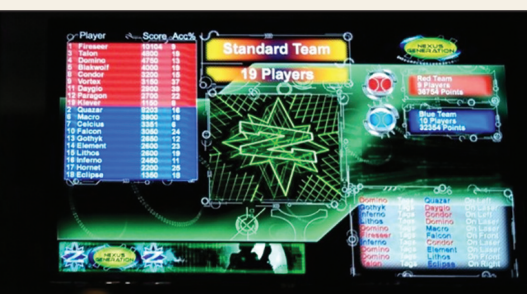


Are You Leaving Money on the Table?

Part Two: Maximizing Laser Tag Revenues By Spotlighting Scoring



By Erik Guthrie
VP of Zone LaserTag



The industry standard is for laser tag centers to mount two screens side by side to show scoring and live action from the arena. But this approach, while functional, misses opportunities to market to the consumers and to connect with them in a more meaningful — and profitable — way.

Erik Guthrie has nearly 25 years in the laser tag industry serving in many capacities. Starting out as a part-time game marshall in 1993, for the past 14 years, Guthrie has been Vice President of Zone Laser Tag, the global leader in laser tag manufacturing. (The company says it has 40 percent of the world market.) In addition, he was the Executive Director of the International Laser Tag Association for seven years and is also an owner/investor in several laser tag facilities. Guthrie has been quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Inc. Magazine*, *Fast Company*, as well as numerous trade publications. He serves as the Curator for the Laser Tag Museum and was recently featured on the hit television show *Storage Wars*. He owns and chairs the Laser Tag Convention held annually throughout the U.S. Guthrie is also involved in the R&D of the laser tag experience now enjoyed by millions of players every month around the world.

In the June issue of *RePlay*, I covered some key areas in which fine-tuning laser tag operations could result in better earnings, increased player loyalty and repeat visits. From enhancing the briefing room experience to selfie walls to using and maintaining atmospheric smoke or fog equipment, operational tweaks can — and do — make a significant difference in your bottom line.

Another key area where laser tag operators are leaving money on the table is in the scoring, something I think is grossly underrated.

The industry standard today is to have one scoreboard mounted on the wall showing the game stats and another next to it showing a feed from the low-light cameras in the arena.

From a deliverable point of view, this is easy. When you're building out your arena, you tell the electrician he needs to mount two monitors, the laser tag manufacturer runs the cables, the camera guy installs the equipment and, bam, it's done. One more item off the checklist. But, in going with this cookie cutter approach, we're missing out on golden opportunities to market to the consumer within the scoring process.

