

Leaps and bounds

Trampoline parks are a phenomenon that have gone from strength to strength in the past few years. *InterFun* investigates their rise to prominence

As the family entertainment landscape changes, certain play activities are making their way from the fringes and into the mainstream. One of those, the trampoline park, was nothing but a curious novelty 10 years ago. 2017 presents a different proposition. Now a fully-fledged sector of the industry, and arguably becoming an industry in its own right, trampoline parks have become a powerhouse in the world of play.

Break the model down and it is not difficult to see why: your standard modern trampoline park offers family-friendly activities that provide a healthy mode of play with a variety of supplementary games like laser tag and basketball, as well as restaurants and cafés, rounding out the offering.

The US in particular is reaping the rewards of this upswing – Best American Trampolines has been operating trampoline parks since 2007 and has seen the industry change dramatically since then.

“Best American Manufacturing Corporation was founded in 1978,” said the company’s marketing director Erica Mercer. “At that time, the company manufactured track and field equipment, gymnastic and stunt matting and commercial grade residential trampolines. Phillip Howell, eldest son of founder Larry Howell, was introduced to the business at an early age and assisted in all aspects of the business.

“Around the time Phillip was entering college, Larry decided he was ready to get out of the business and pursue other passions. After spending some time in the corporate world, Phillip decided to put his knowledge and experience passed on from his father to start up Best American Trampolines, a full-service, design, production and consulting company for trampoline parks.

“In 2007, Phillip began work on his first trampoline park, Xtreme Trampolines, in Carol Stream, Illinois, and has since designed and manufactured trampoline attractions for over 200 parks worldwide.”

According to Howell: “The first generation of trampoline parks included a basic layout of trampoline courts in a warehouse or big box space. There was limited paint and graphics, no cafés and no additional non-trampoline attractions. Today’s trampoline parks have evolved to resemble more of an FEC model, including full service cafés and additional attractions like climbing walls, ninja courses, ropes courses and soft play for young children.

“Some are even adding traditional FEC attractions like laser tag, game zones, kiddie



The varied range of activities on offer from Best American Trampolines

rides and more,” said Howell. “The trampoline attractions are becoming more diverse as well. The open jump court has been reduced in size to make room for dodgeball courts, slam dunk basketball, gladiator and multi-attraction pits, performance trampolines and walking walls.

“We have also seen more and more traditional FECs expanding to include trampoline attractions or adding on entire trampoline parks to their existing facilities.”

Interestingly, Howell suggests that trampoline parks have evolved to become a location to rival the FEC – they have become all-encompassing locations, incorporating several attractions and F&B options in an effort to increase dwell time and encourage repeat visits. The appeal of the trampoline is always front and centre, added Howell, but supplementary activities and offshoots of the traditional trampolines have become so popular that they are now staples of the sector.

“Kids can jump, flip and literally bounce off the walls. We also believe that people like to be around other people doing the same activities. When you take a fun action sport like trampolining and incorporate fun games like dodgeball or the slam dunk and then add a bunch of kids into the mix, you create a very fun and energetic atmosphere. Something about jumping and ‘catching air’ just makes people happy.”

“Kids can jump, flip and literally bounce off the walls”

“The ninja obstacle courses are very popular additions to trampoline parks right now. The popular TV show *American Ninja Warrior* has aided in the popularity of these attractions.

Guests can compete against themselves or others as they race to complete the obstacles.”

Best America Trampolines is succeeding thanks to a potent mix of the traditional trampoline park and variations on that concept. Some operators have taken this a step further.

Flip Out, a location in Dubai, has recently collaborated with Archery Tag to provide an experience unique to the region. The game follows a simple concept to dodgeball, in that players need to avoid each other’s attempts at hitting them. The one major difference is that it is played with bows and arrows with foam tips.

Two teams - consisting of five players each, playing opposite one another - are separated by a safe zone. Each team has what’s known as a Five-Spot Knockout Target. There are two objectives: 1) to hit the opponents and 2) to knock out the five discs of the opposing team’s target. You eliminate a player by hitting him or her with an arrow, or by catching his or her arrow.

This has reportedly driven footfall up in the location - finding an activity that dovetails with trampolining can give a location the reputation of somewhere ideal for an entire day out.

Another example of diversification is Atlanta’s X-drenaline. The operator has teamed up with Math Mind Workshop to offer STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) summer camps. Offering hands-on activities that encourage students to have fun while learning, elementary-age children enjoy Bounce Blast, a camp that combines maths, physics, technology and engineering.

