



# MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR SPACE

## ENHANCE YOUR CUSTOMER'S EXPERIENCE WITH INDOOR PLAY EQUIPMENT

BY: CORNELIUS FORTUNE

**Y**ou might have gotten into the roller skating rink business because of a love for the activity, but the days of simply providing a hardwood skate floor are nearly gone. Such activities as laser tag, bumper cars, and other additions, can increase revenue and attendance.

Zone Laser Tag, Ride Development Company (RDC), Creative Works Inc., and Indoor Play International, are providing rink operators more options for expanding their space.

### TAG: YOU'RE IT!

The rise of laser tag, a movement more than 15 years in the making, is now one of the most lucrative ventures a rink owner can undertake. It's not without its financial commitments though.

Erik Guthrie, VP of sales and marketing, Zone Laser Tag, says more rinks are

looking at laser tag attractions.

"There's definitely an uptick in rink operators looking at adding laser tag and existing rink operators that have had laser tag are looking to revitalize it," Guthrie says. "They may have bought laser tag 15 years ago, when the durability and features weren't as strong as today. Rink operators today are reinvesting and turning themselves into skating entertainment centers, which often include laser tag."

As for the price, Guthrie suggests that it's well worth it. "If you don't need an extra \$70,000-150,000 a year, that's fine," Guthrie says. "Because that's what laser tag does. Laser tag is not a cheap proposition. You spend anywhere from \$50,000 to \$100,000. It is a little stunning to some people when they look at it, and it's not for everybody."

Laser tag, he adds, has two advantages: It draws more boys, and it adds more sales value - both of which roller skating rinks are consistently looking to add.

"Where skating has (traditionally) lost

boys from 11 and up, laser tag gives you those younger tweener (ages) 13, 14, 15, to capture a market that they've lost," he says. "Secondly, depending on the nature of the arena, it adds to your group sales. It adds to your party packages. It adds to a market that they're already catering to, and it gives them a market that they've already lost."

It's possible, though, you might have to evaluate your space to see if it's right for you. "Some people might already have some available space," Guthrie says. "Other guys will build a two-level laser tag arena. The investment range can vary depending on the vision and scope of what they want to do."

Additionally, you can find financing. "The nice thing is laser tag is no longer considered a fad," he says. "Zone Laser Tag does in-house financing at no interest on the laser tag equipment. We can help finance the equipment purchase. We have relationships with companies that want to work with established rink operators. Or they can try to go to the SBA (Small Business Association). There's a variety of



Photo credit: Indoor Playgrounds International



Photo credit: Indoor Playgrounds International

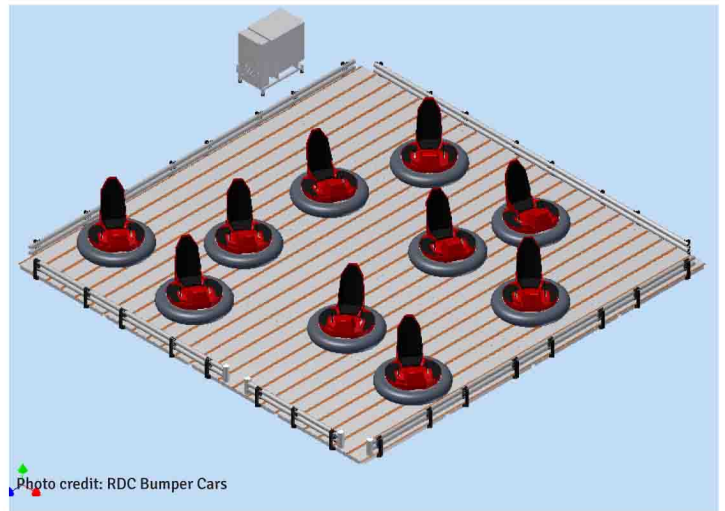
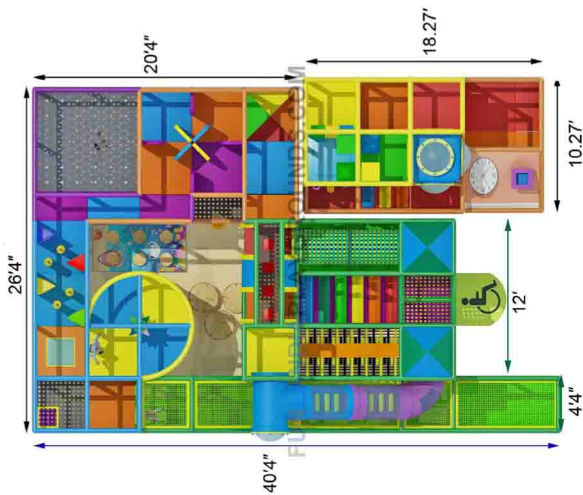


Photo credit: RDC Bumper Cars

Indoor Playgrounds International and Ride Development Company can design completely 3D models representative of your space and customize it to suit your size and needs. These incredible photos show the capacity to see what you're getting before it's even built.



