Business Profile - Bowling Alleys

While bowling centers offer a wide variety of services in addition to providing facilities for the sport itself, revenues [illegible] accounting for at least half and usually as high as 70 to 80 percent of all revenues generated. In turn, the major source of bowling revenues results from league bowling.

A 1968 survey conducted by the Bowling Proprietors' Association of America indicated that 73 percent of all games bowled across the country were by league bowlers (including practice games apart from league action).

This same survey indicated that of the 38 million persons who had bowled at least once in 1967-1968, 30 million were casual bowlers (did not belong to leagues) and 8 million were active bowlers. Of the 1.7 billion annual games rolled, only 27 percent or 0.5 billion were by casual bowlers- the remaining 1.2 billion games were rolled by the 8 million active bowlers. [illegible] roughly 15 games per year, while the league bowlers averaged 150 games annually.

The reasons given by survey respondents for starting to bowl did not differ significantly between casual and active bowlers. The dominant reasons given were (1) seeking fun and recreation and (2) encouraged to try sport with friends or family. The reasons for continuing to bowl also did not differ greatly among casual and active bowlers, and were dominated by (1) healthy exercise, (2) challenging activity, (3) fun and relaxation, and (4) a good form of social activity.

The cost of bowling, typically between 50 to 75 cents per game rolled, has not been found to be a serious factor in limiting the market. League bowlers are accustomed to paying considerably more per game, not only to cover their bowling, but also to contribute to cash funds for end-of-the-season league dinners and for cash prizes and trophies. Casual bowlers are likewise relatively insensitive to bowling prices; their [illegible] probably more [illegible] alleys at prime time (non-summer evenings) due to scheduled league bowling than by the cost of the sport.

2. Nature of the Customer

This same 1968 survey indicated that, of persons in the United States 11 years of age and over, some 58 percent had bowled tenpins at least once in their lives and an additional 5 percent had bowled smaller pins. Some 26 percent - of which 6 percent were active league bowlers - had bowled at least once in the past year.

While a greater percentage of metropolitan area residents had tried bowling than nonmetropolitan area residents (62 compared with 47 percent), among those who had tried bowling, the percentage of presently active bowlers was similar in the metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas (10 compared with 9 percent).

An analysis by age of population reflected the surge in popularity of bowling in its "golden years," 1955 to 1962. While only 34 percent of the population sampled over age [illegible] percent rose markedly to 68 percent from ages 40 to 49, 76 percent from ages 30 to 39, and 79 percent from ages 20 to 29. In the youngest age group, 11 to 19, a total of 67 percent had bowled at least once. Of active league bowlers, the 30 to 39 and 40 to 49 age groups each had 9 percent of their populations represented, while 7 percent of the total population from 20 to 29 were league bowlers.

Statistics broken down by sex revealed that 36 percent of the males sampled had never bowled compared with 45 percent of the females sampled. However, among those who had tried bowling, 10 percent of the males and c percent of the females were now regular league bowlers.

As a general rule of thumb, industry sources recommend that a population of at least 1,000 persons per lane is needed to support a bowling center. This figure needs to be adjusted, however, to account for such factors as recent population growth (10 percent growth for the 1960-1970 period is considered a good [illegible] size and potential), proximity to competing bowling centers, neighborhood bowling history (blue-collar areas traditionally have been thought to be better sources of bowlers than white collar areas, although this may be more stereotypical than factual); racial composition (minority community members have only recently begun taking up the sport in significant numbers); accessibility (high-traffic areas-such as shopping centers - are prime locations); and climate (warmer climates favor competing outdoor recreation such as golf and boating). On the basis of these factors, it is clear that each city - and, in fact, each neighborhood within it - must be analyzed separately; there are no simple rules of thumb to pinpoint with certainty a favorable location or to define the local popolation size needed to support a lane or center.