Older kids engage in *Free Fallin’*, which investigates the maths behind bouncing. This includes exponents, roots, dimensions and quadratics. Students experiment with concepts like velocity and acceleration, potential and kinetic energy, and the laws of motion.



SOFT PLAY



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A trampoline court from Best American Trampolines

CircusTriX also offers a unique variation; selling itself as an “extreme” recreation park, the location offers an aerial ninja obstacle course, slackline, obstacle and trapeze activities, as well as trampolines. Company founder Case Lawrence began his foray into the industry after experiencing it first hand.

“As an attorney and real estate developer, I ran into a serious bit of trouble in the recession,” he said. “I was looking for something new to do; I’d spent several years trying to work out trouble with banks and real estate projects. I finally did that and when I took my kids up to San Francisco to watch a baseball game, a friend of mine asked if I wanted to stop by this place. It was an old aircraft hangar on a military base and they had turned it into a trampoline park, one of the first in the country.

“I took my boys over there and we just had a blast. That was the revelatory moment for me – I was so overcome with the possibilities. It was a play space, it was an active sport, it was an aesthetic experience. So I left that trip determined to create one myself. That’s what I did: my first one was in 2011 in Fresno, California. That was the start of CircusTriX.

“The market has changed significantly since then. At the time, there were less than 10 trampoline parks in the world – now we’re approaching something close to 500. The parks have changed, too. My first park was 12,000sq. ft, with some trampolines and that was it.

“Now, the typical park is 40 or 50,000sq.ft and they are very diverse. They have parkour, ninja courses, basketball, trampoline dodgeball, bouldering walls. They have become much more diverse, multi-attraction facilities. They’ve really become the standard for family entertainment. The last generation of family entertainment has pretty much gone and the focus now is on physical activity.”

Lawrence went on to say that the temptation to stick to sedate activities is not one experienced by children alone. “Both parents and kids are struggling from too much screen time,” he said. “They are magnetising, mesmerising things but we are not meant to

CircusTriX offers many activities to supplement trampolining, such as Gravady Air Sports



spend this much time staring at these devices. Parents know that and so do the kids, on some level. So you’re seeing a polarisation of activities for kids – they are spending so much time looking at screens where, in the past, it was more moderate.

“Despite their apparent obsession with tablets, phones and so on, kids want physical activity and at least a moderate dose of adrenaline. This generation wants something that will give them an adrenaline high. That is combined with the fact that they are watching things on social media and they want to try those things in a real-life setting.

“Social media is one of the things that is driving business in this sector. The thing about it is, not only do kids and parents want these physical experiences but they also want experiences that they can share on social media that are highly optical and paint them in an aspirational and positive light.

Manufacturer spotlight

ONE market that has seen a meteoric rise in interest is the UK and, almost to confirm that success, the International Association of Trampoline Parks held a show and conference in London from May 22-23 this year, allowing the country’s burgeoning industry to converge. One session saw the industry’s manufacturers sharing their unique viewpoint on the industry’s development.

ED REED, JUMP STREET:

“The UK market is growing rapidly and, as such, manufacturers and operators need to change their ways of thinking. Initially, you could build a trampoline park wherever you liked and people would travel to them because they were a novelty; they were unique. Nowadays, that is not the case. For example, people won’t bother to drive to one a few miles away when there is one in a shopping centre nearby. If you want to open your own, make sure it is at least half an hour away from the nearest competitor – a crossover in customers means they may simply choose the competition because of convenience.”

ARCH ADAMS, FUNSPOT:

“At this time in the market, you should be selective – a competitor will quite easily come along and set up in a better location after you have signed your lease. It may seem like a good idea to jump straight in and nab a spot for your new location but take a step back – you may benefit from taking your time.”

SHAUN WILSON, LUNA TRAMPOLINES:

“We are seeing an increase in the demand for not only trampolines but ninja courses and soft play products. There is definitely a bigger focus on creating all-inclusive installations now. We work to install as much as the customer asks for – Luna provides 3D rendering of each product so the customer can see what they are buying.”

“Our parks are the perfect venue for that - kids participating in a physical, triumphant activity that their parents can post on social media. This highlights a really interesting subliminal need in parents, too; if they are taking the time and effort to take their kids somewhere, they want credit for it as a parent. They want to share something so it’s documented that they are a caring, active and engaged parent. So we’re really seeing behaviour being driven by that social media dynamic.

“Social media also highlights something

CircusTrix has shown the trampoline park can evolve beyond the conventional



about today's young generation: it is one of instant gratification. Attention spans are short. Right now we are seeing a great interest in parkour, as well as wall running. Kids are able to start on that very young. Participation in organised sport is at an all-time low and it's continuing to drop. What kids want are physical pursuits that feel like they are sports. Parkour, ninja courses and wall running fill that vacuum."