Atomic Rush. Photo credit: Creative Works



Ocean Theme Cosmic Golf. Photo credit: Creative Works

The Atomic Rush Game by Creative Works is the new arcade-style game bringing you the latest in touch and LED technology with unlimited variations, vibrant colors, high fidelity sound and more by infusing state-of-the-art touch technology with brilliant multi-colored LED lighting circuitry as part of the next generation arcade.

Cosmic Golf branded black light courses by Creative Works utilize incredible quality props and pieces that deliver the WOW effect. Each course is tailored to suit the needs of your facility with consideration to the demographics in the market and the appeal they have on the guests.



Photo credit: ARC Lasertag Arena

These brilliant set-ups, like this interactive display from ARC Lasertag Arena, includes features that allow participants to destroy a base to trigger an interactive projection and lighting effects on the walls and interior units.

ways to get laser tag funded.”

And your investment is covered, thanks to advancements in the system.

“The cool thing about laser tag is durability has gone up,” Guthrie says. “Our product comes with a two-year all inclusive hassle free warranty. Laser tag systems will actually tell you what’s wrong. They’ve got self-awareness in the packs to let the operator know what’s wrong.”

“We’re the largest laser tag supplier to the skating industry. We’ve been working with skating facilities for more than 20 years now. We do a lot of marketing and operational support to help the rink operator; they’ve got the skate rental, food service. We provide a lot of support operationally and market-wise in helping them maximize revenue in the laser tag portion of the model.”

## CREATING MORE IMMERSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

True, laser tag is a very popular option, but

there are companies doing more not only with laser tag, but are creating immersive environments that can rival video games.

Jeff Schilling, owner, Creative Works Inc., has been in the FEC business for more than 20 years. He has watched, as the industry has become more technology conscious.

“Consumers expect a lot for their ‘hard earned dollar,’ so FECs and rinks alike need to provide unique experiences to both draw and keep them coming back,” Schilling, says. “Kids are so immersed within games and technology that their standards for games are higher than ever before. So when attractions can combine a unique and memorable experience with technology and an immersive environment, you have a hit.”

Some trending products he sees are small box attractions like Lazer Frenzy laser maze and Color Crush.

“(Lazer Frenzy) is a small box attraction that takes up very little space within an arcade space,” Schilling says. “It’s a fun game that immerses kids within their own ‘Mission Impossible’ type experience and

weave their way through a lazer maze. We have adapted the game to be auto-attendant and you can even add redemption tickets, if you like. It’s been a great producer for several of our clients with a really good ROI.”

Color Crush is a light and touch sensor game that kids can play while they still have their skates on. “Players select a color and try to react quickly and ‘hit’ it when it flashes on the panel in front of them and beat the score of the person next to them who has their own color,” Schilling explains. “It’s fast paced, interactive, and is fun for all age groups – old and young alike.”

If you’re hesitant about adding indoor playgrounds, Schilling suggests speaking with owners who have these attractions. Learn from experienced operators on the ins, outs, ups and downs of these attractions. Also attend events that will help educate on the specifics of the attraction you are considering.

“Look for seminars within these events that will teach you everything from design considerations to operational insights,” he





Photo credit: RDC Bumper Cars

Ride Development Company can tailor an area within your rink to fit several LED illuminated bumper cars, even within older rinks. The system footprint is very small and has options in both electric floor cars or battery powered cars.

says. “The longer you can keep someone in your facility, the better. By having more than just roller skating, the more draw you will have for varying birthday parties, groups, and customers. New competitors in the market will be forced to ‘up their game’ to keep up with a rink that is constantly innovating and adding to their facility.”

## BUMPER CARS

A classic staple of many amusement parks, bumper cars are finding their way in roller skating rinks.

Tami Dean, general manager, Ride Development Company (RDC), recently introduced a new line of competitively priced LED illuminated bumper cars to their line of products.

