

Game Room Layout

By: George Smith, President of Family Entertainment Group

After many years of visiting hundreds, if not thousands of locations, I am convinced that the layout of a game room is 50% science, 50% art, and 100% important in the ability of a room to make more or less money. A few prime considerations or rules of thumb should be noted:

- ***How big is the room?***
- ***What is the audience?***
- ***What is your budget?***
- ***What is the power availability?***
- ***Do you have any security considerations that need to be addressed?***
- ***Will you have Redemption games?***
- ***Is there a display counter?***
- ***Will you operate merchandisers or video games and novelties, including kiddie rides, air hockey or large attractions such as rides or bowling lanes?***

In this industry we tend to use a rule of thumb; one game for every 50 square feet. Therefore you can place approximately 20-25 games in every 1,000 square feet, but the numbers of pieces tend to go down as the size of the space goes up. The larger the space the greater the need for walkways and other access points that eat up floor space.

If you are going to add redemption the first consideration is where the prize counter is to be placed. It tends to be the most visual element in a game room and usually serves as the focus for point of sales (including cash registers or scanners) and it is where you will highlight the customers attention on valuable prizes that induce the spending on redemption games. Access in and out of the redemption center is critical as you want to be able to operate your game room with as few employees as possible and they should be able to attend customer needs as quickly as possible without compromising the security of the cash and prize center(s). Access of the display area to storage is also a primary consideration during a layout.

Given the shape of any game room we try to remember that the first 20-40 feet of your entrance is the primary sales area and in most cases it is also the bait to encourage customers to walk through the arcade door. We try to make the openings of any arcade space as large and inviting as possible and try to avoid any bottle necks or pinch points allowing access into the room. The entrance should highlight new and exciting pieces that encourage the customer to walk in. Additionally, the entrance and exit area are the prime location for cranes and merchandisers. We want to encourage the first and last play at these pieces, which are stand alone game rooms in their own right.

We try to group categories of games together. All redemption games tend to be in one area and nearest the display counter. Within the category of redemption, we then choose where the larger games are to be placed. Games such as alley bowlers, basketball, and large sport games should be grouped in an attractive line up. Be aware that large games tend to preclude smaller games placed beside them. If an alley bowler is 10 feet long (plus two feet for an approach) it doesn't make sense to put a much shorter game aside it. People don't feel comfortable with a ball or some projectile whizzing by their head. We also want to leave room above the large games for bonus scoring features and additional prize displays. This area above large games is a great way to encourage game play. The customer faces large attractive prizes which reinforce the desire to play.

We try to place quick-coin games in the same general area. We want the customer to have easy access to token machines that encourage fast play and better customer service. Try to keep at least one reliable change machine in a pod near your quick-coin games. Even in game rooms operating on debit cards you want the customer to understand easily how each game works and what the psychology is behind each game.

Larger game rooms (40-200 games) operate redemption and it tends to be the most productive part of the game room mix. In a mixture of earnings we see 60-80% of gross sales coming from redemption games. Therefore, making the redemption games attractive and in close proximity to the prize center/displays is critical. It is also important to recognize that redemption predominately tends to be played by younger people and families. Security is enhanced by separating children, women, and parents from male customers particularly teenage and young adult males who may be more physical and use more colorful language.

Change machines and debit card kiosks need to be in close proximity to the customer. On average it is wise to keep the customer walking only 20 to 40 feet to get more tokens/credits. The more inconvenienced the customer the less likely they are to trade dollars for tokens/credits. Placement of change machines should be made at the front of your location, the back of the location, in close proximity to the quick-coin games. After those placements, then one station for every 15-20 games on average.

After deciding on the placement of display, merchandisers, large redemption, quick-coin redemption, and standard redemption you can then consider video and novelty. We suggest that you consider kiddie rides at the entrance of your location to lure the young player in or within the area of redemption where most families congregate. This encourages mom to do something with her youngest child instead of forcing the whole family to leave.

The last items to place tend to be large novelty items such as air hockey and shuffle board. These pieces need to be placed so that players of these games and the moving pieces are safely contained whether against a wall, in an alcove, or in such a manner that the puck or similar doesn't fly off and strike other players.

Video games tend to be very attractive and a great visual element so placing them in sight of the entrance or where the monitors can be viewed from a distance. We tend to move these pieces to the center or back of a store, but within site of the employees. Driving games and especially gun games tend to be more testosterone heavy and you might want to keep an eye on players who may get out of hand. On the other hand video dancing games and the like tend to make good entry pieces because the frenetic activity they bring adds some theater to your location.

If you intend to use large attractions they will take precedence in placement given their size and often the power requirements that may be unique to large scale pieces.

Within the game room environment always stand back and look at how inviting your placement is. Try to theme areas such as %driving+, %sports+, %kiddie+games and activities, %fantasy+pieces, and games with similar look and shape. Keep in mind that building and fire inspectors will check on your space. Each community may have their own standards to be met for distances between games, wall, and columns and in some places you may need to be aware of codes for earthquake and special egress needs. These considerations may involve %knee+walls, ramps and open areas per specific code.

In general, keep your game room light and visible. Long lines of games tend to block visibility and security. Take a tip from Las Vegas, place like games near each other, but stand in the middle of your game room and see what you have paid for. More importantly, change the layout of your game room regularly. Each move you make with your existing stock of games will inform you as to what geography of your game room produces best. Moving a game from one spot to another will likely get a repeat customer to notice a game they might have missed otherwise. Also, remember that every game room needs at least one Big Bass Wheel. In the last two years this game has out produced all other games by a huge margin and shows no signs of slowing up.

No two games rooms are exactly the same and experience will always be a guide as to how to make money with placement of the game room. But remember, with the huge capital costs related to amusement equipment, the overall design, and layout of the space may well make the difference between good earnings and great earnings.

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