

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Tips to get people
to your field and
make sure they
come back!



Written By:
Patrick Ehren
Ron Goldblatt

With Major Contributions from:
Giovanni D'Egidio and Dennis Bukowski
Mike "Pev" Peverill
Ray, Paul and Mike Dagnino



HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

*Tips to get people to your field
and make sure they come back!*

Written by

Patrick Ehren, Tippmann

Ron Goldblatt, Tippmann

With Major Contributions from

Giovanni D'Egidio and Dennis Bukowski

Mike "Pev" Peverill

Ray, Paul and Mike Dagnino

Edited by Write Away, Inc.

Former Editor of Action Pursuit Games Magazine

Funded By

TIPPMANN®

Published: July, 2011

LIMITATION OF LIABILITY

This book and the information it contains is provided as a public service by Tippmann Sports, LLC.

Tippmann makes no claims, promises or guarantees about the accuracy, completeness, or adequacy of the contents of this book and expressly disclaims liability for errors and omissions in the contents. No warranty of any kind, implied, expressed or statutory, including but not limited to the warranties of non-infringement of third-party rights, title, merchantability and fitness for a particular purpose, is given with respect to the contents of this book.

References in this book to any specific commercial products, processes, or services, or the use of any trade, firm or corporation name, is for the information and convenience of the public, and does not constitute endorsement, favoring, or recommendation by Tippmann.

This book and its contents are copyrighted by Tippmann Sports, LLC. Tippmann grants you a license to copy, distribute and publish the book in whole or in part, provided however, that you provide complete attribution to Tippmann and do not remove any of the copyright or trademark notices contained in the publication. In addition, the contents of the publication cannot be modified or altered without the express written consent of Tippmann.

DISCLAIMER

Participation in any sport has inherent risks to participants, employees, and game operators. Tippmann makes no claims pertaining to the safety of paintball games, and takes no responsibility whatsoever for any

injuries, death, or damage to property, or any expenses or costs relating to any activities related to playing the game, or operating a business relating to paintball.

In addition, there may be state and/or local laws that prohibit you from performing certain activities outlined in this book. Tippmann makes no claims pertaining to the legality of any initiatives contained in this book and recommends that you research and understand the laws in your local area.

USE OF PAINTBALL PRODUCTS

Tippmann strongly condemns any unsafe, improper or illegal usage of paintballs and related paintball sports equipment. This includes, but is not limited to, vandalism, unsafe participation, unsafe equipment modifications, improper use of equipment for non-paintball activities, any use of paintball equipment intended to harm any person or animal, and any use of paintball as training for illicit, illegal or terrorist activities. Any such usage should be strictly prohibited by field operators and staff at their game sites, and observation, discovery or suspicion of any such activity should be reported to the appropriate authorities immediately.

LIMITATION OF LIABILITY

GROUPON®, GOOGLE®, FACEBOOK®, TWITTER®, YOUTUBE®, and other trademarks owned by third parties are the registered trademarks or trademarks of their respective owners. Their use in this publication does not imply their association with, endorsement of, sponsorship of or approval of this publication, the contents of this publication or the authors or owners of this publication.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Preface

Chapter 1 Get Started

First Impressions

Chapter 2 The Right Phone System, Website and Field Brochure

Field Marketing

Chapter 3 Your Most Important Marketing Asset – The Liability Waiver

Chapter 4 The Free Play Pass

Chapter 5 The Return Pass

Chapter 6 Fundraiser Booklet

Chapter 7 Online Coupon Programs

Chapter 8 Promotional Calendar

Chapter 9 Event Marketing

Chapter 10 Search Engine Optimization

Chapter 11 Leveraging Social Networking Sites

Chapter 12 Television, Radio and Billboards

Chapter 13 Leveraging Team Sponsorships

Chapter 14 Yellow Pages

Chapter 15 Stickers, Magnets and T-shirts

CONTENTS

Groups

Chapter 16 Marketing to Groups

Chapter 17 Birthday Parties

Chapter 18 Youth Groups

Chapter 19 Corporate Outings

Community Relations and Cross Promotions

Chapter 20 Community Relations

Chapter 21 Cross Promotions

On-Site Marketing

Chapter 22 Signage, Brochures and Staff

The On-Field Experience

Chapter 23 Providing a Fun and Safe Environment

Bringing It All Together

Epilogue: One Small Field Owner's Perspective

References

Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the incredible support and contributions from Gio D'Egidio, Dennis Bukowski, Mike Peverill and Ray, Paul and Mike Dagnino. When I first approached them about the concept of the book, I wasn't exactly sure how they would react. How willing would they be to share their deepest business secrets? What I found were field owners so passionate about their industry that making their competitors stronger was perceived merely as a side effect of making the industry stronger. In today's world where so many CEOs are only concerned about their bottom lines, it is truly refreshing to find industry icons concerned more about the health of their industry.

Ron Goldblatt, our Director of Marketing, and I spent a significant amount of time with each one of these individuals, time that could have been spent at their field or with their families. But they volunteered their time and ideas all in an effort to grow the game of paintball. The funny thing is I know they enjoyed it, and so did I. I am honored to be a part of this project and only hope that you get as much out of the book as I did from the time I spent with these very insightful, professional and very passionate individuals.

Gio, Dennis, Mike, Ray, Paul and Mike, on behalf of Tippmann and the entire paintball industry...thank you!

— Patrick Ehren

Preface

Are you wondering why Tippmann would produce a book on how to market your paintball field? If so, the answer is simple. As an industry leader for more than 25 years, we think that it is not only in Tippmann's best interest, but it is also our obligation, to develop programs that will help to grow participation and to keep players on the field.

While there is plenty of material available on how to start and run a field, there has never been a book written that was entirely dedicated to marketing a paintball field. We hope that this resource along with our 40+ years of combined marketing experience, and expertise of several industry veterans, will help fields of all sizes grow their businesses through a two-tier strategy: attraction and retention. The goal is to attract new players and then keep them coming back for more!

The key contributors to this book were Mike Peverill of Pev's Park in Aldie, Virginia; Ray, Paul and Mike Dagnino of CPX Sports in Joliet, Illinois; and Giovanni (Gio) D'Egidio and Dennis Bukowski of Giant Paintball Parks, SC Village and Hollywood Sports Park in Southern California.

Pev's has been in the business for 18 years and currently operates a 48-acre park with more than 16 fields. Since 2005, Ray, Paul and Mike have owned their 149-acre field just southwest of Chicago. Gio and Dennis have been in the paintball business for more than 28 years and currently operate five parks that range in size from 20 to 150 acres and generate traffic ranging from 50 to 2,000+ people per day. Every

PREFACE

initiative that Gio utilizes, he utilizes at all of his parks. So, whenever we refer to “Giant,” you can assume the same is done for Hollywood Sports Park, SC Village and California Paintball Park.

These are some of the most successful paintball fields in the U.S. Their owners/operators have tried hundreds of programs over the years in an attempt to attract more people to their fields. This book includes many tried and true ideas that have worked for fields like Giant Paintball Parks, Pev’s and CPX.

Our objective here was to sit down with these industry experts who have 55 years of combined field experience, and to understand the intricacies of these initiatives. We wanted to uncover the details behind these successful field-marketing strategies and put them in an easy-to-understand format and make it easy for you to implement them at your field. You might be asking yourself, “Why would these guys share their secrets with every other paintball field in the country?” It’s simple: They all understand it is the right thing to do in an effort to save and grow the sport of paintball.

As Mike Peverill explains, “Competition will only make each of us better.” Gio adds, “If sharing my ideas with 700 other field owners helps them expose paintball to more people, then it’s good for the sport.”

As Gio colorfully adds, “In the beginning, if you had a sign, a few pallets and a toilet you had customers. It’s not like that anymore.” Over the last few years, the paintball industry has seen player participation flatten, and in some cases, decline. Tough economic times, escalating gas prices and increased competition in the outdoor and entertainment

PREFACE

categories, have all contributed to an industry that has had to adapt and reinvent itself. However, even in a tough economy, field owners such as Gio, Mike and Ray have consistently experienced participation growth at their fields. More importantly, they realize that for the betterment of the paintball industry, it is imperative that they share their ideas so that every field has the opportunity to experience the same success. The paintball industry needs to grow its player base, and the ideas contained in this book will work towards helping us accomplish this objective.

So, what's the common denominator when it comes to being successful? Marketing! These field owners know how to market their fields. They attract new players to try the sport and get existing players to play more frequently. And, while we understand that not every idea will work for every field, there is something for everyone.

In some cases, geographical location, field size, resources, etc., may limit what you can implement at your field. But, we guarantee that there are enough ideas contained herein that will work in your specific situation and will lead to an increase in traffic. And remember, you have something very valuable and tangible — a great experience that anyone can enjoy.

As Gio points out, “You could probably survive if you approached your business as a hobbyist, with no marketing, but to take it to the next level where you have big numbers, it takes marketing, and it takes methodical marketing, non-stop, every day.”

PREFACE

*“The man who whispers down a well
About the goods he has to sell
Will not make as many dollars
As the man who climbs the tree and hollers!”
(Lord Leverhulme – co-founder of Unilever)*

So let’s dig in so you can learn “How to Market Your Paintball Field.”

Chapter 1

Get Started

There are two very important underlying principles that should be understood before you try to implement any marketing strategy discussed in this book:

1. You will only benefit from getting people to your field if they have a “great experience” and come back.
2. Focus your efforts on soliciting groups to play at your field. You can spend all your time trying to get one person to come to your field or you can spend the same amount of time trying to get a group of 10. Which do you think will earn a bigger return?

First, let’s talk about number one – the “great experience.” You need every player who passes through your gate to want to return again and again. You also want them to tell their friends about their experience and to entice them to the field as well. So, before you start undertaking any initiative outlined in this book, make sure you and your entire staff understand what your true business strategy should be.

Let’s take a look at how Pev’s puts these strategies into place. Pev’s internal business moniker is, “Throw a stone in the water.” Mike adds, “When you throw a stone in the water, it creates a ripple effect. It’s the same effect when interacting with players at our field. We’re not just affecting one kid. His/her experience at our field touches their friends, their friends’

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

friends, their parents, their parents' business associates, and on and on.”

To demonstrate how Pev's philosophy has paid off, you can simply look at birthday parties. When they host a birthday party of 10 kids, they see seven to eight of those kids come back with another group. That's a 70 to 80% participation return rate. Not bad! And remember, when those seven to eight kids return, they bring a new sub-group of kids, so the ripple effect continues to expand.

The lesson here is to touch each person and make sure that he/she has a great experience, because that alone will increase your traffic.

Pev's also focuses on groups with a very specific strategy. “Don't just try to get 10 people; try to get 10 kids, because they will talk about their experience to their friends, classmates, teammates, etc.,” says Mike. Ten years ago, the ratio of individual walk-ons to groups was 80/20. In some cases these ratios have flip-flopped to 20/80.

The bottom line: Providing a great experience is paramount and focusing on groups is a more efficient use of your limited resources. Later in the book we'll discuss strategies to attract a wide range of groups to your field.



First Impressions

Before you can start any marketing program it is important to put together a plan that will ensure that the first contact with a new player or existing player is a positive experience. This section focuses on the three key contact points that will impact that first impression and outlines the steps you need to take to ensure that the first impression is a positive one.



Chapter 2

The Right Phone System, Website and Field Brochure

There are three primary ways someone is going to learn about your business:

1. A telephone call
2. Your website
3. Your field brochure

These three key elements can significantly affect the first impression someone has of your field. That's why it is critical that you have a live, knowledgeable person answering the phone, an informative website and an effective field brochure. We will review each of these mediums to help ensure that the first impression is as positive as possible.

Your Phone System

An inbound call is an opportunity, so don't lose it. If you have a pro shop, set it up so the calls are routed there. Educate your store employees on details associated with the field. You may even wish to create a laminated sheet that includes the key attributes of your field (i.e., number of fields, types of fields, years in business, pricing, hours of operation, etc.). Keep this sheet near the telephone.

Also, remember to highlight special features like the fact that you cater to birthday parties, youth groups, sports teams, church groups and bachelor

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

parties, etc. You want to ensure that your caller understands all that your field and its staff are capable of handling. If you offer laser tag, make sure they understand that is an option as well.

If you don't have a pro shop, look into utilizing an answering service. An answering service can accomplish the same thing without the need for you to hire additional personnel.

A third option would be to set up a phone system where the caller can access some of the most commonly requested information. For instance, after a brief introduction about your field, he or she can press one for directions; two for hours of operation; three for park information; four for information on groups such as birthday parties; and zero for attendant.

You must also have the option for the caller to leave a message if a live person isn't available (although hopefully this is a rare occurrence). In this case, state that all of your reservation agents are busy, and recommend that he or she leave a message and then direct the caller to your website for additional information. In most cases, if prospective callers don't reach a live person or get answers to their questions, they are going to move on and call your competitor or, worse yet, a non-paintball business.

If needed, have calls forwarded to your cell phone. Although that's not ideal, it's better than letting the call go unanswered. You just have to assume every unidentified call to your cell phone is a prospective customer and you have to answer the phone with that in mind. "Turning away a phone call is one of the biggest mistakes you can make because you've lost that opportunity," explains Mike from Pev's.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Mike at CPX agrees. He says, “We get slammed with phone calls on Saturdays and Sundays when people are literally calling from their cars looking for directions, so someone has to answer the phone. We make sure every employee understands that it is their responsibility to answer the phone and if a call does go into voicemail, that someone calls that person back as quickly as possible.”

Your Website



Another way people may find you is through your website. In fact, Gio would say, “Your website is the most critical element of your business, outside of rental equipment. Ten years ago, you probably didn’t even need a website. Today, your website needs to have some kind of stickiness to get your customers to return. It must be adult-friendly, easy for an adult to navigate and very informational.”

Paul at CPX agrees. He says, “The first impression is always the website. Our demographic is far

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

more inclined to type in “www” or do a Google search than to actually pick up the phone and call.” So, if you haven’t already secured a URL, make sure your web address is short and easy to remember. And, make sure your website contains all of your field’s relevant information, including:

- **Pictures and/or field videos.** These should be front and center on your home page. Ask your customers what they like most about your field – include that information on your landing page.
- **Pictures and/or videos of specific groups at your fields.** There’s no better sales tool to attract birthday parties than to have a video on your web page showing kids having a great experience at a birthday party. Mike at CPX said, “You can’t show one video on your website of 250-pound dudes dressed in camouflage and expect to attract birthday parties. If you have only one video, it should be kids in jeans and t-shirts using a rental marker. But in a perfect world, you’d have multiple videos, like our birthday video, which shows a girl wearing pink using a Tippmann rental marker in a hyperball setting. It’s like, ‘If she can play, I can play.’” Gio has a slightly different perspective. “I’m in the war game business, and guess what? My war game business is the same war game business that Band of Brothers, Modern Warfare, Call of Duty and others are selling in the hundreds of millions of video games sold every year. Our culture craves excitement and they want that video game to come to life. They want to be in Spec Ops. They want to

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

be in Call of Duty. It's an element that attracts people to paintball and my website(s) has to effectively communicate this." In the end, the more videos that you can post on your website that show the diversity of the groups that you service, the better.