“Our new LED cars complement our current line of bumper cars and are well-suited for indoor rinks and FEC’s,” Dean says. “We have found that LED lights are most popular with indoor venues due to their bright color displays and flash

synchronization.”

Dean believes that bumper adding bumper cars to rink arenas is one of the biggest new trends in the industry.

“Owners and operators see bumper cars as a family-friendly experience bringing in new groups of people that may never have considered visiting a rink before,” Dean says. “It’s very appealing to older rinks because it presents a new fun addition with a small footprint. After 30-plus years in the bumper car business, we see and hear from our clients that RDC bumper cars do not lose their appeal over time. It has been shown that bumper cars have more repeat ridership than other rides, which equates to additional revenue potential. Bumper cars appeal to all age groups, too.”

Dean adds the cost of a typical RDC rink installation involving a six- or eight-car system ranges from \$42,000 to \$94,000 depending on venue requirements, electric floor or battery powered cars, and add-ons.

“RDC offers a list of financing companies who are familiar with our products who and ready to assist clients

with their financing needs,” Dean says. “Naturally, the number one marketing opportunity is promoting something new and different that complements the rink experience. We have also seen rink operators develop a number of promotional packages that combine the rink experience with bumper cars aimed at groups such as birthday parties and school groups.”

## INDOOR PLAYGROUNDS

Although laser tag is the rising kid on the block, there’s lots more happening. Maybe laser tag or bumper cars isn’t right for you. Maybe you’re looking for something different. Julie Caricato, owner, Indoor Playgrounds International provides that experience.

“Some of our newest products and most popular products right now are the glowing spider climber, climbing volcano with slide, our soft indoor climbing walls, as well as our mobile playground that can be easily moved,” Caricato says.

Indoor playground businesses are the

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newest up and coming entertainment and are opening all over the country, Caricato adds. "It is a sure way to attract more customers to your rink by offering entertainment for the younger children as well," she says. "It is a minimal investment that is sure to increase business."

On average, she notes, an additional \$50,000 investment into an indoor playground you can expect a minimum of at least an additional \$25,000 per year which is a 50 percent ROI (Return on Investment).

"We do offer financing on all of our playground equipment," Caricato says. "As an example, an equipment cost of \$50,000 could be as low as \$1100 a month. A two-level decent size playground structure would be about 1000 sq. ft. For the space required for an indoor playground, it is sure to out-produce anything else in the rink in terms of dollars per square foot."

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



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Cornelius Fortune is an award-winning journalist, whose work has appeared in NewsCred, Citizen Brooklyn, In the Fray, iPhone Life Magazine, The Advocate, Metro Times, Yahoo News, and others. He has written extensively on popular culture, comic books, and 21st century trends for more than a decade. He is also a Rhysling-nominated poet, and the author of the book *Stories from Arlington*. His most recent short stories can be found in the anthologies *Brief Grislys* and *Writings on the Wall*. In addition to journalism, he mostly writes poetry and less-than-interesting grocery lists, devoid of imagery or clever alliteration. Visit his website at [www.corneliusfortune.com](http://www.corneliusfortune.com), or follow him on Twitter@Arlingtonscribe.

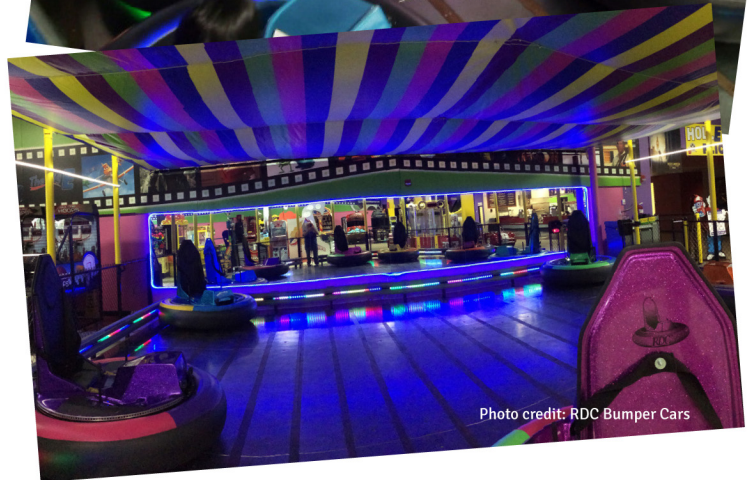


Photo credit: RDC Bumper Cars

As you can see from these photos, adding bumper cars can be a fun, colorful, and money-making feature to add to your rink.

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