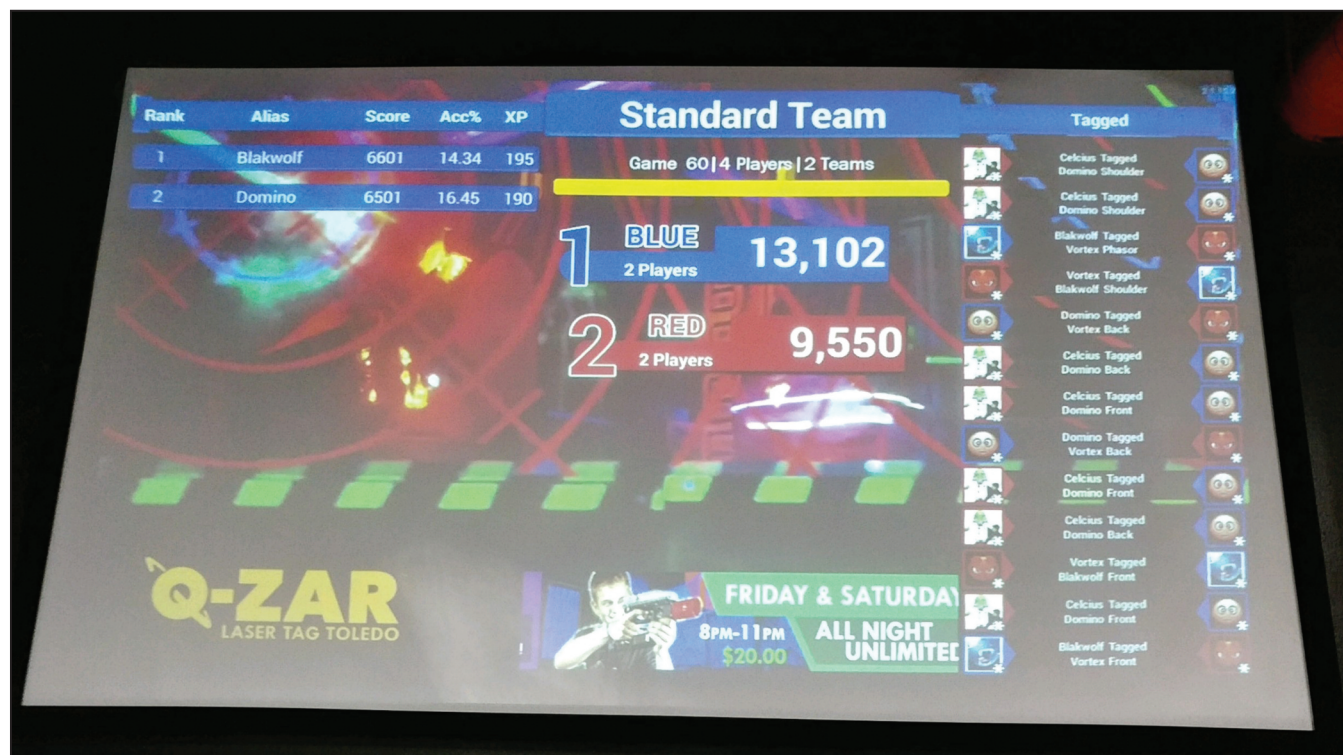
For example, most laser tag manufacturers' systems have the ability to run advertisements using the built-in scoring soft-

ware. So, while the consumer is standing there looking at the score, they could also be seeing upcoming special events or deals. I don't see this done in other laser tag centers and it's a golden marketing opportunity that is ignored.

At my own Q-ZAR location in Toledo, Ohio, we bring it all together and have incorporated rotational banner ads along the lower portion of our scoreboard. Each is displayed for a certain period of time before it switches to the next image and so on. Panels promote everything from our "All You Can Play" deals to church nights, from fundraising to lock-ins. Even our concession stand gets a plug.

Laser tag centers don't take advantage of this built-in feature of the scoring software. Not only are they missing out on the rotational ad feature, they often don't even use what's become the "industry standard": a single, static marketing message image.

So, let's start by adding that static message. After all, the consumers are looking at that scoreboard! And if you manage to incorporate a rotating image, you will create motion that naturally draws the eye. That means your customers will be more engaged and will notice the messages about all the cool things your center is doing: your church groups, birthday parties, concession stand and so on.



Connecting With the Customer

From a staffing perspective, as an industry we have automated and dumbed down the scoring process and don't require that the staff interact with the players. Instead, you should train your staff to come out and talk with the players to

encourage repeat play. They might say, "Oh, whose pack was 'Princess?' You were the best player on the blue team. You're going to play again, right?" or "We're gonna see you back next week, right?"

You should use the scoring process as a point of affirmation and marketing for future play. We're missing that now because laser

A picture on a printed page doesn't do a gargantuan scoreboard justice, but hopefully, the picture at left helps convey a sense of scale. This big-scoreboard approach engages the customer much more than the industry standard, making an event out of scoring and helping promote your center's special events through use of rotational advertising. (Just imagine how cool it will look with lights spinning all around as a new round of scores gets revealed.) Does it take extra time and effort to do this? Sure it does, but like most things, the more you put in, the more you get out.

tag is thought of as a "bolt-on" attraction at bowling centers and other forms of FEC where it's just one of many kinds of fun players can have. That's in stark contrast to standalone locations like Ultrazone in Sherman Oaks, Calif., where they really shine at using the scoring process to create customer loyalty and encourage repeat play.