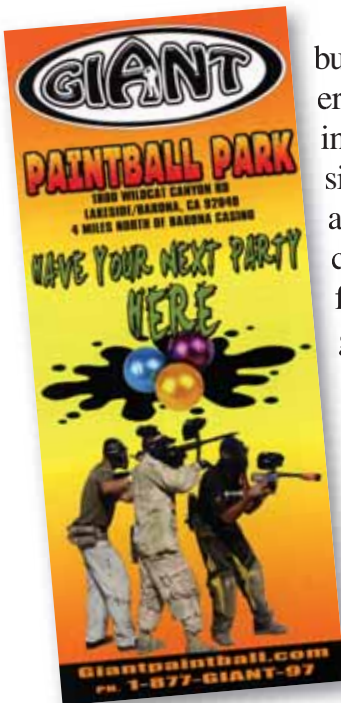
- **Location (address, directions, map).** Look at incorporating a link to MapQuest where your address is automatically loaded.
- **Days and hours of operation.**
- **Rental equipment information.** List what's available and what's included.
- **Pricing.** This is important to have on your website, but don't make it front and center. Hook them by the pictures first, then introduce cost.
- **Safety rules and rules of play.**
- **Upcoming events, specials, promotions, etc.**
- **Electronic/downloadable liability waiver.** We'll talk more about this in Chapter 3.
- **Online group reservations.** This comes down to personal preference. Pev's, for example, prefers to take reservations via telephone so that they have the opportunity for add-on sales/upgrades. On the other hand, CPX sees online reservations as a growth opportunity. As Mike at CPX explains, "We don't have a reservationist staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We understand that many of our customers are going online during

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

non-business hours and we feel it is important to give them the opportunity to make a reservation should they desire to do so.” CPX’s reservation software is very sophisticated and customized to their business, but off-the-shelf software packages, like Party Center Software, are also available.

- **Add a weather widget.** By doing this, players can see the local weather forecast.
- **More information.** Add other contact information such as a phone number and e-mail address, maybe even add a link to your Facebook page (discussed in Chapter 11).

Your Field Brochure and Other Print Material



Everything you print, whether business cards, field brochures, flyers, banners, etc., should all visibly include your field’s logo and website address (and always keep the appearance of your field’s logo consistent). Everything you do from a marketing perspective is going to drive people to your field or website. Even your social marketing efforts should drive traffic to your website.

According to Gio, roughly 40 to 50% of their business is coming in, directly or indirectly, through their website.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

In other cases, someone's first exposure to your field will be through a brochure that someone handed them or they picked up at another local business. A good field brochure is a key marketing tool that can be handed out by the thousands to prospective customers that may not know anything about your field. Although it's always a good idea to have brochures available at your field for existing customers to take home with them and to use for future reference, using it to attract new customers is its primary purpose.

Make sure you include all the same elements that we highlighted above for your website. Look at your brochure as a two-dimensional version of your website.

Mike, Paul and Gio all have multiple brochures because they've found that one brochure simply does not serve every purpose. CPX, for example, has one generic brochure and a second one that includes free play passes.

The generic brochure includes pictures of their main fields, information on the field and their main offerings, such as birthday parties, corporate outings, etc. There is also some information on pricing, hours of operations and a map.

The second brochure is the one they typically hand out to organizations that are seeking giveaway prizes or auction items because it has a perceived value associated with it.

For Gio, he has one brochure with pricing and one without. If he's distributing brochures through other businesses, he typically uses the one without pricing. That way he knows he won't lose anyone's interest over

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD



price. New players often need an incentive to make that first visit to your field, so one brochure may include some type of special offer. However, players already at your field may be looking for more information about groups or party options; this could be included in a second brochure.

There are all types of businesses where you can place your brochure to attract new players. Here are some ideas:

- **Local paintball stores.** These are especially ideal if you don't have a store on site. Don't view these stores as competitors. You should encourage a mutually beneficial relationship. They should promote you and you should promote them.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

- **Sporting goods stores.** Many of these stores have a brochure rack that is typically located near the front of the store; the racks are usually filled with local sites and activities. Think about how many sporting goods stores there are within a 25 to 40-mile radius of your field. Don't think about these stores as competitors either, whether you have a pro shop or not. Your field is a perfect fit with the other businesses they are promoting, and the retailers want people to play paintball as much as you do.
- **Hotels.** Hotels can be a good partner. Just about every hotel has a brochure rack in the lobby promoting local attractions. Simply stop by and ask the store/hotel manager if you can place your brochures in the rack. Wherever you place brochures make sure you routinely stop back to ensure the racks remain filled. If you don't think you can do this yourself, there are companies that will do this for you. For example, CPX uses CTM Media Group located in the Chicago area. *(Note: Contact information for CTM has been included in the reference section of this book.)* Throughout this book we'll talk about several other business establishments that are great vehicles for you to distribute your field brochure and other marketing materials.

Tip: Gio has a great tip for designing your field brochure. If you know your brochure is going to be placed in a brochure rack, make sure your field name and the word "paintball" can be seen from the back and front side. This way, if your brochure happens to be placed in backwards, it won't be ignored.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Because of the importance of brochures, Tippmann has worked with all three of its field contributors to create a template that can be used for many of these brochure ideas, including the on-site brochure and the field brochure that can be distributed to local businesses or hotel racks. These templates allow you to simply insert your logo, field pictures, hours of operation and pricing in an organized manner.

The templates can be printed by your local printer or Tippmann can even help you to get in contact with high volume printers that can produce these brochures for a very low cost. The brochure template and other templates for most of the marketing materials listed in this book are available on the Tippmann FTP site. For access to the site, simply contact Tippmann directly using one of the contact points listed in reference section in the back of this book.



Field Marketing

There are many dimensions to marketing your field. In fact, the four “P’s” of marketing apply to paintball as well: Product, Place, Price and Promotion. We will cover all of these in the upcoming chapters, but there a few critical points worth mentioning here.

First, some fields are truly destination spots and they market themselves nationally. In this book, it is our intent to focus on marketing vehicles that are close to home. Focus on a 25 to 30-mile radius around your field and make sure that the people who live within this radius know who you are.

Second, there are marketing initiatives that will help you reach your existing customers, and there are other initiatives that target new players. Both are equally important to your success and will be covered in this book.



Chapter 3

Your Most Important Marketing Asset – The Liability Waiver

The liability waiver that must be completed and signed by every individual who plays at your field is the single most valuable marketing tool you own. Gio would tell you, “Every waiver is worth more to me than the money I would make on their first visit. The value of the waiver should come back four times. If you make \$25 per visit, the waiver is worth \$100.”

Paul at CPX adds, “It’s a lot easier to reach current customers because you have their contact information.” These names should be entered into some type of a database and accessed on a regular basis as you target these existing individual customers with various marketing initiatives discussed throughout this book. They are your past, current and future customers.

It is important to understand the benefits of the liability waiver:

- 1. Save time at the field.** Whether you save it as a PDF document on your website or create an electronic version that can actually be completed online, suggesting that individuals/groups complete the form at home and bring it to the field signed, versus completing it at the field, will save everyone valuable time on game-day.
 - a. Pev’s has his groups fill out the waiver electronically. The individual is instructed to fill in a valid e-mail address so that the final,

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

completed waiver can be e-mailed back to the player, printed, signed and brought to the field. This saves time and ensures that a valid e-mail address is used.

2. Integration into marketing strategy. By creating an electronic version and having it on your website, you can require players to fill in certain sections, such as e-mail address, phone number, cell phone number, birth date, etc., which will become an integral part of your marketing strategies down the road.

By gathering the zip codes of your customers, you can plot an accurate map of where your customers are located, which will help you down the road when you're making marketing decisions (like what zip codes to hit with your advertising).

In addition, once you have birth dates, you can use the information in your marketing efforts. CPX uses the waivers to harvest birth dates of kids who have played at the field. About a month before their birthday, CPX sends out a postcard encouraging them to have their birthday party at CPX. Pev's does the same thing and offers a free pass on kids' birthdays (and they never come alone so he/she still gets the entry fee from all the kid's friends).

If sending out mass e-mails is something you don't think you can do yourself, there are companies out there that offer this service. Constant Contact is an e-mail service that many fields use. But don't get discouraged with a 13% open rate (which means that only 13% of those individuals that you sent the e-mail to will actually open it) on these e-mails; it's the industry average.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

It is also possible that by having an electronic waiver you may be able to integrate the data directly into your database. It is recommended that you work with your insurance carrier for final approval before posting the liability waiver on your website.



Chapter 4

The Free Play Pass



There's a reason that the Free Play Pass is one of the first marketing tools we are covering in this book. There's no better way to get someone into paintball than to let them try it firsthand. In fact, Pev's will tell you, "It's the number one program for getting new players to the field." Too many field owners look at the Free Play Pass as simply giving away something that otherwise would have been sold. Here's how Pev's looks at it: "You're going to make a profit on the additional paint they will buy and you didn't have that customer to begin with, so why wouldn't you do it?"

Pev's used to spend thousands of dollars per month on advertising. Now they spend considerably

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

less and rely heavily on the Free Play Pass. On average, they accept 200 passes per month. To them, that's 200 new people who are coming to their field on a monthly basis who are spending an average of \$25 each on additional paint and concessions. From there, it's all about creating the "ripple effect," and ensuring those 200 people have a great experience and spread the word.

So here's what you do. Design a simple, business-card size, UV-coated Free Play Pass. Put a value on it (what you typically charge for admission and rental). Make it good only on Saturdays or Sundays, when the field is already scheduled to be open. Put a disclaimer on the Pass that it can't be used as part of a group outing and identify whatever else is not included. It's up to you whether you want to include air and/or a limited number of paintballs. But even if you include some paintballs, you should expect the customer to buy more, so you still make your money on the paint, plus any concessions you sell. You already have the staff at the field and the rental gear in inventory, so your only true cost for this person to play is the cost of the paint you provide as part of the package. It seems in most cases the free passes do not include paint, but only you can determine what it takes to get players to your field for the first time.

All three of these fields use the Free Play Pass. Pev's offers free admission and rental equipment – a \$50 value. Giant offers just free admission – a \$25 value. And CPX has what they call a Gold Pass, which includes open play admission and equipment rental – a \$33 value. In all cases, the Free Play Pass excludes paint and air.

Start an Ambassador Program

For Pev's, the number one place they distribute the Free Play Passes is at schools. Via a sign-up at the field, Pev's solicits kids from each specific area – middle school and high school – to act as Pev's "ambassadors." In the high schools, they try to find freshmen and sophomores so they can utilize the same kids for a few years. The kids carry around a stack of Passes and they get points (as the Passes are redeemed) that can be used for free play at the field. Remember, these kids (ambassadors) are already players, so the free play, which costs you nothing, is very enticing. Pev's codes the Passes that are given to each kid so they can easily track how many redeemed Passes come from each ambassador.

Pev's, through their database, can also track whether kids are redeeming Free Play Passes multiple times. The Pass is stapled to their completed waiver, and when the individual's information is entered into the database, they note that admission was via a Free Play Pass. Thus, they can tell how many times an individual was admitted via a Free Play Pass, as well as the ambassador responsible for the Pass.

If one ambassador continues to give away Passes to the same kids, he/she will not get points for those redemptions, and could potentially lose their ambassadorship (which they don't want to do because they want to keep that status and the free play). You may think that Pev's is asking for problems with this program, but they would tell you that the kids generally police themselves. They understand that the goal is to attract unique kids to the field and they don't want to lose their status in the program.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Make Free Play Passes Work for You – Network, Network, Network!

Gio, at Giant Paintball Parks, also distributes the Free Play Passes at schools using kids who sign up at the field. But he takes distribution of the Free Play Pass one step further. Whether it is a county fair, or a festival that is coming to town, Gio meets with their marketing people and offers them Free Play Passes to include in their price of admission. Relative to the price of admission, the value of the Free Play Pass is so high that they typically include the offer in all of their promotional materials, including local radio. It gives Giant some great low-cost promotional exposure.

CPX does the same thing. As Paul explains, “If somebody calls and says they are hosting an event with a thousand people, I’ll give them enough Gold Passes for everyone. A nearby town had a 4th of July celebration and they were expecting 10,000 people, so I sent them 10,000 passes.”

Partnering with other local businesses is another great vehicle for distributing your Free Play Passes. For instance, family restaurants are ideal partners. It could be as simple as exchanging brochures and marketing each other at your respective establishments. Or, you can take it one step further. Pev’s, for example, gives away 100 Free Play Passes to select area restaurants. These Passes have a total value of approximately \$5,000. Pev’s tells the restaurant owner that they can do whatever they want with the Free Passes – they can give them to employees or customers, or to use in promotions (for example, one restaurant gave away a Free Play Pass to Pev’s with every gift card purchase during

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

the holidays). But what Pev's requests in exchange is exposure, either through a sign in the window or table tents on the tables.

A secondary element to this program is that Pev's also requests restaurant gift certificates in exchange that they can then use in promotions at the field. Gio does the same thing with restaurants located around his fields. In fact, Gio also provides a plastic or cardboard holder with his logo on it so that his brochures/passes have a home on the counter.

Pizza joints, especially those that deliver, are an example of a good partner. They can tie the Free Play Passes into their delivery program and get your field exposure in households that you would not otherwise reach. The pizza place can use the Passes to help entice a larger order or pick-up, while you generate incremental exposure for the cost of printing the Free Play Pass.

All three of these field owners will tell you there is no single better vehicle to get new players to try the sport than the Free Play Pass. They each hand out Free Play Passes in the tens of thousands per year in their respective communities. In fact, Pev's handed out more than 75,000 Free Play Passes at a recent Washington Redskins' game. But don't feel confined to the strategies incorporated by these three fields; think outside the box for unique ways you can utilize the Free Play Passes in your area.

However, depending on the size of your community, you should be careful not to over-saturate the market with Free Play Passes. The larger the metropolitan area your field pulls from, the more Free Play Passes you can distribute. And remember, even if

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

you have a small percentage of your regular players redeeming Free Play Passes every once in a while, they're still spending an average of \$25 at your field every time they play.