Pushing the boundaries of what is expected helps to grab the interest of this increasingly discerning young demographic, said Mercer. "Lifestyles have become very sedentary," she said. "Technology has played a large role in children becoming inactive. At home, gaming and social media have largely taken the place of active, face-to-face interaction. Kids don't have to leave their homes any more to participate in group activities.

"They meet online in virtual game arenas and communicate via SnapChat, Facebook, etc. Finding an out-of-home activity that encourages fitness while having fun is paramount in a society that is seeing higher obesity rates and health problems as a result of unhealthy lifestyles."

"It is very important to involve the family, too. Trampoline parks cater to all ages and allow the whole family to join in the fun. A family with both a four-year-old and a 14-year-old can enjoy the same activity, getting

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everyone out of the house and offering an opportunity to exercise while having fun."

As the park becomes bigger and more complex, it begins to present more challenges to the operator. To succeed, the operator must pay attention to the minutia of day-to-day operations.

"Our experience has allowed us to better understand flow and traffic patterns, how much space is needed to maximise throughput and what attractions work well with the current model," said Howell. "We provide a better layout and design and present a more polished look that appeals to a variety of markets. Our trampoline and ninja course products are manufactured here in America and we only work with reputable third-party vendors to provide the non-trampoline attractions to our customers."

Howell has confirmed the strength of the North American market – it remains receptive to bigger and bigger ideas. This is not the same throughout the world, however. Speaking to Carel Fourie, CEO of Oryx Properties in Namibia, InterFun ascertained the market for trampoline parks in Africa has potential but is still essentially in its infancy. The company is currently working towards opening a trampoline park in Namibia's Maurua Mall.

"Maerua Mall is a regional shopping centre in Windhoek, the capital of Namibia," said Fourie. "We offer a variety of retail offerings that you would expect in a mall. We believe the market for family entertainment is quite strong in Namibia, if not that big. There is a lack of offerings, especially for children, teenagers and young adults. We hope that this new venture will be able to cater for the entire Namibian and even regional market."

Fourie expressed similar feelings to those of Howell - the benefits of trampolining can be seen in its physicality and its ability to bring people of all ages together.

"We are trying to attract a younger crowd and offer teenagers and young adults active and healthier alternative forms of entertainment," said Fourie. "A trampoline park is a form of entertainment that also speaks to living a healthy lifestyle and being active. We believe in living a healthy day-to-day life. The advantages of having a physically active lifestyle are numerous and well documented.

"We believe in the old saying: healthy body, healthy mind. Since everyone's dwellings seem to be getting smaller and smaller, families need space in order to have fun together and for children to be able to enjoy physical activities. Parents are also more keen to spend time with their children where everyone is having fun."

Fourie sees the potential in the trampoline park and the success of it as a business model can be clearly seen in other parts of the world. A strong enough concept in itself, it is also flexible enough to adapt to changes in demand and taste – this bodes well for it as a mode of entertainment and it seems a safe bet to assume it will be around for years to come.

IATP: safety first

As Britain's trampoline park industry sky-rocket in popularity, it has to focus even more intently on addressing safety

TRAMPOLINE parks offer a great way for children and adults to play, have fun and, importantly, take part in physical activity. First arriving in the UK in 2014, the parks have enjoyed huge growth.

Many hundreds of thousands of customers have safely enjoyed trampoline parks and the activities they contain. However, they are a high-risk environment and it is impossible to remove this risk entirely. As of February 2017, there were around 60 trampoline parks in the UK, with more opening on a weekly basis.

At this year's International Association of Trampoline Parks conference held in London, safety was a huge talking point. The industry is still in its infancy and it has been a challenge for all involved to keep up with its growth. To provide a collective approach to concerns regarding accidents and consistent standards, a working group of industry professionals, including operators and local authority representatives, was formed, which quickly became a sub-committee of the IATP.

This sub-committee now works to share best practice and accident data. A key task for the group is the drafting of a publically accessible British standard – led by members of the UK's IATP and RoSPA (the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents), it is hoped this will be available within the next 12 months.

RoSPA's leisure safety manager, Dave Walker, said: "Trampoline parks have seen an explosive growth over the past few years and unfortunately some communities have seen a rise in A&E visits as a result. It's heartening to see the sector organising and sharing good practice and we are supporting the IATP and the British Standards working group to draft nationally recognised operational guidelines. This should provide a clear framework for parks and regulators to work towards."

