



Leaps and bounds

Trampoline parks are as popular as ever; we catch up with the industry with an eternal spring in its step

LAST year, *InterFun* reported that the trampoline park industry had firmly made its way from the periphery of the family entertainment industry onto the main stage. Over the course of around a decade, it has steadily become an activity practically synonymous with family fun, and if you were to break it down into its composite parts, the appeal of the medium becomes apparent: healthy, varied, interesting activities interspersed with F and B make for a well-rounded day out.

A year on from that issue of the magazine, this kind of family entertainment location is as popular as ever. There isn't a secret ingredient behind the formula, however, said Samurai Trampoline Products' Anthony Bull.

"It's quite simple, really," he said. "It's an activity that kids are drawn to because they enjoy jumping up and down and having fun. Trampoline parks have, however, moved on from being just a place to jump up and down. Our research indicates that many operators are looking beyond just trampoline-based activity and have been for some time. They need to keep their customers happy. Standing still in any industry means you are likely to be left behind so you always have to innovate and the trampoline parks are no different."

With such a global focus on health and exercise, an increased demand in activities that are healthy is inevitable and the trampoline park has met that demand in spades. It has created something of a holy grail of an activity as far as parents are concerned: one that makes exercise fun.

"Parents like the fact that their kids are being active," said Bull. "They can relax in a café or watch their kids having fun. For some parents, this is a welcome break as they have time to themselves. Therefore, while a park is geared towards the people that take part in activities, the facilities offered to parents and other

visitors are also very important. This includes areas like the café and viewing areas.

The evolution of the trampoline park into a diverse and varied location has been relatively swift and it is clear to see in the range of attractions, and parks, now available.

The first generation of parks featured a basic layout of trampolines in a wide-open space - and that was the extent of the offering, in most cases. Fast-forward to 2018 and this couldn't be further from reality, with multiple attractions and food and beverage options now the standard. The US-based Best American Trampolines, which has operated in the market since 2007, has been at the forefront of these changes.

"Trampoline parks are multi-attraction entertainment centres that allow guests to create a unique and memorable experience with each visit," said the company's Erica Mercer. "Parkgoers can experience a wide variety of exciting and engaging activities in one location. Parents have the option to participate or relax in comfortable seating while their kids jump on the trampolines, climb extreme rock walls, soar through the air on a cloud coaster and enjoy the variety of attractions the trampoline park has to offer.

"Trampoline parks cater to all ages. Traditional family entertainment centres are



usually age specific and fall short of providing an experience the entire family can enjoy together. The multi-attraction concept of trampoline parks ensures that everyone can join in on the fun."

The appeal of the trampolines themselves remains paramount but peripheral activities have become a staple of the park, so much so that all-encompassing locations such as these are fast becoming big enough to rival the FEC in some parts of the world.

"The family entertainment industry is constantly evolving and trampoline parks are not excluded from this evolution," said Mercer. "Park owners are incorporating new and exciting attractions like cloud coasters, drop zones, and extreme climbing walls into their parks for guests that crave a new and exciting adventure.

"Our Ninja Warrior Course continues to be a very popular attraction. First and second-generation trampoline parks are updating their venues to keep up with consumer demand and the Ninja Course is a popular product they choose to incorporate into their current model. Likewise, trampoline parks that are new to the market are including Ninja Warrior Courses in their attraction list with the goal of appealing to guests that seek a more challenging activity."

The US was one of the first markets, if not the first, to wholeheartedly take to the trampoline park, but operator Sky Zone is the perfect example of the universal appeal of the concept.

The company was initially founded in 2004 by entrepreneur Rick Platt, who, according to the company, "had the intention of creating a new professional sport that involved athletes jumping through a suspended hoop while holding a ball.

"When it didn't take off, he saw the potential to reinvent his concept when neighbourhood children expressed an immediate interest in

using the space to jump on the trampolines. Today, Sky Zone has almost 200 locations in 11 countries including Australia, Canada, Guam, Guatemala, India, Kuwait, Mexico, Norway, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the UK, and is currently the largest trampoline park chain in the \$1.5bn industry."

Today, Sky Zone prescribes to the model that has practically become the benchmark for the sector - that a broad spectrum of attractions for multiple age groups is the key to success.

"Many of our parks have added new innovations and attractions, such as warrior courses that test speed, strength and agility, and free climb, which is a bouldering wall. These are just two examples of the new attractions we are continuously rolling out. At the same time, our original attractions remain popular and a core element of the Sky Zone experience, such as freestyle jump, where guests jump on our massive wall-to-wall trampolines."

As this approach has become something of an industry standard, there are certain ways in which Sky Zone sets itself apart from the competition.