Print and Track

Two other points that you want to keep in mind – printing and tracking:

Printing: Find a good local printer that will work with you in an effort to keep costs down. As an example, CPX prints 10,000 Gold Passes (UV coated) for \$99. See if you can arrange to get a printer's end-runs (which means they tie your print job onto the end of another large print job and give you a discounted price). It may not work with every printed piece, but on those that you use regularly throughout the year, it may be the route to go.

Tracking: Try to track (via numerical code or other means) what passes are going where. This will help you to understand where your traffic is coming from, what programs are working and which should be discontinued. Assign someone on your staff to fulfillment. You need to send someone out to all of the locations where you have passes or brochures to make sure brochures are still there and everything looks professional and well organized.

Chapter 5

The Return Pass



Right behind the Free Play Pass in importance is the Return Pass, or as Gio refers to it, “The Thank You Pass.” You’ve probably been in the situation where your field gets a birthday party, church group or other youth outing, and you wonder if and when any of these kids will come back. As we know, too often kids will leave the outing talking about what a great experience they had, but many won’t return if they are not motivated or given a reason to play again.

The Return Pass is one great way to motivate these kids to return again and again! Pev’s, Giant and CPX all utilize a Return Pass. They hand one out to all individuals who visit the field as part of a group, and in some

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

cases, they are also distributed to walk-on players. Return Passes are typically business-card size with UV coating on one side and no coating on the other side. Just prior to distribution, the date of your next business day is stamped on the side without the coating.

Tip: Don't stamp the current day's date because you will inevitably get some people who will try to sell it to someone in line for use that day.

The expiration date is typically seven to 14 days later. At Pev's, everybody who comes in a group to play gets a Return Pass. It's a 14-day Return Pass that lets the user walk-on again, free, within the 14-day period. They just have to buy paint. When the players turn in their equipment, a Return Pass is stamped with the next day's date and handed to each member of the group. Again, it's a great way to encourage a return visit.

CPX also heavily relies on the Return Pass, although Paul is very liberal about handing them out to walk-on players, not just those who are there as part of a group. Their Pass entitles the user to free admission and basic equipment rental and clearly states it expires in 14 days. Mike at CPX sums this up perfectly, "We're not Southwest Airlines where people are going to fly Southwest time and time again because it has the cheapest fares. We actually have to work at getting them to come back." And it's working for CPX: Mike claims that Return Passes account for roughly 60% of their free admissions.

Gio does the same thing, but his Return Passes expire in seven days. And Gio adds, "When they come back they typically bring a friend plus they're spending some dollars." It's a win-win.

Chapter 6

Fundraiser Booklet



Although the Free Pass/Return Pass and the passes that are a part of the Fundraiser Booklet are similar, the key difference is that the Fundraiser Pass is sold (although it typically provides an exceptional value).

We're sure you get hit up constantly to give donations, prizes, etc., to local groups for their annual fundraising efforts. You can't afford to give something to everyone who asks, but you know that it demonstrates your commitment to the community and is great public relations. In the end, you have to choose which few organizations will get your support each year.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Here's a great idea that allows you to support every organization that requests your support, and it gets people to your field and makes you money in the process.

Keep in mind that the number of passes you include in your booklet, the value you assign to the booklet and the price you sell the booklets to the groups for is ultimately your decision. For the purpose of clearly outlining how the program works we are going to use a few examples.

Pev's Fundraiser Booklet

Pev's Fundraiser book contains six passes. Each pass provides free admission and equipment rental. It does not include paint and that is communicated clearly on the passes. At Pev's, each individual pass has a value of \$50, so the entire book has a \$300 value. The groups buy each book for \$25 and sell it for \$49.95. That's right, a \$300 value for \$49.95. The group keeps the remaining \$25. So, if a sports league has 100 kids, and each kid sells only one book, the league makes \$2,500 and you make \$2,500 too!

Giant's Fundraiser Booklet

Giant's Fundraiser book includes 12 passes – each pass has a value of \$40, so the entire book has a value of \$480. He sells his books for \$6 each to groups and the groups turn around and sell them for \$60. Giant's passes also do not include air or paint.

Whether the kids sell it to the neighbors or Dad takes it to work, selling one book is certainly easier than selling five car washes at \$5 a piece or 25 candy

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

bars at \$1 each. You can be certain that virtually every organization will look at this as a great and unique fundraising opportunity.

And equally important, you are perceived as a community champion for supporting every one of these groups because most people will assume you are donating the value of the passes (although you are really making money in the process).

It is estimated that Giant and Pev's sell more than 10,000 Fundraiser Booklets every year. This puts into perspective the dollars their fields put back into the community, and into their own pockets, just through this one program.

There's an argument that can be made that you could give the books away to the groups and they could keep 100% of the profits. Ultimately, that's your choice. But it seems applying some value to the book (the fact that they paid you \$6, \$15, \$25) keeps the teams more motivated to proactively go out and sell more books, which leads to more people coming to your field. By charging a small fee you can at least recoup most of your printing costs.

Be Proactive

The "Fundraising" booklet can be used with just about any organization looking to raise money for their cause. In addition, you don't need to wait for organizations to call you; you can be proactive in calling them. It will get more people to your field and they will welcome your call.

We recommend that you start with youth sports' leagues; this provides the best overlap with the targeted

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

paintball player because these young athletes are competitive by nature and enjoy being on a team. Virtually every youth league has a website and a person in charge of fundraising. Find every youth league in your area – soccer, basketball, lacrosse, baseball, girls' softball, football, etc. You don't need to call the individual teams; once the league buys into the program they will disseminate the information to the individual teams.

Schools are also a good target, because they too are always looking for fundraisers. The best way to penetrate the schools is through the Parent – Teacher Association (PTA) or Parent – Teacher – Student Organization (PTSO). Most schools have the contact information for the PTA on their website. And once you help them raise some money for their program, they become your ambassadors and start promoting your field as well.

Gio, at Giant, actually targets the athletic departments within the schools. Gio adds, “Coaches have to raise money for their teams for things like uniforms, bags, tournaments, etc. The kids on these teams are the perfect vehicle through which to sell ticket packages to our parks. We encourage the athletic department to promote the tickets in the school newspaper because that will help sell tickets as well. And, in both cases, every four years you have all new students so the program should never get stale.”

Pev's takes the whole program one step further by tying in the Fundraiser booklet with the team's year-end banquet. Mike adds, “The team could go to a pizza joint to have their year-end party but what do the kids do? They run around like crazy because there is noth-

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

ing else to do. Instead, they come to the paintball park and have their year-end party here. They can bring in pizza or grill out, hand out the trophies and the kids can play a game of paintball while the parents sit back and relax.” For Pev’s, if a group agrees to have their year-end party/banquet at the field, he sells them the Team Fundraising books for \$10 each, with the team then making \$40 per book versus the \$25. For most teams, it’s an easy decision.

A Few Additional Points

- 1. Create a contract:** You should do this for each group to whom you sell passes so that they clearly understand the arrangement terms. This also helps you keep track of the number of passes sold to each group. For Pev’s, the contract tells them the period of time they have to sell the passes and that once the time is up they need to pay for the sold passes and return unsold passes to the field. It also clearly states that the group is responsible for any lost passes.
- 2. Make it clear:** If you tie in the booklets with a team’s year-end party, make sure they understand that the passes cannot be used for the party.
- 3. Set appropriate time of year:** Be aware that a significant portion of the passes will be redeemed the last couple of weeks before the expiration date, so make sure the expiration date is during a slow time of the year.
- 4. Show support:** One additional way to tie a fundraiser into your field is by donating back a percentage of their spend. For instance, if Gio

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

has a team that wants to play paintball, but also wants to raise money for their cause, his program will cut a check back to the group for 10% of their total spend on that day. If their group spends \$1,000 on admission fees, paint, air, food and beverages, Gio cuts them a check for \$100. Just another way for you to show support for an organization.

We have created a template for the Fundraiser booklet, so all you need to do is plug in your field information, restrictions and state's legal information and then print your desired quantity. The template is available on the Tippmann FTP site. For access to the site simply contact Tippmann directly using one of the contact points listed in the reference section in the back of this book.

Chapter 7

Online Coupon Programs

More than likely, local online coupon programs are available in your town or city. These online services, such as Groupon and Living Social, provide great deals for local businesses and can be used to attract new players to your facility. In the reference section we will provide the contact information for these sites. However, we are going to focus on Groupon since it is the largest and most widely-used program by fields around the country.

Groupon (www.groupon.com) was launched in 2008 with the deal-of-the-day concept; it took the country by storm. In 2010, it exceeded \$500 million in revenue and could hit the \$1 billion mark faster than any other company in history. If you haven't heard of Groupon before, now is the time to jump on the bandwagon.

All three of the fields interviewed for this book have successfully utilized Groupon in the past and are planning to continue with it in the future. They have such a big reach with their extensive database that if the deal, time and location are right, it can be a huge success.

Here's How Groupon Works

Groupon promotes a package, in a specific geographical area, at an incredible deal through its massive database and then splits the revenues with

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

you 50/50. For example, Groupon ran a 2-for-1 deal with Pev's. The value of the package is \$100; it included admission, rental equipment and 200 paintballs. For Pev's, they wanted to include paintballs because they felt that since the package was being purchased it needed to include everything necessary to play the game. They offered the package to their customers for \$50, or 50% off. For every package sold, the revenues were split, Pev's got \$25 and Groupon got \$25. It's a one-day promotion and after the promotion ends Groupon sends you a check for your portion of the revenues. The second time Pev's ran this offer, Groupon sold more than 1,500 packages. That's more than \$37,000 in advance sales for Pev's.

Giant also has worked with Groupon. In their last promotion with Groupon, Giant sold 3,800 packages at \$39 per pass which included air, rental, 200 balls and entrance fee. Gio assumes that when a Groupon coupon is redeemed at the park he will make another \$25-\$35 on additional paint and concessions.

When CPX runs their Groupon program, they offer a package that has a value of \$48 and includes open play admission, basic equipment rental and two pods of paint. Groupon offers it at \$24 and CPX gets \$12. But as Paul at CPX will tell you, "We expect each individual to purchase more paint and we'll hit them up with other upgrades, food, drinks, etc. We're certainly not giving anything away." Paul added, "Groupon typically gives you 30% of your share within 10 days, 30% within 30 days and the rest in 60 days, so we try to run it in November so we get the money when we need it the most – in the wintertime."

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

You're probably asking yourself, am I losing \$20 because my regular customers will buy a Groupon coupon? The answer is, "possibly." But as Gio puts it, "You never know whether that customer was going to come and play during that timeframe anyway, now it forces them to come play. Plus, you should still be able to generate \$25-\$35 per person."

A few important points are worth mentioning. First, even with a deal like this you are still covering your hard costs. Plus, you know for most players, 200 paintballs will not be enough, and they will purchase additional paint, which means more money in your pocket.

Second, you are getting great exposure to potential customers that you may otherwise never reach. Third, by consciously selecting when you run the deal with Groupon, based on Groupon's payment terms with you (typically half in 30 days and remaining balance in 60 days), you can ensure you get your money during a slow month when the incremental cash flow will be helpful.

And finally, by carefully selecting the expiration date on the offer, you can ensure higher traffic during a slow period. You'll get a big influx in traffic right after the offer, but then the next big influx will take place close to the expiration date.

Groupon isn't going to run a promotion with a paintball field in every city and they are going to be careful about running multiple promotions with multiple fields in any given city. So, it may not be a viable marketing tool for every field. But it's certainly worth a call to see if it could work for your field.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Getting started on Groupon is simple. Just sign up on www.groupon.com and then go to the Groupon Merchant Services listing at the bottom of their home page. There, you submit information about your company and what you want to offer to Groupon. They will contact you and help you optimize your deal, plan for capacity issues and address the expected redemption cycle with videos, testimonials and checklists. They also help craft a compelling write-up in the Groupon style that will enhance your field image.

Maximize Groupon Success

There are many ideas on how to maximize your success on Groupon, but here are some of the better practices to consider when developing your final field offer:

First, prepare for a lot of customers. As stated above, people who purchase Groupon deals redeem them rather quickly. The goal is to create a loyal customer base. A Groupon deal is your one opportunity to get these customers to come to your field, so make the offer compelling and they will come in quickly and come back if they have a great experience.

Second, get your employees ready. Have your employees trained and ready to go. Teach them how to redeem and track Groupon promotions. Training your employees on how to interact with Groupon customers will increase the probability that they will become repeat players.

Third, get your customers' contact information. With Groupon shoppers it's important to get their contact information because there is no way to get

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

customer information from the Groupon site. It's very important to use your liability waiver forms to get all the information including name, address and email.

Fourth, know the limit of what your field can handle. When creating a Groupon promotion, be sure to place an appropriate cap on the number of deals. You don't want to oversell the Groupon deal if your field cannot meet the needs of players. This will create a bad player experience and may risk that not only will they not return, but they may speak poorly about it to other people.

Finally, create deal restrictions to protect yourself and get the most out of your Groupon offer. Restrictions should include that the Groupon deal is not valid with other coupons, is valid only on certain days of the week or can only be used once per visit. Using these three restrictions will help ensure that you don't lose money on Groupon.

Groupon is working for many fields beyond CPX Sports, Giant and Pev's. Smaller paintball fields and fields offering laser tag are seeing great success as well. One paintball field offering laser tag sold more than 1,500 Groupon deals and a second laser tag operation sold more than 100 party packages (groups of 10) that provided a high dollar value for the Groupon offer and brought in a whole new group of players. These players may not have otherwise known about the paintball facility.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, there are many online coupon programs available besides Groupon so check out each one so you can fine tune your message and hit your target audience.



Chapter 8

Promotional Calendar

Most paintball fields are only open 104 days a year. If you live in the Midwest, the winter season can drive that number even lower. In addition, you will automatically lose days due to weather, major sporting events, movie premiers, etc. If a holiday falls on a weekend it hurts, but then you can make up for that day by opening on Mondays such as Labor Day and Memorial Day. The point that Gio makes on this subject is clear, “Every weekend

is precious...it is the only chance we have to make money.” Gio’s philosophy is to have a plan for every weekend and every holiday. You have to understand what you are competing against and have a plan on how to attack it and maximize your traffic. “Invest in a huge whiteboard calendar, put it up on your wall and start filling in the weekends with your promotions.”

For instance, Super Bowl Sunday is traditionally slow for Gio. So on Super Bowl Sunday he runs a promotion where you get a free pass with each paid admission. History has proven that he can increase his



HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

traffic by as much as 50% by having a promotion on these types of days.

