

By Brandon Willey

Seasonal and Holiday

STRATEGIES

Operator Insights on Crafting Unforgettable Experiences That Draw Crowds and Keep Them Returning

The holiday season is a golden opportunity for bowling entertainment centers to draw in crowds, create memorable experiences, and boost revenue. By leveraging the excitement surrounding the fall and winter holidays, centers can offer unique attractions and activities that keep families coming back for more. Here at LBX Collective, we polled some of our regular listeners and community members, and they came back with the following ideas to plan and execute successful seasonal events that will create cherished memories and ensure your center stands out during the holiday seasons, encouraging guests to return year after year.

IMMERSE YOUR GUESTS

One of the most effective ways to enchant families and ensure that your center becomes a must-visit destination during the holiday season is to transform it with immersive environments and decorations that capture the essence of the fall and winter holidays. For a haunting Halloween, transform your entertainment center into a spooky haunted atmosphere that offers thrilling experiences for guests of all ages. Use eerie lighting, fog machines, and sound effects to create a chilling environment. Add themed props like cobwebs, skeletons, and pumpkins to enhance the spooky feel. If your center caters to a younger audience, you can take a lighter approach with decorations like silly scarecrows or friendly ghosts. For the winter holidays, turn your center into a magical winter wonderland. Decorate with twinkling lights, artificial snow, and ornaments that invoke the seasonal spirit. Set up a Santa's grotto where children can meet Santa Claus and take photos or build a little elf village that your younger guests can explore. The goal is to create a warm and festive environment that encourages visitors to feel the joy and wonder of the holiday season and gives them a reason to return. Creating these immersive environments, however, requires careful planning and execution.

Sourcing Decorations

- **Plan Ahead:** Plan your decorations well to ensure enough time to source everything.
- **Budget Wisely:** Set a budget for decorations and look for cost-effective options that don't compromise quality.
- **Local Vendors:** Support local businesses and build community relationships by sourcing decorations from nearby vendors.
- **Reuse and Recycle:** Invest in budget-conscious but high-quality decorations that can be reused for multiple seasons. Look for items that can be easily stored and repurposed.

Unleash Your Staff

- **Encourage Input:** Incentivize staff to share their ideas and suggestions for decorations and activities. This can lead to fresh concepts that enhance the overall experience.
- **Engage Your Team:** Involve your staff in the design and decorating process. Their enthusiasm and creativity can contribute to a more authentic and enjoyable setup.
- **Assign Roles:** Divide tasks among staff members based on individual strengths and interests to ensure a smooth and efficient setup process.



Competitive Strategies

ENHANCE YOUR MENU

Themed food and beverage offerings are crucial to filling your guests with the holiday spirit. They should complement the seasonal atmosphere you've created and provide a sensory experience that evokes nostalgia, excitement, and a feeling of celebration. When your guests see and taste your seasonal specialties, it will enhance their overall experience, making their visit more memorable.

Fall Delights

- **Spooky Snacks:** Sate the sugar high with fall treats like jack-o-lantern caramel apples, pumpkin spice donuts, and ghost-shaped cookies.
- **Themed Drinks:** Offer concoctions like Cauldron Brew (a green punch that can have an alcoholic option), pumpkin spice lattes, and hot apple cider.

Winter Joy

- **Festive Treats:** Delight guests with gingerbread cookies, peppermint bark, and cupcakes or brownies decorated with snowflakes or snowmen.
- **Seasonal Beverages:** Warm up visitors with hot chocolate topped with marshmallows, eggnog, and mulled wine for the adults.

Consider partnering with local vendors to add a unique touch to your seasonal offerings. This supports the community and brings unique flavors to your existing menu.

Find Local Talent

- **Research:** Look for local bakeries, cafes, and specialty food vendors that offer high-quality, budget-conscious seasonal items.
- **Networking:** Attend local food fairs and farmers' markets to discover potential partners and build long-term relationships. Start small and get to know them and their operations.

Collaborate on Menus

- **Custom Creations:** Work with local vendors to create exclusive event items. This can include custom-decorated snacks and signature drinks that aren't available elsewhere.
- **Co-Branding:** Highlight the partnership in your marketing materials to draw in both your regular customers and fans of the local vendor.

Promote Local Offerings

- **Marketing:** Use social media platforms and in-center signage to promote your menu's unique, locally sourced items.
- **Events:** Host tasting events or meet-and-greets with local vendors to engage your guests and create a buzz around the new seasonal offerings.

CREATE CRAFTY WORKSHOPS

Interactive workshops add enriching and enjoyable experiences to your holiday experiences, particularly appealing to families and groups. They offer a hands-on way to celebrate the season together. Collaborating with local artists and experts can enhance the quality of your activities and create unique, memorable events that keep guests coming back year after year.



Finding the Right Partners

- **Local Talent:** Reach out to local artists, bakers, and craftsmen with a reputation for quality and creativity. Attend local art fairs, craft shows, and community events to discover potential collaborators.
- **Community Involvement:** Contact local trade schools, art studios, and community centers to find talented individuals who can contribute their expertise to your workshops.

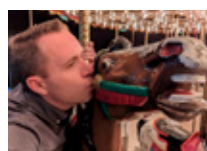
Creating Collaborative Experiences

- **Custom Workshops:** Work with your partners to design workshops that fit the holiday season theme and showcase their unique skills. For example, a local sculptor could lead a pumpkin carving workshop, while a local pastry chef could teach a cookie decorating class.
- **Promotion:** Promote these collaborations through your marketing channels, highlighting the expertise of your guest instructors to attract more participants.

Enhancing the Visitor Experience

- **Interactive Elements:** Ensure that the workshops are interactive and hands-on, allowing participants to engage with the activity fully. Provide all necessary materials and create a welcoming environment.
- **Learning Opportunities:** Emphasize the workshops' experiential aspect, allowing participants to learn new skills and techniques from professionals.

Planning and executing successful seasonal events require creativity, careful planning, and a focus on creating memorable experiences. By incorporating holiday-themed decorations, having novel food and beverage offerings, providing interactive workshops, and building community partnerships, you can create seasonal experiences that attract and delight families enhancing the guest experience and building a loyal customer base that returns season after season. ●



Brandon Willey, ICAE, is co-founder of the LBX Collective and Premier LBX Group, co-host of The LBX Daily Show, and founder and CEO of Hownd. Brandon has an intense passion for the attractions industry and extensive knowledge of location-based entertainment. Brandon is the former chair of IAAPA's FEC Committee and now sits on the North American Manufacturers and Suppliers Committee. You can connect with him at [LinkedIn.com/in/bwilley](https://www.linkedin.com/in/bwilley).