmosphere of change, there is one dependable factor not prejudiced by improvements, automation, services or whatever:

If the bowler scores well, the lanes are awfully good; but when he scores badly—they're horrid.

Cursory Exploration

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operator. However, the film may be sent to a processing unit for completing this phase of the operation.

A special mention of the aperture card and the jacket card is probably in order since they open up interesting avenues for many practical microfilm applications. The aperture is made in accounting machine punch-cards, margin-punched cards or index cards, for holding the microfilm records. The jacket card is for lengthy records. There is a 5 x 8 jacket card that will hold 120 pages size 8½ x 11;

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