On holidays such as Labor Day and Memorial Day, Gio typically plans on doing something special. Gio adds, "I don't want to discount a Sunday unless I absolutely have to, but I can discount a Monday because I'm open an extra day. Any days where schools and banks are closed you need to be open." On these types of days Gio may offer something like \$10 entry instead of the normal \$35. The reason he is willing to do this is that he has learned that many of the customers showing up on these Mondays are new players, not his existing Saturday or Sunday players, so he is willing to give them a discount.

Even if your field is not typically open on weekdays, there are some weeks that may make sense. For instance, weeks such as Spring Break should be good weeks for you since kids are out of school.

On these special days, where you otherwise might have been closed, make sure you are promoting the fact that you are open through your website, social marketing sites, direct e-mail, etc. It seems like such a simple thing, but planning out your year not only gives you a clearer picture of what dates need additional marketing support, but also helps you prepare to get that marketing message out early enough to your current and future customers to make an impact. It will also help you to better understand when you should start initiatives like your Team Fundraisers, when your programs should expire, and what events you may want to attend to build exposure for your field throughout the year.

Chapter 9

Event Marketing

Speaking of event marketing, there's no better way to get someone excited about paintball than to let them fire a paintball marker. We all remember the adrenaline that rushed through our veins the first time we felt the blow-back of the marker and saw the paint splat on the target. And there's certainly something to the theory that outdoor people do outdoor things, so look for these types of events to include as part of your marketing calendar.

Invest in a shooting booth and attend as many local events as you can. Any event where there will be lots of kids is a good target. Here's a list of the types of events you should consider attending in an effort to promote your paintball field:

- State/County Fairs
- Street Festivals
- Music Concerts
- Professional Sporting Events
- Youth Tournaments

Pev's, for example, sets up a 20' by 50' shooting booth, and charges people \$3 for 10 balls (Reballs) to shoot at a target. If they hit the bull's-eye, they get a Free Play Pass. If space allows, they also set up a 60' by 100' area for laser tag. They charge \$3 to play for a four-to-five-minute game. Pev's comments, "Our line is the longest line at every festival. Everybody wants us

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

there. We don't even have to pay to be there anymore. Plus, we're making \$3 per attempt and averaging 200 attempts per event, so we're more than covering our costs and we're exposing Pev's to new potential customers." Plus, it sends the message that paintball is truly one of the few sporting activities that anybody can play, regardless of gender, age or athletic ability.

Giant does the same type of thing. Gio will attend just about any event he can, although he only uses the Predator Games Eagle Eye Laser Tag System because it takes less time to set-up and fewer people to run it (we'll talk more about integrating laser tag into your marketing strategies in Chapter 16).

Whether it's a county fair, local college event or even a school carnival, you will find Giant there. Gio adds, "We'll be at the Orange County Fair with 1,000,000 people and the Beehive Family Expo with 2,500. This is one of our best forms of marketing. There's nothing better than letting somebody shoot and pull the trigger of a paintball gun." They typically request an 80' x 100' area and set up a field complete with bunkers. Although Gio doesn't charge the kids to play laser tag, he does actively sell his ticket packages at these events. By not charging, he feels he can leverage free or discounted space since the event can now market the activity as free in their marketing campaign.

Although their tactics are slightly different, the objective is the same: Expose paintball to your targeted demographic and find a way to make enough money at the event to at least cover the expense of your attendance. Remember, you are there to build awareness for paintball as well as your field.

Chapter 10

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

CPX claims only 7% of their web traffic comes from someone actually typing in www.cpxsports.com and 85% of the referrals to their website come from Google. There are, of course, many other search engine programs you can use, including Yahoo and Bing, but we will focus on Google so you can understand how the program works and how easy it is to set up an account with any one of these search engines.

Google It!

There are two ways to use Google:

- 1. Organic Search:** This is driven by how many people have linked to your site, how many have clicked through to your site, integrating key words throughout your site and writing and syndicating articles with key words. It may take some time for a field to work its way to the top of the listing this way (on average three to six months).
- 2. Pay-per-click:** With this method you can target a specific geographical area within five to 60 miles around your field so you're not spending money targeting individuals who you know will not travel to your field. Pay-per-click is basically an online auction for words/terms that you pay for on a per-click-basis. For example, if you buy the phrase "bachelor parties" and

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

someone in your geographical areas types “bachelor parties” in Google, your listing/website will come up on the listing, but you only pay if an individual actually clicks through to your website. Other relevant words that you could use in your field’s Google pay-per-click program include birthday party, laser tag, paintball, party, birthdays, bachelorette party, corporate outings, team building, etc.

How Does Pay-Per Click Work?

First, you select a word/phrase that you are interested in buying and the corresponding rate per click will be displayed. Mike at CPX explains, “The average cost for a “paintball” term in our area is 70 cents to be in one of the top positions on Google, so every time someone clicks on our ad/website we are billed 70 cents. On the other hand, the per-click expense to get near the top of the listings for “corporate team building” is around \$10 compared to the 70 cents for a paintball term.” That’s because there are many more entities, outside of paintball, bidding on those terms which drives the cost up.

Regardless of the terms you select or the number of terms you select, you will set up a daily budget with Google so that your daily expense and total expense can be managed. In addition to the geographical focus Google can offer, another advantage is the seasonal flexibility it offers. As Mike at CPX explains, “You can change your words throughout the year. We target corporate outings in the summer, bachelor parties in the spring and fall and birthday parties year-round.”

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Some of you may not be using Google today, and may not be familiar with what it has to offer your field, so we will go into greater detail on setting up a pay-per-click program so you can see how easy it is to get started.

Before starting a pay-per-click program, your website is the key to your success and should follow the guidelines outlined in Chapter 2 so you optimize your pay-per-click advertising. You also need to consider what people are looking for and then create the words that will drive customers to your field. We highly recommend that you go beyond the single term “paintball” and use a list of words or phrases that people will use in their searches. Phrases such as “places to play paintball,” “paintball fields near me,” and “best paintball fields,” are just a few examples of word phrases that you can use.

You also need to consider the local party theme searches conducted online. Parents or party organizers and corporations are looking for fun and fresh ideas to create that perfect birthday party, bachelor party or corporate outing and you could be that place. To build awareness and keep your facility in demand, you need to add these words and phrases to your website to optimize your website for searches along with the investment in advertising with Google Ad Words or other pay-per-click programs.

For the Google Ad Words’ pay-per-click program there are three easy steps to getting started:

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Step 1 – Set up your account

- Go to www.Google.com/ads.
- Use your existing Google account or create a new account on Ad Words.
- Follow the simple online instructions.

Step 2 – Set up your campaign

- Click **Create your first campaign**.
- Follow the on-screen prompts, name your campaign and decide where you want to target your ads (i.e., by state or zip code).
- Set your maximum daily budget and choose your bidding option.
- Click **Save and Continue**.

Step 3 – Create your ad and select your keywords

- You are on the **Ads** tab.
- Think of a headline and description lines that will appeal to parents and corporations shopping for party ideas – in your city, area or town (see below – Search Term Titles and Ad Copy Suggestions).
- Enter your website address.
- Save your ad.
- Move to **Keywords** and choose keywords that relate to paintball. Remember – your best prospects are probably looking for ideas for their party and may not know about paintball yet.

Now that you have your Google account set up,

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

begin to test and see the cost of words and phrases in and out of paintball. To get you started, here is just a sample of phrases to consider. Also consider setting up special landing pages for each of these phrases. As a guideline, the higher the search volume, the more you may have to bid, but a lower search volume or the longer phrases will likely give you a more targeted audience with less cost.

<u>Keywords</u>	<u>One month search volume</u>
Paintball	5,000,000
Indoor paintball	27,200
Outdoor paintball	8,100
Paintball fields	33,100
Places to play paintball	720
Corporate team building	22,200
Birthday party places	22,200
Bachelor party ideas	27,100
Bachelor party	246,000
Kid's birthday party	165,000
16th birthday party ideas	8,100
13th birthday party ideas	9,900
Teenage birthday party ideas	9,900
Birthday party for adults	14,800
Corporate outing ideas	320
Places for birthday parties	18,100
Places for bachelor parties	720
Fundraising idea	246,000

Paintball Google AdWords Create Your Account and Ad Campaigns

Step 1 – Set up your account

- Go to www.Google.com/ads.
- Use your existing Google account or create a new account on “For Advertisers: Google AdWords”.
- Follow the simple online instructions.

Step 2 – Set up your campaign

- Click **Create your first campaign**.
- Follow the on-screen prompts, name your campaign and decide where you want to target your ads.
- Set your maximum daily budget and choose your bidding option.
- Click Save and Continue.

Step 3 – Create your ad & select your keywords

- You are on the **Ads** Tab.
- Think of a headline and description lines that will appeal to paintballers – in your city, area or town.
- Enter your website address.
- Save your ad.
- Move to **Keywords** and choose keywords that relate to Paintball parties.

Giant utilizes Google, but works through a third party that helps them get exposure through Google in a slightly different way. Rather than just paying for placement, he pays per click-through and the person that actually clicks through is tracked. It appears they are going to your site, but they are actually being directed to the third-party company’s site and then the user comes back through to Giant. The advantage is that when an individual is searching for related topics such as birthday parties, youth activities, team building, etc., Giant comes up as well. It drives more total traffic than simply moving your field further up in the listings.

Note: For contact information on Google check the Reference Section in the back of the book.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

In addition to the direct relationship with Google, there is also an indirect option. When you do a Google search, there will be sites that are listed that do nothing more than list businesses (like your field) that offer the respective services. Some of these sites have a nominal charge for a listing, others are free. For example, in many major markets there's a publication called Family Magazine that is both in print and online. They have a specific birthday-party section. Again, search those key words listed above and any others that may be applicable to your field and find out what listings you can quickly and inexpensively add to your marketing.



Chapter 11

Leveraging Social Networking Sites

It's interesting that four or five years ago, social media probably wouldn't have been included in this book because it did not exist. Now, the social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, provide a great vehicle for businesses to communicate with their existing customers and ultimately attract new business.

Social media is not a fad; it's a fundamental shift in the way we communicate. "We don't have a choice on whether we DO social media; the question is how well we do it." (Erik Qualman, Author, *Socialnomics*). Social media is now the #1 activity on the web. More importantly, 96% of the Generation Y population has joined a social network. While these sites can reach new customers (such as those Facebook fans in your geographical area that list paintball as an interest), they also help reach your existing customers on a regular basis.

There are many social networking sites other than Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, but these are the most significant so we are going to focus on these. If you don't already have an account with each of these platforms for your field, we recommend that you set them up. Here are a few reasons why: Facebook has more than 600 million active users. In fact, if Facebook was a country, it would be the third largest country behind China and India. Ashton Kutcher and Britney Spears have more Twitter followers than the population of Sweden, Israel, Switzerland, Ireland, Norway and Panama. And YouTube is the fourth most visited site

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

on the internet and the second largest search engine behind Google.

Facebook and Twitter allow your regular, loyal customers to follow you in real time. And with Facebook, you can focus your communication geographically, so if you know that most of your customers are within 30 miles of your field, you can focus your communication to just those individuals.

Fields and Facebook

There are several ways you can leverage Facebook. Pev's mainly uses Facebook as a place for their regular customers to communicate with Pev's and it allows them to keep their customers involved and informed. Pev's has a weekly trivia contest on their Facebook site and gives away prizes, just to keep their followers engaged. Giant actively advertises with Facebook, targeting those individuals living in zip codes around their fields who have a designated interest in paintball.

CPX is a big believer in the social networking sites because of the many roles it can play as part of their overall marketing program. Paul from CPX explains, "If the local weatherman is calling for severe thunderstorms on Sunday all week long and then on Friday says the storms are pushed out to Monday and Sunday is going to be gorgeous, we can immediately send out a tweet on Twitter and update our Facebook page and immediately get the word out to our loyal customers to come out and play. How else can you get that message out that quickly, and it's at no cost to us."

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

All of these social networking platforms are relatively new, but they are growing very rapidly. You must have clear objectives when integrating these platforms into your marketing mix and have realistic expectations of the results. At CPX, they have 3,000 followers on Facebook. They realize that if they send out a promotional message to these 3,000 followers, not all 3,000 are going to act on the message and come to the field. But as Mike explains, “If we get 10 people who saw it and came in, and if they each brought one person who has never been there before, it was successful.”

The most dominant social marketing vehicle for any field is Facebook, so we want to offer some of the best practices that we have used to become the #1 paintball company on Facebook with more than 150,000 fans.

There has been a lot written on Facebook and here are some interesting facts you should know:

- Facebook fans, on average, spend twice as much as non-fans on your product or service;
- More than one third of your fans will stay loyal to you; and
- Almost half of your fans will recommend your business or facility to their friends.

Several chapters could be written on this subject alone, but to keep things simple, here are 10 things to consider when using Facebook as a marketing tool.

- 1. Content is key.** Treat your fans like they are at your field. Ask questions; highlight some things they do not know about your field and continuously provide updates to encourage

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

“likes” or “comments.” The more comments and likes you get the better; this ensures your post stays active on your fan’s page and may encourage them to share your posts.

2. **Leverage your assets (what your field offers).** Highlight some of the best aspects of your field, provide weekly or monthly discounts just to your Facebook fans and encourage them to share it with their friends. Do this to build traffic in the off-season or off-hours. Keep your posts short and always include a picture, photo album or video.
3. **Develop “Fan only” programs.** There are a number of ways to create promotions for new fans or promotions only for current fans. For new fans, you can adjust your Facebook settings so that they come to the New Fan Page/Tab first so you can offer a low cost promotion to encourage this new visitor to sign up as a fan. This is surprisingly easy to do using the FBML application on Facebook and adjusting your settings on Facebook so new fans come to this tab page first.
4. **Keep your page fresh.** It’s amazing to see companies post one or two comments on their page a week. There is, of course, a point where you may lose some fans by posting too much, but posting one to two comments a day should be the norm. Your posts don’t need to be just about your field—they could be links to interesting stories or videos you have seen on other social sites. Think about weekly

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

polls or other posts that encourage feedback and of course, “likes” to your posts.