"While many trampoline parks simply offer wall-to-wall trampoline entertainment, Sky Zone recently launched innovations that are popping up in our parks across the world. Some of these attractions include SkyLine, on which guests must balance their way across a millimetres-thin raised slack line, SkyJoust, Warped Walls and parkour-style obstacle courses. We also pride ourselves on delivering an excellent customer experience from the moment guests walk through our doors.

"At Sky Zone, we offer an array of specific programmes that helps set us apart from our



competition. We're always looking to add new elements to our birthday parties - for example, we are now offering superhero themed parties and glow (dark light) parties. Another example is Toddler Time, during which little ones get to discover the joy of being active, bouncing under the supervision of their parents, and without interference from the 'big kids.' Most of our parks also offer sensory hours to enjoy the freedom of jumping. These sensory hours provide a quieter, toned-down jumping experience for those with special needs.

"Because consumers are consistently looking for new experiences, finding ways to continually offer fresh and new attractions and programmes is one of Sky Zone's top priorities. As such, Sky Zone has recently adopted programmes such as overnight lock-ins and launched attractions that have a 'gamification' element to them."

The industry's rapid growth is testament to the simple fact that it is incredibly enjoyable and, subsequently, profitable, said Bull.

"The industry has grown phenomenally these last few years because trampolining is a fun activity that appeals to kids and parents alike.

"News travels fast and while trampoline parks took off in the US initially, they quickly spread to other parts of the world. Countries like the US and UK are now established markets where the phenomenal growth has slowed when it comes to parks. Other territories in Europe, the Middle East and South America are now going through a similar aggressive growth model."

The kind of expansion evidenced in the world's operators is indicative of an industry with a great deal of ingenuity and passion behind it. Embodying this is the International Association of Trampoline Parks, which came into being to guide the industry out of its infancy and into the age of prosperity it currently resides in.

"The IATP began in 2012 when the industry first started to pick up," said Bethany Evans, executive vice president of the IATP. "When we first began, there were 40 parks globally. We were instrumental in creating the ASTM standards in the States, which were the only standards at the time for the industry to follow. That was imperative to guide growth in the right direction. So, as we moved forward, 2015 was when the first trampoline parks started to pop up in the UK. That was imperative to guide growth in the right direction. At that time, there were around four parks identified and we began working with the founding parks, bringing them in under the IATP umbrella to continue to grow the industry in a safe and responsible manner. We then formed a UK committee, which was chaired by Peter Brown, who is the managing director of Freedom, and then we had our founding members that were part of AirHop, Gravity, AirSpace, etc.

"We worked very hard to create the



IATP EU Conference and Trade Show

Amsterdam, Netherlands

ANOTHER year, another successful event for the International Association of Trampoline Parks and, although it is only the second show, significant progress has been made, said Bethany Evans. The general verdict was positive from both exhibitors and visitors.

"The energy levels were high at the Beurs van Berlage," she said. "The one question I answered over and over is 'where will next year's EU event be?'. I think this is a great testament to how this year's event went. We look forward to bringing park owners, operators and vendors an event bigger and better event in 2019.

"London was our first annual EU

Conference and Trade Show. We welcomed 275 vendors and attendees. This year, we hosted nearly 400 attendees and vendors from over 30 countries, increasing our exhibit space from 25 to 60."

The industry itself has noticeably progressed in the 12 months since last year's event, said Evans, and this progression was apparent in Amsterdam.

"The growth throughout the European market has been significant. We had an increase in visitors from throughout Europe and the Middle East, whereas last year a majority of our guests were from the UK."

The event has proved beneficial to all that attended and, having set a precedent for

quality over just two years, the signs look positive for the IATP's next trade show.

"We set a clear agenda for the EU market for the remainder of 2018 and the first part of 2019," said Evans. "Our member parks will be leading the way in regards to regulation and safety standards in their respective countries. Additionally, the education and resources provided at the event are all geared towards helping owners and operators effectively run their trampoline parks and to grow the industry responsibly.

"Our next event will be held in Ft Lauderdale, Florida, on September 16-18. We will be announcing the dates and location for our 2019 EU event this summer."



PASS000, so that the industry in the UK would have a standard that they could adhere to. That standard was implemented around March 2017 and now that we come up on IATP renewal in September 2018, parks will have to have a PASS000 inspection to become a compliant member of the IATP. That goes a long way in raising the standards of the industry. We're looking at around 200 parks in the UK, give or take - there have been a couple of parks that have closed down but we are seeing growth in the UK specifically and a lot of growth throughout Europe."

Evans has seen the industry adapt and develop over the years and, as such, expects it to delve deeper into the territory that it is currently exploring.

