

Dan Gingiss was the keynote speaker at AAMA's All Access event in August. There, he introduced his WISE framework for creating remarkable experiences at scale. Now, he dives deeper into the amusements industry to recommend ways to apply his framework across the value chain.

CREATING WINNING EXPERIENCES IN THE AMUSEMENTS INDUSTRY

By Dan Gingiss

Like in almost every other industry, competing on price or product alone won't win the amusements and entertainment battle.

Whether you're a family entertainment center creating magical memories or a manufacturer developing the next must-play arcade sensation, your biggest competitive advantage lies in crafting unforgettable experiences that keep guests coming back and talking about their visit long after they leave.

As entertainment options have exploded, from streaming services to mobile gaming to social media, the bar for creating compelling real-world experiences has never been higher. Families aren't just looking for ways to kill time; they're seeking meaningful moments of connection and joy. This shift presents an incredible opportunity for savvy operators and manufacturers in the amusements industry.

BECOMING 'WISE' TO THE POWER OF EXPERIENCES

The WISE framework – Witty, Immersive, Shareable, and Extraordinary – provides a strategic roadmap to transform your business from just another entertainment option into a destination that families actively choose and enthusiastically recommend.

Let's explore how each element can revolutionize your approach to customer experience. These components work individually or can be combined to create even more powerful experiences.

WITTY: BRINGING PERSONALITY TO PLAY

The amusements industry sometimes gets caught up in technical specifications, ticket payout ratios, game mechanics, square footage optimization. While these operational elements matter, they miss the emotional magic that transforms a simple outing into a cherished family memory.

Injecting personality into your brand makes your business feel more human and approachable. Consider how Chuck E. Cheese transformed what could have been generic messaging about birthday parties into "Where a Kid Can Be a Kid®" – instantly communicating fun, freedom, and childhood joy.

For family entertainment centers, being Witty might mean playful restroom signs ("Players, wash your hands before your next quest!"), staff uniforms that reflect your venue's unique personality, or fun and interactive elements like a bingo card to encourage exploring the entire venue. Manufacturers can incorporate clever artwork, unexpected sound effects, game cabinets that become conversation pieces, or creative game instructions that build excitement rather than just explain rules.

Remember: Witty isn't about forcing jokes, it's about letting your brand's fun personality shine through every interaction.

IMMERSIVE: ENGAGING ALL THE SENSES

Amusement venues have an incredible advantage in creating Immersive experiences because great arcade games naturally engage multiple senses: the satisfying click of buttons, the visual spectacle of LED displays, the triumphant sounds of victory, even the tactile feedback of a well-designed joystick.

Leading family entertainment centers understand this and design their spaces as complete sensory experiences. This goes beyond just having games; it's about creating themed environments where the lighting, sound, scents, and even temperature work together to transport guests into another world.

Consider how Dave & Buster's doesn't just offer games, they create an energetic atmosphere with dynamic lighting, upbeat music, sports on big TV screens, and the constant celebration sounds of winning. The experience begins the moment you walk through the door.

Manufacturers can support this by designing games that contribute to the overall atmosphere. Think beyond individual gameplay to consider how your machines enhance the venue's total sensory experience, from attract modes that draw players in to celebration sequences that create excitement throughout the entire space. Consider adding QR codes that unlock cheat codes or special hints, extending the Immersive experience into the digital realm.

SHAREABLE: CREATING VIRAL MOMENTS

Every great experience has the potential to become powerful marketing. When families have an amazing time at your venue or playing your games, they don't just remember it, they share it, creating authentic advocacy that money can't buy.

Family entertainment centers can engineer Shareable moments through photo-worthy prize walls, Instagram-friendly neon lighting, or special celebration sequences when

someone hits a jackpot. Venues can also create custom hashtags to encourage guests to share their winning moments, turning customers into content creators.

The key is making sharing feel natural, not forced. When a child wins big at skee-ball and the whole family erupts in cheers, that's a moment worth capturing and sharing. How can we make it easier for them to do so?

Manufacturers can facilitate sharing by incorporating distinctive visual elements, unique cabinet designs, spectacular light shows, or celebration sequences that naturally draw attention and create "I've got to show this to someone" moments.

EXTRAORDINARY: EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

The difference between a good visit and an unforgettable one often comes down to small, thoughtful surprises that go beyond the expected. The beautiful thing about becoming Extraordinary is that it doesn't require massive investments, but rather creative thinking about how to delight your guests.

For family entertainment centers, Extraordinary moments might include surprise bonus tickets for first-time visitors, personalized congratulations announcements for big winners, or small gestures like helping kids reach higher scores or that elusive claw game prize. Manufacturers can create Extraordinary experiences through unexpected bonus features, hidden game modes, or special rewards that activate under certain conditions.

RESPONSIVE: BUILDING LASTING CONNECTIONS

Once you become WISE to the power of experiences, it's time to be WISER than your competition. In our digital world, genuine human connection stands out more than ever. Taking time to truly listen to customer feedback, and more importantly, acting on it, creates the kind of loyalty that weathers any competitive storm.

For family entertainment centers, this means systematically gathering feedback from guests – both qualitative and quantitative – analyzing patterns in their experiences, and making meaningful improvements. It's about training staff to recognize when a family is having challenges and empowering them to make things right on the spot.

Manufacturers should maintain open dialogue with operators, understanding not just what games perform well, but why certain experiences resonate with different audiences. This insight loop drives innovation that truly meets market needs.

THE EXPERIENCE ADVANTAGE

As the entertainment landscape becomes increasingly crowded, the businesses that thrive will be those that recognize experience as their ultimate differentiator. By implementing the

WISER framework – Witty, Immersive, Shareable, Extraordinary, and Responsive – amusement industry professionals can transform routine visits into remarkable experiences that families actively seek out and eagerly recommend to others.

The question isn't whether your competition will eventually copy your games or match your prices – they probably will. The question is whether you're building experiences so memorable that customers choose you regardless.

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