5. **Develop limited time promotions.** Facebook has a few rules for promotions, but look at a few other sites and you can see how easy it is to run a promotion. The prize can be a low cost or free admission or maybe an occasional free marker. Again, the goal is to interact with your fans and give them a substantive reason to come back again and again.
6. **Interact with your fans.** When they post a comment, you should post a comment as well; you will be surprised by how your comment will spur more comments. If a fan posts a picture, we strongly recommend that at least once a day you post a comment on that picture. When you post a comment on a picture, that picture and comment gets posted on your fan’s wall which again encourages more comments and links back to your site.
7. **Let your fans guide the content.** Ask them on a regular basis what they want to see. Is it promotions, pictures of players at your fields, tips to play better paintball or maybe some YouTube videos? They will tell you and then you must react. Again, it goes back to giving them what they want so they suggest your page to their friends.
8. **Advertise.** You will be amazed at how targeted you can get with your Facebook advertising. You can go by state or zip code and even target to a certain age group. Since

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Facebook asks for favorite activities you should, of course, include paintball as a key word, but also think about other outdoor activities to expand your reach. The two big tips we can offer are: Make your picture interesting and consist of something that will appeal to your target audience; and once you build up a fan base, consider advertising only to the friends of your fans. Every time your ad is seen, the ad will go onto their friend's page as "John Smith likes XYZ Paintball." This is an easy setting on the Facebook ad page and has proven to be one of the big reasons we have grown our fan base so quickly.

9. Share your page with other businesses in paintball and in your surrounding area. If the local pizza place uses your facility as part of a promotion (get a Free Play Pass with any large pizza) they should link their fan base using the "@" sign and your Paintball page in their comment section. They win because they are giving away something for free and you win because their fans have to link to you.

10. Make time for Facebook and Social Marketing. The costs are very low but you are not only competing against other paintball fields but other recreational and entertainment activities that each of your fans may be interested in. Plan at least an hour a day, or even at night, and keep it fun. Read online articles and buy a book or two; you will be amazed by how quickly you can reap the benefits of using Facebook and Social Marketing to grow your business.

Post on YouTube

YouTube is slightly different than Facebook and Twitter, but should be integrated into your marketing strategies as well. It's a great vehicle for you to post videos of/from your field. It can be as basic as showing the various playing fields at your facility or as strategic as creating a video for each of the various groups your field currently services such as birthday parties, corporate outings, bachelor parties, etc. The same videos that you are already using on your website can be posted on YouTube.

For all three of these social networking platforms, make sure someone is always monitoring your sites. If you don't have the time or don't feel comfortable doing it yourself, find a high school student who's savvy with these sites and consider trading his/her time for Free Play Passes. Or, hire a college intern. It shouldn't cost you anything.



Chapter 12

Television, Radio and Billboards

With the growth of the Internet, including social networking sites, the way businesses market themselves has changed. However, you should still consider traditional media like TV, radio and billboards as a way to complement your other marketing efforts. But, first you need to understand which one(s) will work best for you based on your target audience and the market area that you need to reach. When looking at traditional media, you need to consider the following:

- The reach (the number of people that your media will reach);
- The frequency (the number of times each member of your target audience will see your ad);
- Location (how many miles from your field that you want your ad to reach); and
- Length of the campaign.

Billboards

Billboards provide you with a very large reach for your dollar, since many people will drive by your ad, but it is not very targeted since you cannot control who is in the car. The frequency is very high for a given month and the location can be targeted. Billboards can be purchased month to month and usually you can get an extra month or two if another company hasn't secured the space (which can be a nice low cost way to

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

get additional exposure from your billboard since most companies just include that at no charge).

Many fields only use billboards for a short period of time and do not make it an ongoing program, but it should be something to investigate in your area. The best option, of course, would be to have a billboard put on your field with the only cost to you being the creative design and production of the billboard. However, this only makes sense if the billboard can be seen by a high number of consumers driving by the vicinity of the sign.

Radio

Radio is an interesting medium because it gives you a very broad reach, but the frequency tends to be lower and the reach can sometimes go far beyond your targeted geographical area and target audience. In talking with the field owners who helped write this book, they do not believe that you need to invest heavily in radio advertising as there are ways to get your field exposure on the radio simply by trading what you already have: Free Play Passes.

As you know, radio stations are constantly giving away free stuff, whether it's to the 100th caller or some other promotion. Pev's, for example, will trade a local radio station 100 Free Play Passes in exchange for a negotiated number of 30-second commercials. Be prepared, you may only get media exposure worth about 30%-50% of the value of your passes, but it's still good exposure.

Giant has a slightly different twist to this strategy. Giant is providing radio stations in their area with sets of 10 tickets at no cost, with a total face value of \$600,

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

and the radio stations are in turn selling these over the air for \$300. Each ticket includes admission and rental equipment. It's called the 50/50 or 50% off program. Radio stations like the program because it's another way for them to generate income beyond selling traditional radio spots. They actually handle everything, including processing payment and mailing the tickets; all Giant does is provide the free tickets. And it's just another way for you to get free radio advertising for your field.

CPX has the same program with radio stations in the Chicago area. They provide Gold Passes to the radio stations and the radio stations in turn sell them to consumers as a buy-one-get-one for \$33. The radio station promotes it on-air and directs consumers to their website to purchase. Like Giant, CPX doesn't get any of the sale proceeds but they do get exposure on the radio station in return. In addition, the radio station provides CPX with the name, address and e-mail of every person who purchased the offer, which CPX can then use in future marketing initiatives.

Again, we do see radio being used in a few markets, and the more targeted a radio station is to your geographical area and target market, the better value it becomes. But before you commit to investing your hard-earned dollars in radio, look to leverage your assets so you both win.

Television

The third medium, which is often thought to be the most expensive, is TV. TV can be targeted because you pick the stations or shows based on your target

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

market, the frequency is usually very good and you can buy only through cable stations that hit your targeted geographical area. With respect to time, TV is usually bought in four-week increments and two-month campaigns are considered ideal for most markets.

TV clearly gives you the best of all alternatives. It has targeted reach, good frequency and you can purchase around a tight geographical area so you know you are not wasting money on advertising to individuals who are unlikely to visit your field due to distance. And, like the other mediums, TV is measurable so you can see the impact immediately. Of course, the big negative to TV is usually the cost. However, you may actually be surprised by how inexpensive it can be to buy time through a local cable provider. Unfortunately, the big cost is producing a TV spot that will not only look good, but will also be effective and drive new customers to your field.

One way to help alleviate the cost of producing your own 30-second commercial is to use one that Tippmann has already produced. The spot was developed to help paintball fields bring in new players to the game and bring back existing ones that may have stopped playing. This spot was designed to promote the game but to be generic enough that most outdoor fields will be able to use it. The commercial was developed by a major Chicago advertising firm and is airing in markets around the country.

Since Tippmann is already working with a national company that buys local cable through the various cable companies in the U.S., we can also help you with your media buy and make TV not only effective, but economical in driving new players in your area to paintball.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

This book was written to help build your business with strong grass roots initiatives that have worked for these larger fields, but we added this chapter because traditional media outlets can also work for you by using the assets you have or the assets of others to maximize your exposure and minimize your costs. That is how the big fields use these media outlets and that is how you should as well. If you are looking at investing in cable TV in your area and are interested in using the commercial, call Tippmann for more details.



Chapter 13

Leveraging Team Sponsorships

As we mentioned earlier in the book, the industry has come full circle over the past few years and has gone back into the woods. But that doesn't mean you should ignore those customers still interested in speedball. So the question is: How do you service this segment of the market? Is sponsoring speedball teams worth the time and money? This debate has been going on for years and we're certain it won't be solved here. However, if you can structure team sponsorships whereby they are a breakeven (or slightly positive) proposition, and you can leverage the sponsorship by ensuring the team members become ambassadors for your field, it would seem to be a good investment.

Giant, Pev's and CPX all sponsor paintball teams and they have all discovered ways to make it work for their fields. The key elements are to work with a paint manufacturer on a paint deal for the teams and offer free or reduced fees to use the field and a discount on paint for practice sessions. In return, you can ask for their help, whether it is as referees or handling other responsibilities around the field. In addition, their presence at the field should act as a positive attraction for your regular walk-ons and groups that aspire to play at that level.

Giant, for instance, still actively supports teams. But in return he demands their involvement in Giant's social marketing efforts. "They are my minions of cyberspace," Gio explains. "They proactively promote

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

the fields on Twitter, Facebook and the many paintball forums. And in return, they get free play.” He measures them by posts and actions. In addition, Gio uses some of the tournament teams to help manage the tournament play at his field. For instance, they will be responsible for set-up and take-down of the bunkers and refereeing and in return they get \$10 for every participant. Gio leverages his assets to get free marketing and field management in return.

CPX does almost the exact same thing. As Paul explains, “We use the teams we sponsor to help us run the tournament games. They have their own field, they set it up, and they pretty much do it all. We even give them a cash drawer and paint to sell. There is no money being made, but it keeps their car in our parking lot versus someone else’s.”

We think the way CPX looks at it is wise. These teams are practicing somewhere. If they are not at your field they are probably going to one of your competitor’s fields. It’s just a matter of understanding your costs associated with sponsoring these teams and figuring out what you can have them do for you that will ultimately cover your costs and hopefully support your marketing initiatives as well.

Chapter 14

Yellow Pages

It seems that the Yellow Pages have come full circle. Twenty years ago, the Yellow Pages were a “must have” part of your marketing mix. Then, with the growth of the Internet, the Yellow Pages became less valuable; people were going online versus grabbing the thick printed Yellow Pages. But now that most of these companies have incorporated an Internet vehicle to complement the printed version, it seems the Yellow Pages have been reinvented.

Giant walked away from the Yellow Pages years ago, but they recently went back because of its digital advantages. “The spiders that are searching for Google, Yelp and Yahoo are going to the Yellow Pages now for businesses because all of the search engines now incorporate a business page that displays a map showing all the local paintball fields.”

Don’t overthink this one. Make sure the Yellow Pages are a part of your marketing mix, but follow these two guidelines. One, make sure your listing is online as well as in print. And two, don’t over spend for a large ad.

All of our experts agree, commit to just a listing or a small ad in the Yellow Pages and focus on marketing your field through other, more widely-used vehicles.



Chapter 15

Stickers, Magnets and T-shirts

Before we move on to Group Marketing, we thought it would be worthwhile to mention a few of the other creative ways fields can get exposed to their target demographic. These are simple, and in some cases, may seem obvious. But if there are low-cost ways for you to promote your field, our suggestion is that you consider incorporating them into your overall marketing plan.

Bumper Stickers

The first is bumper stickers – why not? Put your field name and web address on bumper stickers and hand them out at your field, events, etc. It's probably fair to think mom won't put it on her BMW, but the teenagers and young adults will certainly display it proudly on their cars. Pev's goes so far as to run contests at their field on weekends by giving away prizes to customers whose cars in the parking lot proudly display a Pev's bumper sticker. It's a creative way to get them to put it on their car (and they most likely won't take it off). Think of it as a small billboard that will be seen by thousands of people all over town.



HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Car Advertising

The second idea is advertising on company and employee's cars. Remember, earlier in the book we said you and your employees are your field's greatest asset. You, and your employees, are driving all over town, every day of the week, so why not promote your field at the same time? Gio and Mike both agree that it is worth it to create a few decals or large car magnets that your employees can put on their cars. By including your field name and web address, it's just another way to generate exposure for the field.

Stickers

Another idea is to print up some small stickers (approximately 3" x 3") bearing your field name/logo and web address. You can hand these out at the field as well as distribute at the events you attend. Kids love stickers and they will proudly display them on their bikes, cars, laptops, etc., where other kids will see them.

T-shirts

And last, but not least, maybe the most creative way to get exposure for your field is t-shirts. The idea of printing and handing out t-shirts is not new to Pev's, and we've seen people in Pev's t-shirts in some of the farthest-reaching



HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

corners of the world. However, how Pev's got their famous t-shirts into the local school systems deserves an "A" for creativity. It was actually the schools that approached Pev's when they saw an opportunity to convert all the colors of Pev's t-shirts that the kids were already wearing to school into their respective school colors.

Here's how it works: Pev's prints up t-shirts (with the Pev's logo on the front), in school colors, for the individual schools in their area to sell. Pev's sells the t-shirts to the schools for \$5 each and the school sells them to the kids at \$10 each, making \$5 each as a fundraiser. Pev's covers the cost of the t-shirt, they get their name in front of their target demographic and the school has the opportunity to make \$5 per shirt. Now that's a Win-Win. One very important point worth mentioning: Keep the t-shirt design simple and don't put a paintball marker on the t-shirt; that won't fly in the schools.



Groups

Paintball is a capacity-based service, which means time is your enemy. Every hour your field sits idle is business you cannot recoup. To operate profitably, you must fill up your field as much as possible. Maximizing your capacity yields the best return on investment and groups are key!

As you master the grass roots initiatives discussed throughout this book, it is time to think about these groups which, as stated earlier, are the “lifeblood” of building your field business. Groups come in a variety of shapes and sizes. For our purposes, a group is comprised of at least 10 people coming together at your field to participate as a group at the same time.

Groups allow you the opportunity to effectively market your facility during non-peak times. In fact, think about the idea of marketing that you are always open for groups (“Open 7 days a week for your group”). Remember, if you don’t secure the business, someone else will.

There is one important number that we want you to keep in the back of your mind when we talk about groups: 50. As documented by all three of the field owners quoted in this book, groups should represent at least 50% of your total traffic. As Gio stated, “If more than 50% of your traffic is from groups, you’ll have a successful field. If you are currently getting 200 walk-ons a weekend at your field, your goal should be to have an additional 200 players that weekend through groups.”



Chapter 16

Marketing to Groups

Marketing to groups is not easy, but it's more efficient to market to one group who might bring in 10-30 customers than to market to 30 individuals. Too many field owners don't really focus on groups. If you run a solid operation, you will get some groups coming to you as a matter of course, and that's great. But it won't be enough. You need to actively seek out group sales using a variety of marketing tactics.



HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Make sure you have signs (like “Have your birthday party here”) and brochures around your facility. Create a bulletin board that displays photos of the various groups you have hosted at your field. Make sure every employee understands that it is their responsibility to support group sales.

Beyond the obvious targets of birthday parties and bachelor parties, there are literally hundreds of other groups and organizations that you can target for group outings. Here are just a few:

- Church groups (youth and young adult)
- Corporate groups (company outings, team building, etc.)
- College clubs (sports teams, fraternities/sororities, political, etc.)
- Service organizations (Kiwanis, Lions, etc.)
- Fraternal organizations (Elks, Moose, etc.)
- Religious (Knights of Columbus)
- Sports’ clubs/teams (youth, high school, amateur, etc.)
- Neighborhood clubs
- Youth organizations (YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc.)
- Scouting organizations
- Youth summer camps

Through the first 15 chapters, we’ve illustrated ways these marketing vehicles can be used to target groups. As we dive in even further, there are some

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

basic principles to follow when targeting and managing groups:

1. Groups are critical to your field's overall success because groups become walk-ons and walk-ons become groups.
2. You must have the proper focus on securing groups, as well as ensuring they have a great experience at your field and ultimately return to your field time and time again.

