

Embracing The

ARCADE EVOLUTION

Understanding the latest arcade trends and innovation

By Brandon Willey

The classic video and redemption arcade has been a mainstay of family entertainment for decades. Games have steadily evolved from early predecessors like Centipede, Street Fighter, and Skee-ball to enhanced experiences and unique gameplay.

As consumer expectations across younger demographics shift towards more group-oriented, socially competitive, immersive experiences, family entertainment centers and location-based entertainment operators must adapt to stay relevant.

Games that promote cooperation and teamwork and develop social and communication skills through interactive play continue to increase in popularity. As a result of this progressive consumer trend and rapidly evolving technologies, virtual reality, augmented reality, projection mapping, and tactile digital screens will continue to claim a more significant share of the arcade and attraction domain.

WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOUR CENTER?

With such a profusion of products, you must first determine what your market expects or demands. As with the addition of any attraction, you must first evaluate your competitive environment, target demographics, existing attraction and arcade mix, and, most importantly, seek to understand the variations of VR that exist today.

ATTENDED VS. UNATTENDED VR

There are two broad categories of virtual reality attractions – unattended and attended – and each family of offerings has its benefits and drawbacks. Inevitable exceptions notwithstanding, unattended will often deliver higher throughput with a lower cost-per-play and little to no staffing costs. At the same time, attended systems require a staffing burden but frequently deliver a more elevated, socially competitive, and higher-priced experience for the guest. Whether attended or unattended, each game or attraction falls within one of four categories: rides, arcades, enclosures, and arenas. While there are many options, let's look at a few examples from each category.



SMALL FOOTPRINT VR

The first stop along our journey is the small-footprint VR rides, like **Virtual Rabbids** from LAI Games, a longtime and early staple of the FEC, and newer rides like **SpongeBob's VR Bubble Coaster** by Andamiro, which provide unattended fun on your game floor for one to two riders. For those willing to invest, both in the attraction and attendant, **XD VR ride experiences** from **Triotech** or **DOF Robotics** can offer an elevated and more thrilling experience for a higher number of guests.

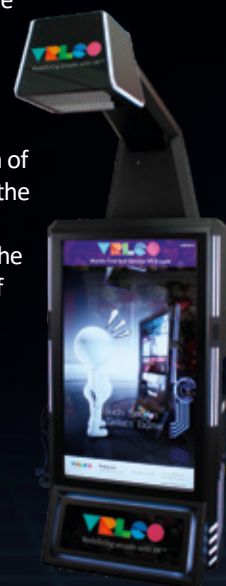
While adding VR rides to your venue can increase excitement, interactivity, and dwell time, keeping your arcade mix fresh will continue to deliver the revenue you've come to expect from your game floor. Some of the early entrants to the unattended VR game space, like **Beatsaber** and **Vader Immortal**:



Lightsaber Dojo by **VRsenal**, have become staples in many centers already, while newer players like **VRLeo** are going further with self-disinfecting capabilities and a selection of high-resolution games for the

guest to choose. Even simulators are starting to go virtual, with LAI Games leading the pack with their latest release of a VR version of their popular dual racer **Asphalt 9 Legends**.

If you are looking to add larger group social or competitive play but have limited square footage, then four-player tethered **VR enclosures** like **Hologate**, with their IP-based solid games, or the **Omni Arena** by **Virtuix**, with their unique omnidirectional treadmill experience, can be fantastic entry points to add VR to your venue.



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FREE-ROAM, LARGER SCALE OPTIONS

For larger scale, free-roam installations (no attached cables, allowing the guest to move freely), virtual reality arenas from platforms like **Limitless VR by Creative Works**, Zero Latency, and Spree can offer a more immersive, tactile, and enhanced entertainment experience.

EXPERIENCES AND ENHANCEMENTS

If you are not quite ready to dive headfirst into VR, there are still great ways to add immersive and interactive experiences to your center: say hello to augmented reality. While still very early in its manifestation, there are two broad categories of augmented reality to explore: *experiences* and *enhancements*.

Experiences

Very few full-blown experiential players exist in this space, but **Verse Immersive by Enklu** is one growing brand. Currently, you can experience their innovative platform at one of three locations: Chicago, under their brand; Main Event in Grapevine, TX; and 810 Billiards and Bowling in Phoenix. They have multiple experiences — delivered via a semi-translucent headset, allowing players to see a virtual overlay over the real world. The attraction requires an attendant and 1,200 square feet for up to 20 players at a time, and their quests vary in gameplay from 20 to 60 minutes.

Enhancements

Enhancements are another rapidly growing trend. While often referred to as projection mapping rather than augmented reality, the impact on the guest experience remains the same: a more immersive and interactive experience. Thanks to projection mapping pioneers like TouchMagix, we've seen manufacturers and suppliers add projection-mapped interactive experiences to their tried-and-true attractions. From Brunswick's Spark system to Chaos Karts to **501 Entertainment's Smart Darts** and **Supercharged Shuffleboard by Game Volt**, these augmented reality enhancements increase interactivity, group play, and the potential for repeatability.

IMMERSIVE TRENDS TO WATCH

The rise of immersive games that don't require headsets is another trend to watch and is the fastest-growing segment of the mixed-reality family of attractions. Most immersive enclosures do not need an attendant and have a higher throughput due to a lack of headsets to fit, clean, and charge. These immersive and interactive experiences can be dropped almost anywhere on your floor and are ready to go at the swipe of a game card.

Valo Motion is a rapidly expanding leader in this space with their **Valo Arena**, a projection-mapped multiplayer arena. Arcade Arena is a newer entrant to the scene with their multimodal interactive, competitive, and tactile attraction. Other enclosures like Qbix by Inowize, Immersive Gamebox, and Attraktion's Playneo each use 270-degree projection environments for free-roam group gaming, enabling interaction for multiple simultaneous players without special glasses or headsets.

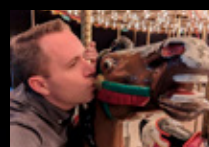
These immersive enclosures create spaces that encourage group interaction and engagement on every surface of the attraction.



However, suppose projection mapping and digital wall panels aren't the right fit, but you still want to add repeat playability, group interaction, and engagement. In that case, you must consider the growing contingent of interactive tactile gaming options like **Mission Box by TimeMission**. Games with a smaller footprint but are equally engaging, like SisyFox and Playmind's Playbox, round out a few options that can fit nicely within your existing game floor.

BOTTOM LINE

The arcade is no longer just about solo play and high scores; it's about creating memorable, shared experiences. Embracing new technologies and trends is crucial to staying relevant and appealing in an ever-evolving market. The future of family entertainment is interactive, immersive, and inclusive. Owners and operators can ensure their venues remain at the forefront of fun by investing in these rapidly evolving attractions. ●



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