MEMBERSHIPS THAT KEEP THE LANES FULL

Recurring Revenue, Lasting Relationships

By Brandon Willey

In today's entertainment and experience economy, relying solely on "one-and-done" visits is a risky strategy. The most resilient bowling entertainment centers (BECs) and location-based entertainment (LBE) venues are transitioning from purely transactional models to recurring revenue streams from membership and season passes. These programs transform occasional guests into committed members who visit more frequently, spend more per visit, and become advocates for your brand.


John Keys

Recently, I sat down with John Keys, sales director at CenterEdge Software, to explore how these programs turn unpredictable foot traffic into predictable income while boosting engagement across food, beverage, and other attractions.

THE POWER OF RECURRING REVENUE

Bowling centers already understand the value of memberships—even if they don't call them that. "If you think about it, bowling centers have been offering a type of membership for decades through their league play," Keys explains. "These leagues drive loyalty since these 'members' tend not to seek out alternative options, keep guests coming back for a fixed term, build recurring revenue in the way of dues, and drive engagement through competition."

Expanding that concept with official non-league memberships or season passes can help operators capture even more of your market through flexible packages that appeal to families, casual players, and repeat visitors alike.

Season passes deliver upfront value, often paying for themselves in just a few visits, while memberships take it a step further. "They're often billed monthly at a much lower price point," Keys says. "Rather than paying up front, members can easily budget the monthly fee into their expenses while giving themselves something to look forward to continually." This low-charge recurring model is a proven one, seen everywhere from fitness clubs to streaming services and car washes, that turns casual users into committed customers.

UNDERSTANDING THE MEMBERSHIP MINDSET

Memberships work because people value what they invest in. A monthly payment serves as a subtle nudge to visit, transforming good intentions into repeat business. Today's consumers also crave value, exclusivity, and a sense of belonging. "If your programs are priced appropriately with the right amount of benefits, members feel good about their investment and that they're getting value for money," Keys emphasizes.

He cautions that operators often make the mistake of offering deep discounts instead of meaningful perks. Members want convenience, special treatment, and recognition: things like priority lanes, exclusive events, or member-only badges and rewards. "Theme parks, trampoline parks, and museums have proven that when benefits are tangible and exclusive, guests will subscribe and stay," Keys adds.

STRUCTURING YOUR PROGRAM

Design what people want

Start with your core offering: bowling. Then layer in high-margin perks that entice repeat use without eroding profitability. Keys advises avoiding overly restrictive entitlements, saying, "Members want to feel like they're getting a good value for their money, so consider offering a membership that includes admission to one or more attractions without being overly restrictive on usage." He continues, "It's also very important to entice members to enjoy and spend more. Special offers or member pricing on food and beverage, free game cards, or discounted merchandise can help you boost per capita spending while still giving members a robust offering that keeps them engaged."

Pricing strategy

Find the sweet spot between affordability and perceived exclusivity. Keys suggests using tiers (e.g., silver/gold/platinum) or bundled packages (bowling + arcade, family plan, etc.) to match varied budgets and visit patterns. He stresses the importance of testing monthly rather than annual or seasonal options. "Season passes shine during peak periods like summer or the holidays, while monthly memberships excel at smoothing demand year-round."

Lean on Technology

Your POS and CRM must make it easy to sell, renew, and measure. "A lot of operators go wrong by just setting and forgetting their memberships," Keys warns. "But they have to do the work to entice members back in. Your point-of-sale platform should offer metrics and reporting to help you track and measure program success." He recommends tracking metrics such as renewal rates, pending cancellations, recurring payment health, and member demographics to fine-tune the program's performance.

MARKETING YOUR PROGRAM

Launch Like It's an Event

Treat your membership rollout as you would a new attraction. Use early-bird pricing, "founding member" perks like T-shirts or commemorative cards, and host a VIP preview for league captains or corporate buyers.

Promote Everywhere

Your lanes, scoring screens, televisions, and concession counters are prime real estate. Use digital signage, QR codes on menus and lane tables, and short looping videos that explain benefits in 10–15 seconds. "Employee contests and challenges can be a terrific way to gain team member buy-in while driving revenue," Keys suggests. "Be sure to teach them the best language to use at the point of sale to help craft exciting conversations." Every staff member should be familiar with the one-sentence pitch, the top three benefits, and common objection responses.

Build Community, Not Just Discounts

Community will always beat coupons. Social proof is powerful. Share short testimonials, highlight "members of the month," and post user-generated photos or videos of guests enjoying their perks. When your guests see your members having fun and enjoying tangible benefits, conversion rises.

Measuring Success and Refining the Model

"What gets measured gets renewed," Keys exclaims. The best way to strengthen your membership or season pass program is to track and analyze what drives renewals and spending. Focus on a few key performance indicators—how often members visit, how much they spend, how many renew, and how many upgrade.

Here's how Keys suggests breaking it down:

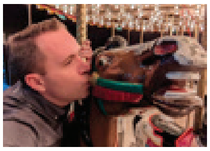
- Member Frequency: Track member visit frequency and attraction usage, flag inactive members for re-engagement, and compare peak visit times with those of day-pass guests.
- Revenue by Membership Type: Track total revenue by membership tier, compare average spend between members and non-members (which requires robust customer data tracking), and measure upsell effectiveness by analyzing how many members upgrade from lower to higher tiers.
- Ancillary Spending: Compare average spending between members and non-members across food, beverage, and gameplay categories to identify cross-selling opportunities, such as combo packages or exclusive member-only events that drive incremental revenue.
- Team Sales: Track which staff members sell the most memberships, analyze sales volume by day and shift, and evaluate how specific events or time periods influence overall membership sales performance.

Then, Keys says, "Turn your insights into action!" Use what you learn from your data to make smart adjustments that keep members engaged.

If family plans lag on weekdays, introduce a fun "homework happy hour" that bundles pizza and 30 minutes of arcade credit to draw families in after school. If you notice cancellations spike after the third month, try a "surprise-and-delight" offer around day 75, like a bonus game card, a free appetizer, or a double-points night, to rekindle excitement.

And if upgrades aren't happening, make your "value ladder" more visible. Show guests how higher tiers unlock new experiences, such as priority lanes, monthly guest passes, or exclusive events, to inspire them to move up.

By combining real value with smart pricing and reliable tech, you can turn unpredictable traffic into steady, repeat business. When members consistently see the value, they'll keep showing up, spending more, and inviting friends—transforming today's guests into tomorrow's loyal advocates.



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