As we talked about in Chapter 2, when a prospective customer calls your field, make sure you have the proper procedures in place to professionally manage the call. Giant focuses heavily on groups and has years of experience handling these customers, so we think it is relevant to understand the steps Giant goes through in securing a group outing. There are four clear steps: the initial phone call, the confirmation, the on-site experience, and the post-event follow up.

It all starts with a phone call. Once that call comes in, there are three key things that need to occur. First, get the pertinent contact information from the caller. Second, clearly understand the type of play they are inquiring about. Finally, document the call.

To start, Gio would tell you that you must “get all the relevant data from that first call including name, phone number and e-mail address. This contact information is critical because if the group doesn't make a reservation on the spot you will want to call the group leader back. Understand whether they are inquiring about walk-on play, a party group or a private group so that you can properly and effectively answer their questions.”

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Finally, Giant logs all the calls on sheets based on which of the three above categories they fall into. If it's a person calling regarding a group, and if they don't book the group on that first call, someone from Giant will use the information on the call log to make a return call to that individual in an effort to close the deal and book the group.

However, your work does not end after step one. In fact, it's only just beginning. Once a group is booked, the second step is sending a confirmation letter or e-mail that will outline how their event will break down, what's included (and what's not), date and time. This will alleviate any surprises the day of the event.

The third step, and arguably the most important one, is the actual event. Once the group is at your field, make sure that every expectation is met. We'll talk more about this over the next several chapters.

Finally, after the event, follow up with a phone call or e-mail asking how their experience was and how you could have made it better. Criticism is often difficult to accept, but it's the only way you will get better. If you can, take the time to call every individual in the group, because, remember, each individual has the opportunity to bring their own group back to your field.

Before we go into detail on the groups that have the greatest opportunity, we want you to think about activities beyond paintball that you could offer to broaden your demographic reach. For instance, you could offer catering, an area to picnic, or even rent a jump house. Or maybe you could offer Paintball Laser Tag (www.PaintballLaserTag.com).

Paintball Laser Tag



In case you've never heard of Paintball Laser Tag before, we will give you a little background. Paintball Laser Tag is manufactured by Predator Games and distributed exclusively by Tippmann. Since its inception less than two years ago, more than 100 facilities, including Giant and Pev's, have incorporated Paintball Laser Tag into their field's "experience."

The objective of Paintball Laser Tag is to give individuals who, for whatever reason, can't or don't want to try paintball, the opportunity to experience the next best thing. It is a realistic, painless and mess-free way to play paintball. It can be used indoors or outdoors and the Eagle Eye System can easily adapt to your Tippmann 98 Custom rental markers. Each Eagle Eye Laser System includes a radio frequency (RF) receiver and an infrared (IR) barrel.

The only other components you need are your rental marker and an air tank. When pulling the trigger, the sound/vibration generated activates the IR laser beam. The players aim at the receivers, which are

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

attached in the marker's feed neck. You can choose the games that your guests play, including setting the amount of ammo, number of lives and duration of the game.



Once a player hits an opponent, the units communicate between one another through RF, visually telling you who you hit, or who hit you. Although the laser markers communicate between one another, the Command Center Module (included), along with a computer, can track the performance of each player in the game. In fact, you can even print out the results at the end of the game (which is a great takeaway for the birthday kids). The range of the IR is the same as a paintball. In fact, the entire experience is very similar to paintball, without the paint.

Now, we're not suggesting that this would replace any of your paintball business. We are saying it can be a complementary part of your business. In addition to

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

offering a convenient solution for your event marketing (Chapter 9), it will help you attract more groups. You already have the employees and facilities; why not broaden your market? If you already actively pursue groups, whether they are youth groups or corporate groups, you have inevitably run into the issue that not everyone wants to play paintball or they are too young to play paintball.

Paintball Laser Tag offers the solution to those situations with a low initial investment that has a proven payback in only a few months. It offers an experience as close to paintball as you can get (without the pain or the mess), and will be the gateway for you to expose more people not only to paintball, but to your field. For more information on Paintball Laser Tag, please check the Reference Section in the back of the book.

Focus on the Key Groups

As we highlighted above, there are numerous types of groups that are attractive targets for your field. Bachelor parties have traditionally been a steady source of income over the years. Birthday parties have really come on strong as of late, accounting for a large percentage of group traffic at a number of these fields. Corporate outings, although a little more work to secure, can be nice business. And there are a slew of other youth organizations such as churches, schools and YMCAs that are also good targets.

Although we are not going to dedicate much time to talking about bachelor parties here, it is important to understand that they have been a part of paintball for

a long time. The best ways to market bachelor parties at your field are through your field brochure, social networking sites and Google.

At CPX, bachelor parties are a significant portion of their group outings. In fact, they have a marketing campaign through Google that specifically targets individuals looking for bachelor parties. It's easy to do; just focus on the appropriate key words.

If groups are a new endeavor for you, and understanding that you have limited resources, we recommend that you focus on birthday parties first. Not only do we believe they provide the largest demographical opportunity, they provide the best long-term opportunity because they should be your customers for years to come. Once you have created a steady birthday party business you can move onto other youth groups and corporate outings.

Chapter 17

Birthday Parties

Birthday parties will, most likely, make up a majority of your group revenue. According to IALEI (International Association for the Leisure and Entertainment Industry), birthday parties account for roughly 60% of total revenue for Family Entertainment Centers (FEC).

Although your field may not achieve that same percentage, keep in mind that these FECs are your competition and that's a lot of birthday party business that you could secure. In fact, if you have an FEC, or Laser Tag facility in your area, we suggest you take the time to check them out. What are they doing that you aren't? How can you improve your birthday program or promote the things about your party that make it special?

There are several key elements that are essential for you to make birthday parties a highly profitable part of your business:

1. Marketing birthday parties at your field.
2. Understand the importance of the event for the child.
3. Acknowledge mom's role.
4. Create a memorable experience.
5. Follow up after the party and generate new customers.

First, let's talk about how you can attract birthday parties to your field. Use the information you have.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Use the Liability Waivers to gather contact information and birth dates and forward information on your birthday parties to kids who have already frequented your field. To attract new customers, we recommend using Google and the social networking sites. You won't have specific birth date information on these prospective customers, but you can certainly promote your birthday parties to this group and plant the seed that their next party should be at your field.

Another creative way for you to build exposure for your birthday parties is by creating a contest where you give away parties to winners. Place a box at your field where individuals can fill out and submit their entries for the contest; this will be the start of a database you can use to build your birthday program. In addition, promote the contest through your marketing vehicles. And feel free to restrict the use of the party to a non-peak day and time so that it doesn't impact your existing business.

Second, understand the importance of the key birthdays. Gio states it clearly, "Your birthday parties need that extra attention because the expectation for a birthday party is it's got to be a home run." In addition, the 10th birthday is big, as is the 13th and the 16th. But don't pass up the opportunity to get them in for the 10th birthday; in many cases it is their first opportunity to try paintball. And don't ignore the girls; they want to play as well. And getting girls to the field can only help in your ability to get the boys back.

Third, understand both mom and the birthday kid must be taken care of throughout the entire process. As Mike at Pev's put it, "Mom needs to create memories.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

She wants to know that when she is 50 years old and her son is 25 that he still remembers the paintball party that mom threw for his 10th birthday.” Throughout the process, make sure to stay in touch with mom. At Pev’s, the Friday before the party, they call the organizer (in most cases, mom) to remind her of the party and to see if there is anything else she may need, such as food, birthday cake, etc. We’ll talk more about mom a little later, but remember, moms control the pocket-book and the memories, so focus on mom.

Fourth, create a memorable experience. We are not aware of any field doing a better job with birthday parties than Pev’s. In fact, we were blown away to learn everything that goes into a birthday at Pev’s, so we are going to use them as an example.

At Pev’s, the birthday parties are two hours, one hour playing paintball and one hour for food. The participants are asked to arrive 45 minutes prior to their official start time so that they can get checked in and receive the necessary equipment. This keeps everything on schedule. Their birthday party package includes everything from the tablecloths, birthday napkins and plates, to silverware and a cake (if a cake was ordered). The birthday boy/girl gets a Pev’s t-shirt and a grenade as a gift from Pev’s, knowing fully that they will sell more than enough grenades and/or t-shirts to make up for the margin they lost on the one free t-shirt and grenade for the birthday kid. In fact, sometimes the mom buys additional shirts or grenades for the entire group. In addition, all members of the birthday party group get a birthday party brochure (so they can take the brochure home and hand it to their mom to schedule their next birthday party at Pev’s) and

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

a Free Return Pass which gives them the opportunity to play for free on a future visit.

At Giant, Gio looks at the experience from a slightly different perspective; it's all about the birthday kid. Each birthday party group is assigned a "birthday party manager" that oversees the entire party. They sing happy birthday over the loudspeaker. They even manage the on-field experience. "The birthday kid needs to get shot, they need to shoot somebody and they need to capture the flag. You don't try to change the course of a game, but our party refs know that if the birthday kid hasn't shot someone that they should provide the necessary assistance to ensure he/she gets a kill."

It is equally important to ensure that if they are the last one standing that they don't get shot up by 10 of their friends and end up coming off the field crying. In addition, at Giant, every birthday boy/girl gets a bag of goodies including sunglasses, t-shirt and a Return Pass. And a really nice touch: they get to take home a CD that contains pictures from their special day.

At CPX, similar to Pev's, the birthday parties are typically two-and-a-half hours, one-and-one-half hour on the field playing paintball and one hour in the party room. But here, like at Giant, the birthday kid gets a little more attention. The birthday kid gets a free one-year membership (a \$125 value that includes admission and a \$10 discount on paint) and a free 98 Custom Power Pack. Although you might say that a free marker is an exorbitant gift, CPX's belief is that by giving a kid a free marker, they are significantly more inclined to play paintball again in the future.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Plus, the other kids in the party are inevitably more motivated to have their party at CPX because they want their own marker as well. Paul at CPX explains, “We feel strongly that if we can get these kids at a young age we should be able to keep their interest for four or five years. It’s worth the investment.” And it seems to be working.

Don’t go through all this effort and take the chance that the kid’s (or mom’s) experience could be ruined by assigning the wrong employees to referee these parties. At every one of these participating fields, the employees that referee birthday parties are the highest paid referees. They earn the right to manage these parties and they understand the importance of ensuring a positive experience, not only as it relates to his/her tip, but also the potential of any kid in the group wanting to come back and have his/her party at the field.

CPX acknowledges that you have to have the right refs working the birthday parties because it’s usually mom or dad overseeing the party and they’re going to be over-protective and sensitive to the safety concerns. Paul adds, “Some of our refs are pretty scruffy-looking, so we try to make sure we have someone clean cut, or even a female ref, work the birthday parties.” And as Mike at Pev’s puts it, “When it comes to birthday parties, refs are no longer refs; they are adventure organizers.”

Part of creating a “great experience” is providing a good value and different options to meet the number of players and time the parent can spend at your field. As a point of reference, Giant offers a variety of packages

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

starting at \$35 per person (no maximum) for a birthday party that includes all equipment with the option to buy more paintballs at \$8.50 per 200 or a VIP package that includes 400 paintballs and other upgrades. Pev's parties offer a variety of packages as well that start at \$34 per person for a one-hour party that includes a private field, ref, marker, protective gear, air and 200 paintballs. Pev's has other packages that cost up to \$49 per play, but include 500 paintballs with the option to buy bags of paintballs at \$20 for 500.

CPX's parties are \$35 per person with a minimum of 10 guests and include a free marker for the birthday child plus a party room and food. Although your local competition (for birthday parties) will have a lot to do with what you can charge and what you include, the pricing structure for these three fields should be a good reference as you price your birthday parties.

Finally, make sure you follow up after the party. As an example, for Gio, even after the party is over, the work continues. The week after the party, the group's leader will get a phone call from someone at Giant. If the group did not have a great time, Gio, or one of his managers, will follow up with the party organizer and do whatever it takes to get them back to the park. As Gio explains, "If they had a great time the fact that someone called makes it even better."

"If they had a bad experience and no one followed up with the organizer, you most likely lost that customer for life." And to take it even one step further, at Giant, each member of the birthday party will get a call that starts something like "you just experienced a birthday party at Giant and I see your birthday is coming up in

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

February. Should we talk to your mom/dad about you having your birthday party at Giant?” You should have a kid who just had a great experience at your paintball field, so why not strike while the iron is hot and generate more business for your field?

Additionally, create a bulletin board at your field where you can post pictures from birthday parties held at your facility. In fact, take it one step further and use these photos on your website and social networking sites to help encourage future parties (but get permission to use the photos first).

There’s also a different twist to the traditional birthday party program, commonly used by laser tag facilities, which you could implement to build traffic at your field. Once a month invite all your customers with birthdays in that particular month to come and celebrate their birthday at your field for free. You’ll still make money on the paint and they’ll rarely come alone.



Chapter 18

Youth Groups

In addition to birthday parties, there are a couple of other youth groups and organizations that our field experts have found to be lucrative over the years. One such group is YMCAs. During the summer months, YMCAs run numerous day camps and they are always looking for different activities for the kids.

A few years ago, Gio searched on the Internet and found all the YMCAs within a 25-mile radius of his fields and sent them his field brochure. It eventually paid off; this past summer (for nine weeks) he had a bus with 60 kids come from the local YMCAs to his field every day, five days a week, at \$35 a person. He now does four mailings a year and follows them up with a phone call. And in addition to the direct benefit

SPECIAL FOR **YMCA** **GIANT PAINTBALL PARKS**

PAINTBALL PARK OUTING

\$35.00
PER PERSON
15 OR MORE PRICE

INCLUDES
PAINTBALL MARKER
UNLIMITED AIR
ENTRY FEES
200 PAINTBALLS
SAFETY MASK

GO TO OUR WEBSITES!
GIANTPAINTBALL.com
HOLLYWOODSPORTS.com
SCVILLAGE.com

1.877.GIANT.97

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Giant experiences by having these groups at his fields, they also have a couple thousand more names in their database that he can market to for birthday parties and other events.

Church groups are another great target. There are probably hundreds of churches in a 50-mile radius of your field and youth ministers are always looking for activities. Gio believed that this was such a big opportunity that he created a special brochure just for church groups. It even has a little prayer on the back. You don't need to go that far, but without too much work you can immediately start attracting these church groups to your field. Either take your existing field brochure, or create a custom brochure, address it

to "youth ministry" and mail it to all the churches in your area. And, if at all possible, try to follow up with a phone call to make sure they received your brochure, proactively answer any questions they may have and hopefully start booking groups.

