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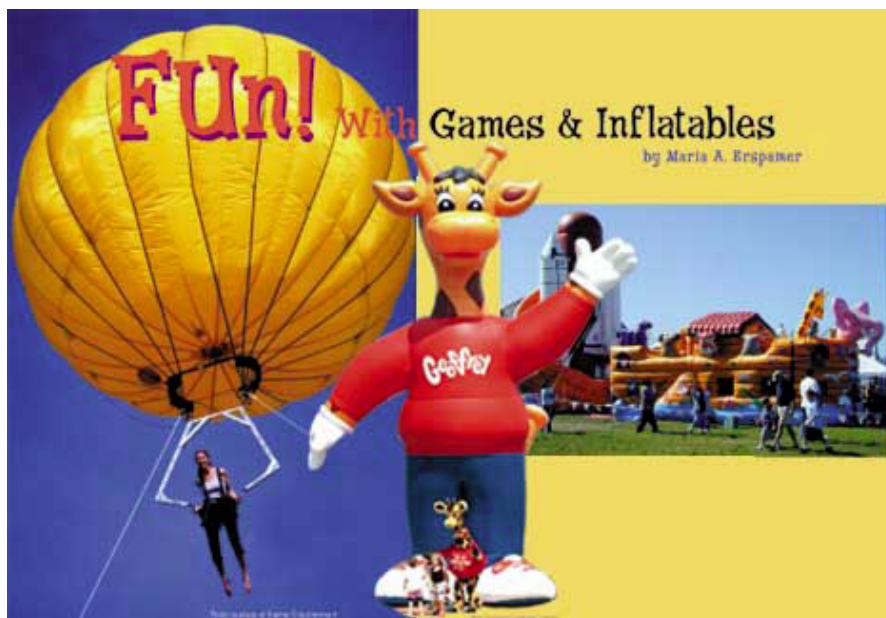
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I'm a self-proclaimed adult. What does that mean? It means I struggle, like many of us, to put aside the kid in me and get the job done on a daily basis. I wrestle the urge to laugh, skip and hold hands with coworkers, when we recess outside the front door here at *Event Solutions* for little sun-inspired breaks.

Think I'm kidding? I'm not. It's taken me 11 long years in the professional world to repress this urge, and I've gotten very good at it. Or so I thought. This past April, the team at Dave & Buster's on Long Island, invited myself and a group of event planners from NYC to see what one of their team-building games was all about. I saw this activity on our itinerary, and I was sweating with anxiety before we even hit the doors. What would happen if I was asked to drive a Daytona 500 video game, don some boxing gloves or take silly booth pictures for the good of my team?

Well, within 45 minutes or less I knew everyone better; I was relaxed, recharged and ready for hours more of touring hotels, visiting venues and generally making nice with droves of new people. Think what a little fun could do for you and your clients.

What Kind of Fun Can be Had?

I'm sorry we even have to examine what kind of fun can be had, but again, assuming you might too be a self-proclaimed adult, repressing your inner child, you've probably not been on the look out for fun for you or your clients. That's not an insult, it's a fact. As adults, the organic trend is to make "fun" be about the aesthetics, like decor and food presentation; however, there are tons of other hands-on opportunities out there that can make your event equally as memorable.

And it doesn't matter how sophisticated or veteran your intended attendees are; there is fun to be had for everyone. Consider the package put together by Kramer Entertainment, Grand Rapids, Mich., which provides traffic-stopping attractions to events nationwide. A client asked the company to entertain a diverse and hard-to-impress group of 14,000 international guests, on multiple days and in multiple venues, during a week-long annual meeting. Kramer delivered and "brought down the house" on Saturday night with several motion theaters, bungee rides, a rock wall, the NASCAR Race Trainer, Fantasy Photo Globes, a mechanical bull, inflatables, Robo Surfer and headline entertainment by Sugar Ray.



If you have an equally large, or larger event, you may want to also consider a very time-tested draw for kids of all ages, including me and you: midway attractions. Cyndee Jones, the national marketing committee chairperson for Fun Services, which has locally owned and operated offices in 40 locations throughout the United States and Canada, shares one such set up for Alticor's (formerly Amway) annual employee picnic. According to Jones, this event includes a full midway game tent, inflatable and mechanical rides, as well as stilt walkers and professional clowns—all the makings of a carnival, right down to the diaper-changing stations for droves of little ones.

Little ones, big ones...it doesn't matter. Everyone loves games and attractions. Adding a few could affect your ROI. "For instance," says Ken Knapp of Eccentric Entertainment, a full-service nationwide amusement rental company that both owns and operates their amusement activities, "a large corporation we have worked with for years asked us to provide entertainment for their bi-annual Worldwide Team Leader Convention. The customer requested sports-related and high-tech unique events. We were able to adhere to their request and put together an event they have kept talking about for the past year!"

What did Eccentric do that packed such a punch? They brought in virtual reality, M-4 Motion Simulator, Pit Crew Challenge, Micro Reality Racing, pool tables, air hockey, foosball, electronic darts, a putting challenge, Zap Attach Laser Tag with 60-foot by 60-foot dome/arena, virtual imaging, a virtual golf simulator, and a stage with constant events, including models to assist with giveaways, disc jockey/ karaoke, cash cube, and raffles, etc. The event was topped off with an extreme 15-foot by 20-foot rear projection screen that showed NASCAR videos all night with the client's logo superimposed.