They have a 25-minute laser tag experience for \$11 and it's pretty much one of the best laser tag experiences you'll have in the U.S. You can bet that they make a big deal about the score! Another successful laser tag chain is Laser Quest with locations nationwide. Go play at a

Laser Quest and watch how the staff hypes up the score at the end of the game.

Again, at a bowling center or FEC, the staff is often not conditioned, trained, encouraged or motivated to interact with the consumer at the end of the game experience. That's because, as a bolt-on attraction, laser tag is seen as no different than Spin Zone or bumper cars or mini bowling, which is to say you go, play it, walk away, and the staff really doesn't interact with you. That's fine for those attractions, but what makes laser tag amazing is we actually have a lot of touchpoints with the consumer that actually make or break the guest experience.

Bring Scoring to the People

Going beyond what's possible with built-in scoring software and staff training, we've just upped our game at Q-ZAR. My partner in the location, ARC Laser Tag Arena's Lathan Gareiss, went against the conventional wisdom of installing a monitor and built a projected scoreboard. That in and of itself isn't revolutionary, but the fact that it measures 12 feet sure is. We're bringing the score out to the people!

When we remodeled the 23-year-old facility in October 2017, the scoring display was only a 22" monitor mounted about eight feet off of the floor. I decided to upgrade that scoring experience. I had a 10-foot space on my wall painted light grey and we projected our game scores onto that area, using the stock scoreboard image supplied by the equipment manufacturer. But in March 2018, we decided to really focus on our scoreboard.

We purchased a 12-foot projector screen from Amazon, built a 1" x 2" frame for it and started projecting the score onto that screen. Now the score image really pops out to the customer, much more so than the gray-painted wall.

The reason we added the 1" x 2" frame was so we could have DMX lights backlight the scoreboard. Those lights change colors to the latest team base that was tagged in live play. This provides a visual clue to the customers in the lobby that bases are being attacked and which team is taking the lead without having to actu-

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ally look at the scoreboard itself.

Lathan has also just ordered some special effects, DMX lighting. (DMX or Digital Multiplex is a standard commonly used to control stage lighting and effects like that.) These computer-controlled lights are going to spin all around and basically go crazy, zooming around the space, aiming up at the scoreboard and then fading away so the game results can be seen.

We're going to have lights spinning throughout the space, illuminating the scoreboard and making a big deal at the end of each game. It's really going to make an event out of it as the lights spin, go crazy and aim up towards the scoreboard, then fade away so the scoreboard can be seen.

Now that we have a 12-foot scoreboard and have already encouraged our staff to engage with the consumer, we'll take it to the next level with rock concert-like lighting effects for the score. It will be timed to correspond with when the players come out after playing the game so the rest of the people in the center can see the team and individual winners.

And, of course, as we're making a big deal about the score, and have everyone's attention, we'll be rotating in our marketing messages!

Live Action Scoreboard

We also enabled a Windows Live Wallpaper feature that any operator should be able to do with existing scoring software. Basically, we have loaded a video of laser tag players in action behind the scoring overlay. This provides depth for the scoreboard overlay and makes it appear that there are players playing in the arena.

Windows Live Wall Paper has been a feature of

Windows for many years yet most laser tag locations fail to utilize this capability. It provides excitement and visual stimulation at no cost so why wouldn't an operator do this?

Conclusion

Yes, we go above and beyond to tweak and improve and innovate. We're passionate about laser tag. But what's important about these operational tidbits is that FECs need to stop thinking about laser tag as a "bolt-on" attraction that doesn't require any extra effort. While we're at it, standalone centers really need to take it to the next level, too. Like most things, the more time and energy you put into it, the better the return.





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