One more point worth mentioning, whether for birthday parties or for other youth groups, laser tag is

church youth outing

GIANT PAINTBALL PARKS

\$35.00

includes
for 15 or more players

**ALL DAY PLAY
PAINTBALL GUN
SAFETY MASK
200 PAINTBALLS
UNLIMITED AIR!**

FAMILY FRIENDLY!

DEDICATED TO THE GLORY OF GOD

CHINO - VICTORVILLE - BELLFLOWER - COSTA MESA - ALPINE - LAKESIDE

877.GIANT.97 or **562.867.9600**

www.GIANTPAINTBALL.com
www.HOLLYWOODSPORTS.com - www.SCVILLAGE.com

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

a viable alternative and even if it is not a key element of your field's marketing message, it is a good option to have in your back pocket. It is inevitable; you will at some point run into either a youth group that is too young to play at your field or a mom who simply isn't comfortable hosting a birthday paintball party for her son/daughter. In both cases, laser tag can save this group.

In addition to their traditional paintball party, both Pev's and Giant also offer Predator Games Laser Tag. It's a great alternative for the younger kids. Both parks get a lot of calls from moms looking for party options for their seven, eight, nine-year-old child. Gio comments, "If we didn't have laser tag we would lose that group. I not only don't want to lose that group, I want them coming back to play paintball for their 10th birthday party. So for me, it's insurance that I will not have to turn any long-term potential customers away."

Plus, as we discussed in Event Marketing in Chapter 9, the Predator Games laser tag equipment gives you a simple, clean, convenient way to give kids the feeling of shooting a real paintball marker in an environment away from your field. To find out how you can learn more about the Predator Games Laser Tag System, check the Reference Section located in the back of the book.



Chapter 19

Corporate Outings

Sharpen your team's skills.

STRATEGY • SKILL • COLLABORATION • COMPETITION • EXECUTION

The same skills to success in a fun day of Paintball are necessary to build a successful business unit or team!

A day away from the office... a day to connect! PEV'S Paintball offers an opportunity for teams to connect and develop communication skills without the atmosphere of a corporate classroom. Your employees will have no qualms as they play to reach a common goal, something that's done every day at work. What could be better than teaching your employees how to work as a team in a fun, exciting and safe environment?

Get the team to PEV'S Paintball help! PEV'S team makes sure each one of our members partner which could include food and pizza and fun for all. With our food service, we can set up any type of catering from hot dogs to grills that we deliver... and we'll have your phone and we will handle the details.

All PEV'S sites will be assigned your own private guide who will assist entrance and make sure it is a great time for everyone!

PEV'S Paintball
703.327.7640
www.pevs.com

Does it look like your team could use a boost?

Think outside the box and give your employees something that'll stick. Book for a long, long time. Let PEV'S get a much needed morale boost for your employees. One another a little better and share a common experience that makes a team a team!

PEV'S Paintball locations are located wherever they need it. PEV'S Paintball, 100% ownership located in:

- 10 miles from DC
- 12 miles from Lansing
- 12 miles from Baltimore
- 12 miles from Columbia

PEV'S Paintball
703.327.7640 • E: Corporate@pevs.com

Over time, corporate outings can be a valuable part of your group business. They are usually bigger groups, so if done right they can contribute significant profit for your business. However, you must also understand that corporate outings do take more time to cultivate and it is best to focus on just one or two opportunities at a time and use networking to get the initial contact.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Corporate outings have more red tape that you need to go through, the sales cycle is often longer, the tightening of corporate budgets has affected companies' willingness to invest in team building exercises, and there are simply more people trying to get a piece of the pie. For instance, in our market, Chicago, you're competing against two major league baseball teams (plus a few minor league teams), a professional football team, a professional basketball team, two major universities (with their athletic teams), museums, the zoo and the theatre, just to name a few, all competing for corporate dollars.

The challenge we have with paintball is that it's not easy to get a corporation to do a paintball event because there will always be employees who aren't comfortable playing paintball. Now, there are a few ways you can minimize this objection.

Gio can overcome this objection at Hollywood Sports Park because he has a nice, large pavilion and can offer other activities like volleyball, laser tag and rock climbing to go along with paintball. However, most fields aren't this fortunate. But Pev's, for example, found another way around this obstacle, a tent. They invested in a nice large tent and, for corporate groups, they actively promote picnics and cook-outs with paintball and laser tag as the secondary activity. As Mike explains, "Many of these groups are probably utilizing a park for this type of activity. If you have the space, why not use it? You can charge for the use of the tent, and you still make money on those individuals who want to play paintball. And you'll always get a few more people to play paintball once they see how much fun everyone else is having."

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Really, the sky is the limit. You can always rent a moon walk from the local rental center and have that there as an option as well for the little kids. Depending on your capabilities, you could also offer to provide/serve the food and charge separately for the food and beverages. If you don't want to do it yourself, find a local caterer to help you and simply mark it up so that you make some money as well.

By offering more than just paintball, you will have the opportunity to attract a wider range of groups. As Mike at Pev's says, "What would I rather have? I can either have none of them show up or I can have 150 show up and still get 50 to play paintball. Why not do it?"

All three of these fields invest resources to attract these larger groups to their fields, but it's difficult and time consuming. You should be prepared to do everything from buying a mailing list, making phone calls and even setting up face-to-face meetings (since most of the larger groups come through the HR department of local companies and it typically takes a face-to-face meeting where you need to present your field and your programs).

CPX, for example, uses a company called MPI, Meeting Professional International. They purchase a mailing list for their area and use it to send out their group brochure. In addition, as we discussed in Chapter 10, CPX also uses Google search to attract corporate outings in the Chicago area. And Paul will tell you, "When using the search engines, make sure you emphasize team building, because that's what separates paintball from other types of corporate outings."

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Gio will tell you that he has a relationship with a major hamburger chain that regularly brings large groups to the field. They now also include his field brochure with the employees' paychecks, but this took years to cultivate.

Our recommendation is not to focus on this segment of the market until you get the other programs in place. However, if you already have a few personal contacts at some of the larger businesses in your area, try dropping off some Free Play Passes and ask the HR person to do an e-mail blast to their employees asking if anyone is interested in Free Play Passes at your park. If the response is good, they'll call you back. And once you start getting corporate groups at your field, ask for testimonials that you can use in future presentations. By providing real world examples of similar groups enjoying your facility, you will break down barriers quickly.



Community Relations and Cross Promotions

From the very first chapter, we've talked about how important it is to be the face of your paintball field and be active in your community. In Chapter 9, we talked about how all of these fields utilize community events to build exposure, and traffic for their respective fields. Here, we will highlight a few ways that you can be proactively involved with other local organizations and businesses in your community, and leverage these relationships to benefit your field.



Chapter 20

Community Relations

When it comes to community relations, there are two categories of involvement: participating in and supporting community events, and joining community organizations.

When it comes to community events, Gio sends a very clear message to any potential employee: If you work for me, you will donate some of your time supporting community events.” Whether it’s a local food drive, holiday gift drop or community Halloween party, Gio wants Giant to be a part of the event, and he will donate his time, and his employees’ time, to ensure his field is seen as a community hero.

There are numerous community organizations in every town. Whether it is service clubs (like the Kiwanis and Rotary), social clubs (like Elks and Moose), military clubs (VFW and American Legion) or hobby clubs, there are plenty to choose from. Not only does it put your field in a positive light in the community, it is also a great networking vehicle that you can leverage to get more groups to your field. It can range from a Moose Lodge member’s child’s birthday party to a fellow Rotary member organizing a corporate outing for his company’s employees.

Another community organization worth mentioning is the Convention and Visitors Bureau. If your field attracts visitors from far distances, or is located in an area that gets tourism travel, the Convention and

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Visitors Bureau (CVB) may be a worthwhile visit. The mission of the CVB is to support the industry within their community such as hotels, restaurants, etc., and every county has one.

If you go to your respective county's website, you should see contact information for the CVB. If large groups commonly come into your community, inevitably some of those groups will be looking for entertainment options, maybe even team-building exercises. Go to the CVB and get them excited about paintball and your field, then they will circulate your brochures to the hotels and you can save yourself a lot of work and money by not needing to visit every hotel in your area yourself.

The Chamber of Commerce is also a worthy organization to join. In many cities, especially smaller metropolitan areas, the Chamber of Commerce is the hub of commercial activity. If you are looking to appeal to the corporate community, you need to be part of the Chamber. Test the waters by attending a few meetings. Look at the people who seem active at the meetings and ask them about the value of their membership. If they find value, you probably will too.

Gio is involved with Kiwanis, Rotary and the Chamber of Commerce. As Gio would tell you, "You have to do it. In addition to presenting you in a good light in your community, it's a great resource for groups and every one of these organizations needs fundraisers throughout the year, and you have the perfect answer with the Fundraiser packages."

Chapter 21

Cross Promotions



There's another key benefit to supporting community events and participating in some of the many community organizations: networking. You will inevitably identify and work with other local establishments in your community that could benefit from a relationship with your field. It probably isn't realistic for you to partner with another paintball field, but you can work with bowling alleys, skating centers, theatres, family fun parks, etc.

Help make money for others and they will help make money (or save money) for you. Remember, you have something of value; you attract a key demographic that other companies are also trying to reach which will help you expand relationships beyond those with other entertainment businesses.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

Soft drink companies, for example, spend a significant portion of their marketing dollars targeting the youth market knowing that they are at a very influential age and getting them to support their brand now will have long-term benefits. Assuming you have beverages at your field, talk to your local Coke and Pepsi distributor and see how you can help each other. Based on your consumption and willingness to offer category exclusivity, they may be willing to offer something of value to you.

In the case of Pev's, not only did he get several umbrellas to use over tables on their patio, Coke is also going to be promoting Pev's Paintball Park on the back of five to six delivery trucks in the D.C. area.

Pev's negotiated a similar deal with a local ice cream supplier, and based on his willingness to use Hershey's for both the ice cream bars and birthday cakes at their field, they also donated patio umbrellas.

Other possible tie-ins include energy drinks, snack companies, car dealerships and local restaurants. Restaurants, whether or not you offer concessions at your field, are a perfect partner. Often, when your customers get done playing they want to go somewhere to grab a sandwich and share stories about the day playing paintball.

Either sell the restaurants' on-site signage or trade for gift certificates that you can use for prizes. Chances are, they will be willing to give you discount cards to hand out to your customers or possibly offer a discount to those showing their field wrist band. Either way, you both benefit. They get traffic and you enhance the experience for your customer.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

For example, a local ice cream shop gave Pev's 1,000 free ice cream sundae passes in exchange for on-site signage. Pev's turned around and created a promotion, on what would have otherwise been a slow day, by offering a free ice cream sundae pass to everyone that came to the field on that day. He spread the word on this promotion by sending out an e-mail to his database a week in advance.

Just to show you that the opportunities are endless, have you ever thought about partnering with a local landscaping company? Remember, you have lots of parents dropping their kids off at your field. If you want the area around your pro shop to look professional and inviting, then do what Pev's did and trade signage to a local landscaper for some nice landscaping around your parking lot and entry way.

The opportunities are virtually endless. Your field has a very unique and valuable asset with the mix of kids and parents. Think about businesses in your community that are currently marketing to those demographics and approach them about developing a mutually beneficial business relationship with your field. We will talk about it a little more in the next chapter, but find ways to promote these businesses at your field.

It can be as simple as hanging banners in high visibility areas to selling signage on buildings/structures on your field. Pev's, for example, creatively exposes his field's sponsors to parents dropping off and picking up their kids. Pev's has a car dealership, heating and air conditioning company and landscaping company all advertising at his field. It never hurts to ask.





On-Site Marketing

Now that you have developed a plan for a good first impression and created strong campaigns to get players to your field, it is important that you also utilize your location and facility to educate customers and guests on your field's services and promotions. In this section we will discuss how signage and training your staff can not only help ensure a positive experience at your field, but also how you can encourage those players to come back by informing them of everything you have to offer.



Chapter 22

Signage, Brochures and Staff



One of the most important on-site marketing assets you have is your company sign. The entry sign could just as easily have been included in the section, First Impressions. Regardless, it is a critical component of your marketing mix. It's no different than when you are looking for a new restaurant to try – the quality and appearance of the restaurant's sign give you an impression of what you can expect when you get inside. Parents want a clean, professional facility for their kids to play paintball; your sign should give them that impression.

If you are not on a main road, try to get permission to post a sign off the closest main road. It is imperative that you have a nice, large sign (preferably lighted) at the entryway to your field. And make sure you include the word "paintball" so that everyone knows what type of business you are in. If you can, add your website address to the sign, so people driving

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

by will know where they can go to learn more about your field.

Whether you're looking to promote events at your field or your field's sponsors, you don't want to pass up this opportunity to communicate the relevant messages. You can invest in some relatively inexpensive, professional looking signs or simply rely on banners and posters. Regardless, make sure your customers know everything that is happening at your field.

At Pev's there is plenty of collateral material on group outings, corporate outings, birthday parties, etc., all around the field that is targeted to parents. In addition, they have three A-frame signs strategically positioned between the parking lot and registration. One sign promotes summer camps, another birthday parties and another corporate outings. It's a simple and inexpensive way to expose everyone at your field to the key programs you offer. It won't take much to turn a profit on that investment.

At Giant, Gio will tell you, "There will always be three different colored posters in the window. We are always promoting three future events, every week at every park."

As we discussed in the last chapter, you have all types of people entering and leaving your field on a weekly basis, so make sure they know about everything you have to offer.



The On-Field Experience

As we've touched on throughout this book, the experience you provide to your customers, whether they are a single walk-on customer or part of a large group, is the single most important element in determining the success of your paintball field. In fact, if you implemented every marketing idea outlined in this book, it won't make a difference if you do not create a great experience for your customers.



Chapter 23

Providing a Fun and Safe Environment

In 2009, in conjunction with the Paintball Sports Trade Association (PSTA), several industry veterans, including Mike, Gio and Paul, created a Field Operations and Safety Guide that was intended to be a roadmap to help paintball businesses enhance and strengthen every player's paintball experience.

So much of the experience is based on how well the player was treated, protected and entertained. These are the factors that most affect whether or not players will return, bring their friends or refer others.

The Field Operations and Safety Guide presents the basic guidelines and procedures for conducting safe and entertaining paintball games for all of your customers, both new and experienced players. It goes into detail on topics such as safety, facilities, staffing, pre-game preparation, referees and on-field rules of conduct.

So, whether you are a new field operator or an experienced one just looking to ensure you have everything under control, the Guide has something for everyone.

Safety Comes First

The most important element a commercial field offers is safety. The number one reason parents send their kids to a field – instead of letting them play unsupervised

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

in their backyard – is safety. It is critical that you and your entire staff understand that providing a safe environment encompasses everything from having the proper insurance, cylinder filling, velocity, goggle/BBD enforcement, netting and bunker inspections and having the proper medical and accident response procedures.