Is your event a tad smaller? No problem. Games, attractions and their correlating activities don't have to take up so much space or time. David Carpenter from Airplay Inflatable Fun!, Sacramento, Calif., describes a smaller-scale fun phenomenon he calls a "company lunch jam." Here his team of fun specialists comes in during an extended lunch hour or afternoon meeting and brings in something fun, but not too complicated, like a "Bungee Bull" ride or adult-size tricycle races. They might also suggest their HOOPS electronic basketball game, which can be used for inside office parties or even in the lunch room, or the Loo Go! Racer electric toilet racer. Says Carpenter, "Nothing is more hilarious than seeing the CEO sprinting to the finish line on our Loo Go!

Racer."

"Group interaction is most hilarious when satire is mixed with our attractions," continues Carpenter. "Our boxing ring is a large 24-foot by 24-foot ring and makes for hilarious interaction when the Rocky soundtrack, Don King wig and scantily clad 'male' Round-1 models are added to the mix." What else can you add to the mix to spice up your event or meeting? How about a game show? "Game shows are all about the goal," says Dave Peters, owner, Absolute Amusements, Orlando. "They are corporate, they are technical, and the results are measurable. Some people use them as just fun elements for an event; however, most are using game shows to measure how successful their conference has been."

How hard is it to set up a game show in a conference setting? Well, it's often a situation where attendees leave for a coffee break, and a company like Absolute Amusements would come in, redo the room, use existing A/V, and when the attendees come back in, they are quizzed to see what they've learned. That simple. Absolute Amusements always adds a few fun questions, too, so that guests are enjoying themselves. "It gets them into their child mind, which helps increase retention," says Peters.

And if you are looking for brand attention, try a few games inside your next trade show or expo booth. Games draw people in, get them to stay awhile and serve as an ice breaker for customers and staff alike. "I believe the smaller activities are better for trade shows. Something easy to operate, takes up little room and makes a lot of noise," says Daniel S. Darrow, regional vice president, Fun Services of Missouri. "The 'Pop A Shot' electronic basketball, or 'The Putting Challenge' putting green does a great job. They are challenging enough to have people stop by, but not so challenging that they get discouraged and walk away."

For more ideas on fun and games for your clients, visit our sources' websites:

Absolute Amusements— www.absoluteamusements.com

Airplay Inflatable Fun!—www.airplayfun.com

Eccentric Entertainment—www.eccentricent.com

Fun Services—www.funservices.com

Fun Services of Missouri—www.funstl.com

Kramer Entertainment—www.kramerintl.com

MEDIA KIT

Winning Strategies
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Professional



Inflating Your Marketing Plan...to New Heights

When marketing your products or services you may have questions about what to include in the mix. It's sometimes hard to know, up front, what will influence people and what will fall short. Inflatable advertising is one option that is proving successful in the event arena and beyond.

Increasing Brand Strength

Building brand awareness is at the heart of any marketing strategy because name recognition is key to a successful promotions program. Brands communicate company ideals and also help consumers directly and immediately relate your offering to a need they have. While there are a multitude of avenues that can be taken to achieve and maintain an excellent level of brand awareness, using events to their fullest capacity can be vital to the process.

Events—trade shows, product launches, road shows, etc.—tie directly to increasing sales margins. Events give your company a critical advantage in helping to increase levels of loyalty and strength from the public or clients. What better place to achieve both goals than at an event?

At the heart of any event is recognition. Inflatables give you an inexpensive and highly effective way to stand out from the crowd. With the use of a 20- or 30-foot inflatable company mascot, product replica or company logo, you'll make your presence known and take a prominent place at any event. Inflatables Break the Norm Clearly, advertising is no longer relegated strictly to print and electronic media outlets. Today we see ads on everything from the sides of buses to the backs of T-shirts. Because of this market saturation, great products can sometimes get lost in the clutter. Using an inflatable to promote your company or product can be a great way to break away from the crowd and get noticed.





Many businesses report immediate and noticeable increases in foot traffic and sales with the use of inflatables. As opposed to coupon campaigns, free giveaways, or other gimmicks, inflatables create a stir and drive traffic levels higher without any additional cost. How? The mere presence of a 20-foot soft drink can or mascot piques levels of curiosity. Customers jockey to check out what's happening. And because inflatables are extremely durable, they can be reused year after year.

Tom Meacham, president of Landmark Creations, Burnsville, Minn., has seen firsthand the effects inflatables have on traffic levels. Landmark Creations was asked to develop inflatable shark fins for the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago to promote a new shark display. Three fins, each weighing 80 pounds and measuring 20 feet tall by 18 feet wide were attached to the roof of the Shedd, the world's largest indoor aquarium, for six months. During their use, these inflatables sustained winds of up to 50 mph with no service calls required. They also drew in new traffic every day.

Inflatable are Irresistible Photo Ops

Inflatable are a favorite of the media. They naturally draw attention and crowds; two things the press cannot resist. If your company has a sponsorship presence somewhere, like a charity or sporting event, you will certainly want to use an inflatable there. The press and consumers will then naturally associate your logo, mascot or product with the event you're sponsoring or hosting.

Need to promote a new brand? "Most clients of the inflatable industry are up and coming companies who need to compete on a level playing field with mega companies, such as Coke and Frito Lay, who are leaders within their industries," remarks Meacham. "Using an inflatable is a key way to compete, especially at events, because it allows these startups to quickly make their own mark."

When consumers are visually stimulated by an inflatable replica they create an emotional connection with your company or product. This stimulation also creates a lasting visual image that enhances brand recognition and, more importantly, retention. Regardless of the product or service, inflatables play a crucial role in the entire marketing mix. From advertising to event promotion to publicity, rest assured your use of inflatables will bring a high return on investment throughout its long life.

Article contributed by Landmark Creations, Burnsville, Minn.

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