"In terms of the changing of the landscape, we're seeing a lot more players, whether that be stand-alone or franchises, come into the mix and we've seen the parks evolve, adding other attractions to them - instead of just trampolines, we've got ninja courses, rock climbing walls, inflatables, soft play. We've seen the evolution of the trampoline parks; there are still traditional parks but we've also seen more of the added attractions and some of them even go as far as becoming more of an adventure park. A different arm of the FEC model, if you will. Always evolving to meet the needs of guests, to keep it exciting and keep people coming back through the door.

"The direction in which we're going is that adventure park idea, with trampolines being the core element within. I really think that's probably how we'll continue to move forward - I think the industry's here to stay, if we at the IATP can continue to do what we're doing, by raising the standards, by having the standards in the first place and holding parks accountable to said standards, that goes a long way to benefiting the industry as a whole. There's constantly a new crop of kids coming through, and it will always appeal to that demographic as long as it is awesome, healthy fun. Trampoline jumping is one of the healthiest forms of exercise you can get; it's exhilarating to feel that bounce as you're jumping high and I think that's one of the biggest draws, it gives you that feeling of weightlessness, of defying gravity.

"The key is making sure these parks are

running with optimal safety at all times; if we don't have guest safety, we have nothing."

With its growing prominence has come an increased scrutiny when it comes to safety in the industry. Of course, this scrutiny is a prerogative for parents whose children's safety is their number one concern, and the media has focused particularly keenly on the potential for injury in trampoline parks in recent months, making it even more vital that no stone is left unturned safety-wise.

"These concerns can be addressed by parks being as vigilant as possible and working customer safety into every aspect of their operations," said Bull. "Parks are in the media spotlight and have been for some time so it is up to the industry to do as much as possible to reduce serious injuries and keep their customers safe. We are IATP members so we know that they have been very active in helping the industry to improve safety.

"In terms of what parks can do to improve safety, we interviewed quite a few park owners and managers and we gathered the following advice: follow any guidelines and standards that apply to your territory, staff training, customer education, not exceeding the capacity for your park and regular staff meetings and feedback."



These guidelines are ones that the industry's operators are keen to adhere to, said Sky Zone.

"Safety is our number one priority. Our courts are surrounded with trampoline side-walls and safety netting both above and below the trampolines. We also have posted warning signs and rules signs throughout the facility, safety videos playing throughout, and our court monitors give a rules speech to guests before they begin jumping."

Mercer emphasised the importance of the IATP in this area of the industry.

"Ensuring that everyone, from the park staff to the guests enjoying the facility, have proper education on how to safely navigate the entertainment centre is paramount in reducing the risk of injury at the park level. We also believe that adhering to international guidelines set forth by the ASTM and similar organisations are key in promoting an optimally safe environment. The IATP is an excellent resource that is dedicated to educating the industry on safety standards in trampoline parks worldwide. We encourage our clients

to take advantage of the IATP and include a one year pre-paid membership with each new client park."

With such expert backing and an ever-increasing network of professionals at the helm, it looks doubtful that the industry's bubble will burst any time soon.

"The trampoline park industry is in the middle of a big boom, with no signs of slowing down, in both domestic and international markets," said Sky Zone. "Trampoline parks are multi-generational and cater to both families and millennials. For families, they provide an all-ages friendly, safety-focused environment that promotes healthy active fun. It also has the bonus side effect of keeping kids away from computer and phone screens. Trampoline parks also appeal to the millennial audience, as they tend to spend their money on experiences and activities as opposed to material goods. It allows for a communal, social experience that only spreads with their positive reactions among friend groups and social media. For all these reasons, we foresee this rapid growth continuing, especially in unsaturated international markets as the experience economy continues to grow."

It appears that the experience economy continues to reign supreme in sectors such as this.

Additional opportunities for growth are there for the taking in Europe, said Evans, and the UK's fortunes remain bright, despite an overcrowded market.

"The market is pretty firmly established in the UK, we're still seeing growth with new parks opening, though the market has become very saturated very quickly. So much of it is based on location - there are a lot of parks opening close to each other, which doesn't bode well for anybody. In any case, we're still seeing some growth in the UK.

"With the addition of attractions and lots of growth throughout Europe, we as an industry will be working throughout the various European countries to ultimately create a European norm. That will be a huge step in keeping the industry growing in the right direction with safety at the forefront of the agenda. Our focus is on growing the industry responsibly; we're in the midst of that right now. Everyone in Europe has their own idea of how to do things, which is a challenge in itself, but we've always operated under the umbrella of allowing regional autonomy."

Arguably, the trampoline park industry has already fulfilled its potential, proving itself to be a worthy addition to the family entertainment scene. That said, the feeling from those operating within the market is that the best is yet to come and it is difficult to disagree with them; a strong enough concept in itself, it is also flexible enough to adapt to changes in demand and taste. All of the signs bode well for it as a mode of entertainment and it seems a safe bet to assume that we will have plenty of developments over the next 12 months.