Quality Rentals and Facilities Matter

In addition to providing safe equipment to your customers, it is equally important to provide durable, high-quality rental equipment that will provide consistent performance on the field. Nothing affects an individual's experience more than having their marker fail or goggles fog during play. Ultimately, this translates into less paint being shot and more service time for your staff, both of which will negatively affect your bottom line.

Look at your rental equipment as an investment and think about how you can get this investment to generate more income for your field. Although keeping your rental markers operational is certainly the most obvious, offering options, such as a marker modified to look like an M16, or a marker with electronics, can often times be an easy upsell. It not only enhances the experience for your customer, but it puts more money in your pocket.

When it comes to facilities, the PSTA Guide reviews important topics such as parking, signage, trash/recycling receptacles, restrooms and staging area recommendations. And when it comes to staffing they talk about attitude, language and appropriate dress code.

In the area of pre-game preparation, they highlight play-style variations, segregation of experience levels and proper-player orientation. The on-field section provides a recommended Player Rules of Conduct as well as rules of the game and the role of referees.

Again, even if you think you have everything covered, we strongly recommend you get a free copy of the actual Guide (check the Reference Section in the back of the book to learn how you can get the complete Basic Paintball Field Guidelines). It's worth the time when you realize how important the customer experience you create at your field is to your overall success.



Bringing It All Together

We've covered a lot in the previous 23 chapters and we've offered some great marketing ideas that have proven to be successful at fields such as Giant Paintball Parks, Pev's and CPX. But it all comes down to **FIVE** very important points that we want you to take away:

1. You are your field's biggest asset; be a salesperson.
2. Invest in a phone system and design an effective brochure and web site.
3. Remember you have something of value. Leverage it to your advantage.
4. Create and follow a plan.
5. Create a great experience. Getting the people to the field is only one ingredient in the recipe for success.

Sell, Sell, Sell

There's a common thread between these three fields...their owners/operators are all salespeople. From the time they leave their houses in the morning until they return at night, they are out hitting the streets promoting their fields to anyone and everyone who will listen.

If you ever run into Gio, Paul or Mike on the street you will see them wearing a shirt proudly bearing the logo of their field with a handful of brochures, free play passes and business cards. Gio adds, "I have tenacity,

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

I'm motivated and I love what I do, so it's very easy for me to sell."

Paul at CPX adds, "Hoping is not a strategy. Most of the initiatives that we incorporate at CPX don't cost much at all; it's just a matter of having the entrepreneurial spirit to want to make your field succeed." So draw a 25-mile radius around your field, put your game face on, shake hands, network and spread the word that paintball is the greatest sport on earth.

Phones, Website and Brochure

Do you remember the old adage, "You never get a second chance to make a good first impression?" Well, the first contact a potential customer is going to have with your field will most likely be through a phone call, your website or your field brochure. Take the time to ensure you have the people and procedures in place to effectively and professionally answer calls. And take the time and money to create an eye-catching brochure and website that clearly illustrate the attributes of your field. Remember, many of the marketing initiatives discussed in this book are designed to direct people to your website. You must make sure it answers their questions and persuades them to come to play paintball at your facility.

You Have Something to Offer

Additionally, don't ever forget that you are in the entertainment business and you have something that others want. Too often we sense a lack of pride from some field owners. To the contrary, you operate a business unlike anyone else in your community. And

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

you offer an experience that no one else in your community can offer. You own a valuable asset; use it to build relationships, get free exposure and advertising or to trade for other assets that will either make your field better or create a better experience.

Create and Follow a Plan

Remember, create a plan and follow the plan. Like anything in life, you have to have a plan; you have to know where you are going. Your paintball field is no different. Take it from people like Gio, Mike and Paul who have a combined 55 years of experience operating paintball fields. They are successful, but it didn't happen overnight. It took years of trial and error. And it wasn't through one or two key marketing initiatives; it's through the combination of a lot of ideas.

Determine what ideas will work best for your field and your situation. Determine the best timing for these initiatives based on your seasonality and traffic flow. Put a calendar together so it is clear what initiatives are happening when. And then, live the plan; make it happen. And understand that a key element to implementing your new initiatives is to make sure that everything can be tracked. It's the only way you will know for sure what worked and should be continued next year.

Create a Great Experience

And finally, create a "great experience." We think Gio puts it into perfect perspective, "My job is getting people to the park and fulfilling their dreams, and everything happens at the park where I believe

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

everybody is fulfilling their dreams. I fulfill their expectation of the day and I fulfill their value of the dollar, so if they spend \$100, they felt like they got a \$500 value.”

Gio adds, “Don’t be afraid to ask your customers if they had a great experience and what you could have done better. You cannot be afraid of upset customers. In fact, I like upset customers because they are the ones who really can help grow your business because if they are mad enough to complain to you, that means they really want to come back. Don’t pass up that opportunity to learn from your customers.” Even Bill Gates, Chairman of Microsoft, says “Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning.”

For Pev’s, it’s the ripple effect. They empower their employees to ensure everyone’s experience (kids and parents) is a positive one. For CPX, it’s about being there for their customers. It’s about Ray, Paul, Mike or any other employee doing whatever it takes to ensure their customers are having a great experience.

As Paul explains, “Just be friendly, courteous, helpful, and move fast.” As proof that they live by those words, we talked to a mom who had never been to a paintball field and recently had her son’s birthday party at CPX. She said, “Throughout the afternoon I was approached by employees asking me if everything was okay. They not only answered my questions, but walked me towards places. And this didn’t just happen once or twice, it happened seven or eight times.”

Providing a great experience can go beyond the players on the field and extend to their parents. The reality is that many parents stick around the field

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

waiting for their kids to finish playing paintball. And while the parents may not be your primary focus, it is important to keep them in mind; it is worth keeping them comfortable because they are ultimately paying your bills.

Pev's, along with many other fields around the country, actually has a parents' lounge. It's nothing extravagant; it's just a designated area in their pro shop that has a couch and some chairs, a television, computer, Wi-Fi, magazines, etc. And as we discussed earlier, Pev's creatively uses this area to market the field's services, as well as their sponsor's services, to these parents. Like we said, it doesn't have to be anything fancy, just enough to make parents feel comfortable.

And don't forget about the fields themselves. Make sure that they are well-maintained and presentable. This is a key element in ensuring a great experience. We like Paul's comment regarding grounds keeping, "Make sure your entire property is clean and well-maintained, from the parking lot, to the toilets, to the restaurant and the fields. And make sure all the work is done on Friday, not on Monday, because on Monday, no one is going to see it."

Take it one step further. If you know another area business owner, maybe even the owner of the local Family Entertainment Center or Laser Tag Facility, ask him/her to stop by your field and offer observations on the appearance of your facilities. Ask for suggestions on signage and marketing. It's always good to have an unbiased perspective from another business person you respect.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

As we reflect back on everything we've covered, some of you might be sitting back and saying to yourself, "It seems like I would be doing a lot of discounting if I implemented all the programs outlined in this book." But as Gio would tell you, 70% of people who come to his fields still pay full price. "In America, people are always looking for deals, but there are still many people who buy Cadillac and Mercedes Benz, and pay full price. Some people are simply not interested in saving money." So it's important to understand that all of these programs build exposure for your field; whether people are taking advantage of the deals or not is somewhat secondary.

Gio, Mike and Paul all admit that they've made mistakes along the way, but now other field owners can learn from them and try to avoid making the same mistakes themselves.

Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, always said "Mistakes can often be as good a teacher as success." This is demonstrated by the fact that these field owners have collectively operated their facilities for a remarkable 55 years. And their marketing strategies will not change in the years ahead. They'll continue to try new things to grow their business, and some will inevitably fail. But they'll learn from their mistakes, make the appropriate adjustments and create success. You must have passion for what you do. You must listen to your customers. You must market your business. You must adapt. "Most people have the will to win; few have the will to prepare to win." (Bobby Knight, former NCAA basketball coach)

"Without passion, you don't have energy; without energy, you have nothing. Nothing great in this world

HOW TO MARKET YOUR PAINTBALL FIELD

has been accomplished without passion.” (Donald Trump, business icon)

“The best way to predict the future is to create it.” (Peter Drucker, management consultant)

We cannot guarantee your field’s success, but we are confident that if you have the passion and implement even some of the marketing strategies outlined in this book that you will expose your field to a much wider audience, measurably increase your traffic and create the future.

Good luck!

For questions or suggestions for future editions of this book, please contact Patrick Ehren at pehren@tippmann.com or Ron Goldblatt at rgoldblatt@tippmann.com.



Epilogue

One Small Field Owner's Perspective

In sports, there are different levels of competition – rookie, amateur and professional. However, in business, companies are categorized as small, medium and large. The marketing examples in this book are from three of the largest companies in the paintball industry. As a result, some of you may be saying to yourself, “All this marketing stuff is great for the ‘big guys’ but I can’t do this,” or maybe “I can’t afford to do this.” Well, my name is Bambi Bullard and my business, Coastal Paintball, is a sole-proprietorship that was founded in 1991 and is considered a small company like hundreds of other paintball fields around the world. And, I believe many of the ideas outlined in this book can work for a small paintball field as well.

First, I would like to share my definition of marketing: It is a complex process that includes every single contact point between your business and a potential customer. With this definition, you can see how you could be marketing your business everyday in some way. So you may be asking, “How can I do this on a small budget?” Over the years, I have used several of the tools presented in this book. And although some of the ideas didn’t work for my specific situation, many did.

The key marketing tools for Paul, Mike and Gio are those associated with business name recognition, a strong web presence, free play and return passes, brochures and telephone marketing. Do not be

EPILOGUE

intimidated by the numbers—smaller fields can do the same things, just with smaller budgets.

Event Marketing

Under the event marketing umbrella, I have volunteered to sit on speaker panels, given seminars at trade shows and operated target ranges at sporting goods stores and festivals just to gain company name recognition. If you can't set up a target range at an event, at least walk around the event area and hand out coupons for discounted play. All it costs is time and a small printing fee. And, as suggested in the book, this would be a great way to put sponsored players or teams to work for your business.

Get Online

I also recommend that you put as much money as you can into your online presence. This includes your website and social networking sites, which in most cases costs nothing and can be very beneficial when targeting various groups for your field.

Free Play Pass

Coastal Paintball has been using a version of the Free Play Pass, which includes the use of rental equipment, but requires the purchase of a minimum of 500 paintballs. The cost is wear and tear on the equipment, and your profit comes from the paint sales. As for the cost of the pass, print as many as you can afford – you may not need a thousand. And don't forget to let your customers do some marketing for you. Trust your regular players with a dozen or so passes and let them help you attract new business.

Liability Waivers

Liability Waivers are critical for building a customer contact list and necessary for follow-up calls for private parties, to pre-sell future birthday parties, etc. The telephone marketing and follow-up phone calls suggested in this book can seem overwhelming if you don't have the staff in place for this task. However, you should at least select and follow up with a few contacts a week that you think would generate the most additional customers, especially calls to potential groups.

Group Marketing

One of the marketing concepts emphasized in this book is "Marketing to Groups." Everyone wants to get the greatest return on his/her investment, whether that is time, money or a combination of the two. Investing in marketing to build your group bookings and increasing the number of returning players will help you to maximize that return.

There are two things I do for my groups:

1. I give the group "organizer" a discount pass or free play pass (depending on the size of the group). They pre-print the waivers, get them all signed, and herd the group through the check-in process; they deserve something for that. I make the pass good for their next visit, and normally they will bring one or more players with them when they return.
2. I offer a discount for each player if the group has 20 or more players.

EPILOGUE

Speaking from personal experience, the same goals can be achieved if small companies use the same marketing tools as the top fields in the U.S., just at a different level or with a little variation. Select what works for you, at a cost that fits your budget.

This book gives every business owner amazing tips for creating an effective marketing plan. So, set up your calendar, choose the various marketing tools that you believe will work in your market and budget, and then set the plan in motion. Be patient, be consistent and follow your plan.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandy Ballard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent initial 'S'.

References

Chapter 2

Websites www.cpxsports.com
www.pevs.com
www.giantpaintball.com
www.hollywoodsports.com
www.scvillage.com
www.giantpb.com

Brochure Distribution

CTM Media Group
www.ctmmediagroup.com

Brochure Template

Tippmann FTP Site – To gain access to the FTP, contact your sales representative at 1-800-533-4831
<http://FTP.tippmann.com>

Chapter 3

Constant Contact – Email Management System
www.constantcontact.com

Chapter 6

Fundraiser Booklet Template
Tippmann FTP Site – To gain access to the FTP, contact your sales representative at 1-800-533-4831
<http://FTP.tippmann.com>

REFERENCES

Chapter 7

Groupon

www.grouponworks.com

Living Social

www.livingsocial.com

Chapter 9

Paintball Laser Tag

www.paintballlasertag.com

Contact your Tippmann sales representative at

1-800-533-4831 for more information

Chapter 10

Google Ad Words

www.google.com/adwords

Bing Advertising

www.advertising.microsoft.com

Yahoo Advertising

www.advertising.yahoo.com

Chapter 11

Facebook and Facebook Advertising

www.facebook.com

<http://www.facebook.com/advertising/>

Twitter

www.twitter.com

YouTube

www.youtube.com

REFERENCES

Chapter 12

Tippmann Television Commercial
Tippmann FTP Site – To gain access to the
FTP, contact your sales representative at
1-800-533-4831
<http://FTP.tippmann.com>

Cable Television Media Buy
NCC Media
www.nccmedia.com
Matthew Gudgeon
312-279-9642
matt.gudgeon@nccmedia.com

Chapter 16

Paintball Laser Tag
www.paintballlasertag.com
Contact your Tippmann sales representative at
1-800-533-4831 for more information

Chapter 18

YMCA
www.ymca.net

Chapter 19

Meeting Professionals International
www.mpiweb.org/Home

Chapter 23

Field Operations and Safety Guide
Tippmann FTP Site – To gain access to the
FTP, contact your sales representative at
1-800-533-4831
<http://FTP.tippmann.com>





Giovanni (Gio) D'Egidio
and



Dennis Bukowski
have been in the paintball
business for more than 28 years
and currently operate SC Village,
Hollywood Park and Giant Paintball
Parks in Southern California.



Mike "Pev" Peverill
of Pev's Park in
Aldie, Virginia has
been a field operator
of over 18 years.



**Ray,
Paul
and
Mike Dagnino**



since 2005, have
operated CPX Sports
in Joliet, which is
a 149-acre field just
southwest of Chicago.