



Innovating to Become Relevant Pays Off Big for First-Time Proprietors

Aaron and Michele Buzbee knew that the neglected bowling center they bought in Marshalltown, Iowa, would need some major renovations, but that didn't scare them off. On the contrary, they leapt at the challenge.

"When we thought about buying the center, we began exploring what other markets were doing in the bowling industry, and we immediately realized this was an incredible opportunity to do something cool with the existing infrastructure," says Aaron Buzbee.

The Buzbees reimagined the traditional 24-lane center, removing four lanes to create a game room and using six of the remaining 20 lanes to create a boutique area for private parties.

"There's no other place like this, with things you won't see at any other center," says Gerry Kesler of Jayhawk Bowling, the Buzbees' Brunswick Bowling Products sales manager. "They used local reclaimed materials and created tables and lighting using pinsetter parts for a very unique look. The Buzbees had no experience in the bowling business, and they've created something that is truly one of a kind."

"There's no other place like this."

— Gerry Kesler of Jayhawk Bowling

Wayward Social also features a full restaurant and bar featuring craft cocktails and a handcrafted menu. The center is furnished with Brunswick lanes, pinsetters, and Center Stage™ furniture.

"When a bowler first walks through our doors, they know this isn't the bowling alley of yesteryear," says Buzbee.

The remodeling project took about 17 months, since the center remained open during construction.

"We didn't close for the renovations, out of concern we might damage league business to the point of no return," says Buzbee. "We expect to actually grow league business for the 2019/2020 season."

"We are hitting numbers earlier than we anticipated, with weekends that are two or three times what they were a year ago," he says. Buzbee says centers need to stay current to remain competitive.



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“I don’t know if there’s an option anymore but to stay up to date on trends in the industry,” he says. “The world has only gotten smaller with the internet, and that has led to customers expecting more. Not every project or modernization has to be as drastic as ours, but those of us in the hospitality and recreation industries need to have our ear to the ground for the next trend.

“I recommend seeing what other centers are doing in their own markets and then make it your own,” Buzbee adds. “We traveled all around the Midwest and scoured the internet to find inspiration, and took different ideas from each center we liked. Where our initial vision started is very different from where we ended, and by being somewhat fluid on the details, we are extremely happy with how it turned out.”

Buzbee was especially impressed with the Sync scoring and management system.

“Being totally new to the industry, we explored options with various suppliers, but once we compared systems, we didn’t explore long,” says Buzbee. “Sync looked by far the most sleek and modern. The lane terminals look the most modern. The graphics are sharp and less ‘cartoony’ compared to other systems. The CRM capabilities are fantastic. We wanted seamless interaction with all our revenue streams, so we didn’t want to buy a separate POS for the restaurant. And we wanted an intuitive system that would require less time for training. We feel SYNC has simplified the complex needs of our center and has wrapped it in a tidy, easy-to-use package.”



Brunswick has been “an incredible partner,” according to Buzbee.

“Early on they provided us with detailed demographic studies, which gave us a better understanding of our market’s needs,” he says. “We were invited to a showcase where we toured two newly remodeled centers and heard from speakers regarding bowling industry trends. We were also put in contact with other operators and got hands-on experience with the SYNC scoring system.

“Brunswick provided us with guidance that was designed to assure our long-term success,” says Buzbee. “We feel that Brunswick truly has the overall growth of the industry in mind versus just making a short-term sale, and we know they’ll be with us in the long run.”

To learn more about Brunswick’s modernization programs, designed for first-time and veteran proprietors alike, visit <https://brunswickbowling.com/bowling-centers>.