

**INTERNATIONAL**

Vol. 24 | September 2016

# **BOWLING INDUSTRY**



**THE WORLD'S ONLY MAGAZINE DEVOTED EXCLUSIVELY TO THE BUSINESS OF BOWLING**

## **THE YING AND YANG OF BOWLING**

**A look into the world of the  
Asian bowling market**



**RAISE YOUR BAR**

**THE HOUSES THAT  
JACK BUILT**

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**INTERNATIONAL BOWLING INDUSTRY**  
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PUBLISHER & EDITOR  
**Scott Frager**  
frager@bowlingindustry.com  
Skype: scottfrager

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER  
**David Garber**  
garber@bowlingindustry.com

OFFICE MANAGER  
**Patty Heath**  
heath@bowlingindustry.com

CONTRIBUTORS  
**David Garber**  
**Patty Heath**  
**Sean Krainert**  
**Paul Lane**  
**Mark Miller**  
**Marc Pater**  
**Robert Sax**

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR  
**Fred Groh**  
fredgroh@bowlingindustry.com

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR  
**Jackie Fisher**  
fisher@bowlingindustry.com

ART DIRECTION & PRODUCTION  
**Designworks**  
www.dzynwrx.com  
(818) 735-9424

FOUNDER  
**Allen Crown (1933-2002)**

**12655 Ventura Boulevard**  
**Studio City, CA 91604**  
**(818) 789-2695(BOWL)**  
**Fax (818) 789-2812**  
**info@bowlingindustry.com**

**www.BowlingIndustry.com**

**HOTLINE: 818-789-2695**

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The new Pokémon GO virtual game is turning the world on its head, and BECs have a great opportunity to cash in.



■ By Sean Krainert

**B**owling entertainment centers (BECs) are continuously looking for new ways to drive more customers through their front doors, and keep them there longer. The BEC structure already has the innate benefit of having multiple features in one facility attracting several target markets. But what if there were a worldwide virtual game that BEC owners could tap into and utilize to enhance their already robust marketing structure?

At first, it may seem impractical that a video game would have a direct impact on businesses across the nation and around the world. But Pokémon GO is not just any video game.

On July 6, 2016, Pokémon released its newest and seventh generation Pokémon GO, a multiplayer, location-based, augmented reality game. The speed at which the game has gained momentum is unprecedented, with downloads and use exceeding that of long-time top notch social and game apps. Its initial surge in popularity is booming, with a strong prognosis to outlive naysayers tagging it as a fad.

The game ignited over 20 million U.S. users in just the first week of its release. That is 20 million reasons why BEC owners should be quickly gathering their marketing teams to tap into this new target market. The unique characteristics of this

particular game are pumping up small businesses and BECs across the country, immediately generating new ways to increase customer base, with an ROI that's off the charts.

### **How is the Evolution of Gaming Related to BECs?**

Until now, gaming has traditionally been associated with the seclusion and inactivity of individuals who increasingly become disassociated with the real world. However, the blanketing phenomena of Pokémon GO is already rewriting the rules for the future of gaming and erasing the stigma attached to it. The game thrives on the physical proximity of other players urging them to get up, get moving and to create a future of public and shared experiences. To understand how to make that connection between this craze and potential business, it's best to understand the basics of the game and how it can work in favor for an BEC.

### **How to Play the Game**

Pokémon GO can be played on both iOS and Android devices. In other words, if you have a phone, you're in. The collaboration between Nintendo, The Pokémon Company and Niantic Inc., crafted a free software application, generating their revenue through in-app purchases.

## TRENDING

When a player opens their app, they can see a real-world map of where they are that helps them locate Pokémon or locations of interest in the game. In order to reach these creatures and desired locations in the game, they have to physically walk there in real life. The app utilizes the device's camera, video and GPS capabilities to put the players in a real-world scenario at all times, with an option to see the game world through the eyes of their surroundings. In other words, Pokémon has crafted an unparalleled sensory experience in the gaming world.

### How to Make the Connection

BECs and small businesses are already harnessing Pokémon GO's international economic power to create not only an instant financial boost but an opportunity to make business relationships with customers that could fuel the future. Here's how.

Once a player reaches level five, they can then join one of three teams. There are two main types of locations in the game that exist at real world locations determined by Niantic Inc.: PokéStops are great for picking up virtual items needed for the game, whereas Gyms are where people congregate to fight against other players' Pokémon and can only be controlled by one team. Hence, the mass gatherings at Gyms to overtake the location.

While these two types of locations are predetermined by the game makers, they can easily be identified by opening the app and looking around, or by a backdoor into Niantic's predecessor game, Ingress, that has the same identical locations on its game that determine where Pokémon GO's hot spots are today. While the option to sign up a business as a PokéStop or Gym is not yet available, it is in the works. Businesses can submit a request to have their location considered as a Gym or PokéStop via the support page on the Niantic Inc. website.

### How BECs can Interact with the Game

There are two main ways that businesses can directly interact with the game. The first is to use the in-app purchase called a Lure Modul. When the Lure Modul is activated, it increases the rate of Pokémon generation in the area around the PokéStop, where they're placed for one half hour. So whether or not a business is a designated PokéStop, it still can control bringing traffic directly to the business area. For a little more than a dollar an hour during open business hours, where else can you find a virtual tool that guarantees crowds to a business for 30 solid minutes of time?

The other way to drive Pokémon GO traffic to a business is a bit more creative than pressing a button. Besides PokéStops, Gyms are the other large gathering areas for players. Again, by opening the app, the Gyms are visible. While you can't use the Lure feature for this, good old-fashioned marketing techniques will do.

BECs and small businesses throughout the country are funneling this game energy straight into the core of their marketing and promotions teams. Instead of being put off by the crowds in the parking lot or the dozens of people crammed in the entryway, encourage it by welcoming the players and tailoring an experience just for them. This can open up the door to record high amounts of foot traffic that can essentially be turned into customers.



Social media can be a way to show off how Pokémon-friendly a business is by not only advertising promotions, but by actively taking in-game screenshots and posting them, inviting players to come catch Pokémon at that BEC. Creating a Pokémon drink special or menu item or offering discounts for proof of Pokémon GO on the customer's device is also a popular angle. Another great way to harness the Pokémon power is to advertise Pokémon GO playing areas at a business that offers all players drink discounts or food specials while they play. By creating incentive programs, players will come back again and again to play, increasing return rates for the future.

Early adopters are already setting the bar high for promotions linked to Pokémon GO with creative and innovate ideas. You can now purchase Pokémon bowling balls, key chains, shoes, head phones, shift knobs, and believe it or not, Pokémon engagement rings! It is a chotchies and collectors frenzy. BECs aren't the only ones jumping onboard. Visiting the online Amazon bookstore can lead businesses to reading multiple e-books on how to drive more Pokémon GO traffic in their direction.

Players themselves are initiating Pokémon pub crawls, bowling center events, singles activities, BBQs and a number of other massive gatherings to interact and play the game together while enjoying food and activities. These can be prime opportunities for BECs.

### GO Beyond!

In less than a week from the launch date, Pokémon GO became the most popular game in history. For businesses that thrive on capitalizing on big shifts in cultural society, Pokémon Go has the strength to generate unprecedented and untapped traffic, creating strong and lasting emotional bonds to their brand for years to come. ❖



Sean Krainert is a freelance copywriter living in the San Francisco Bay Area specializing in real estate, hospitality and mental health writing. He is also an alumni of the Wichita State Shocker bowling program.