

Case Study

Skyline Paintball and Laser Tag



As presented by



Introduction

Skyline Paintball and Laser Tag's storied history began in 1991 as a paintball field and pro shop that also sold hunting and fishing supplies. The business serves the Winchester/Strasburg area of Virginia, not far west from Washington D.C.

They moved away from hunting and fishing sales in 1995 and things were pretty steady until 2000, when things really took off during the golden years of paintball. During those years they expanded their pro shop but things in the paintball industry came to a major halt during the 2008 recession. Fortunately, Skyline was not one of the businesses that disappeared during this time. They began exploring alternative sources of revenue and in 2010 introduced mobile laser tag after discovering it through a supplier, Tippmann Sports, a distributor of iCOMBAT products.

Susan recalls, "We added iCOMBAT laser tag to try and capture the general public, a much larger audience than paintball attracted. These laser tag guns specifically took on a similar form and operation as a paintball gun, keeping it in line with our current business experience."

They marketed it as "paintball without the paint" and soon decided to go indoors, opening up a laser tag only playing field along-side their pro shop. "It made total sense because there was no mess or the usual costs of paintball," she said.

Challenges

Prior to integrating iCOMBAT laser tag into their operation, Skyline had some problems that needed addressing:

1. Making it through the 2008 recession when the paintball industry saw a huge decline and pro shop supplies were not selling very well anymore
2. Public misconception about paintball and guns; not being able to get enough customers due to minimum age and insurance restrictions
3. Cold winters created many isSusans for paintball (equipment, supplies, and the paint)

Of course Skyline tried a number of things prior to discovering laser tag. The industry as a whole was struggling to adapt to changing times.

One of the co-owners, Alexa, explained, "We thought about doing indoor paintball to combat the winter weather, but it was just too hard logistically." Susan elaborated, "Dealing with clean up, putting in good drainage, and marketing to a very select audience kept us from going this route."

They also looked into the skateboarding market, perhaps building a skate park that could be used year round. They smartly decided against it due to a lack of experience and it not being a great match to their current line of business.

Laser tag came to mind, and they settled on the iCOMBAT gear from Tippmann after noticing that no other system on the market was similar enough to paintball, in both looks and operation.

Solutions

So what did Skyline Paintball and Laser Tag decide to do about those challenges and problems? Their smart decisions are still paying dividends to this day.

1. When it came to keeping the paintball business alive through 2008, they thought outside the box, yet capitalized on a current strength. They took advantage of birthday parties, which continued to be strong. Expanding services to those younger audiences was the key.
2. “Laser tag” was a concept that appealed to a mass audience without the negative stigma of paintball. It was acceptable to groups, churches, and the general public.
3. “We knew we had to open an indoor location, and we finally figured out how to use the space in a way that made sense,” explained Susan. Year round business was now possible.

The owners of Skyline realized iCOMBAT laser tag was the solution after a reputable paintball supplier of theirs, Tippmann Sports, brought it to their attention shortly after the product hit the market. The low cost of the laser tag units, along with Tippmann’s trustworthy name, triggered their decision to buy.

“The fact that we were not restricted by any franchise rules allowed us to use the system in the way that worked for us,” said Susan. “We made it fit our business model. We also did not have to use a headband or vest like the other systems out there.”

They specifically chose iCOMBAT laser tag systems because they were more modern, more user friendly, and less bulky than all of the other systems available at the time. The guns were designed based on paintball equipment, which almost erased the learning curve.

Results

The owners of Skyline were quick to fall in love with their new laser tag system and soon realized their favorite features.

- The light weight of the Barracuda was a big plus with players of all ages, so they eventually built their entire fleet around that tagger.
- It was user friendly enough for any age with minimum instruction.

- The versatile software on the guns or with a PC allowed them to run things as simple or as complex as they wanted to, and it was easy to set up and run the short games they prefer.

Their revenue has tripled since introducing laser tag, and they currently average about 300 players a week. If you factor in the paintball players, they get more than 600 customers a week. 2014 was their best year yet, and laser tag is still growing. Groups are a key source of revenue.

“Laser tag saved us last winter, and we had to restructure our sessions in order to serve the high demand and allow more people in the doors,” explained Susan. “We now have 3 different fields that can be used together or separately to accommodate our players.”

Susan said other paintball businesses can benefit from iCOMBAT laser tag very easily because:

- It opens up your business to a much wider audience and keeps traffic high.
- The learning process is easy, and it can be adapted to your style of business.
- It replaced pro shop revenue, which was lost due to online competition.
- Weather is no longer a limiting factor for business.

Sales have increased, birthday parties bookings continue to grow, and the paintball business has picked up as a result of these new players seeing what else Skyline has to offer. Skyline became more efficient and turnover between parties was made much faster because of the laser tag.

“The indoor location was key. We started with mobile back in 2010, and in May 2011 we knew we had to transition to an indoor field. The building we found was truly a blessing,” mentioned Susan.



Recommendation

Skyline Paintball and Laser Tag is very satisfied with their laser tag equipment and look forward to expanding further down the road.

“The products are incredibly durable and the companies behind it are well known and very supportive. Laser tag went hand-in-hand with what we were already doing. Plus, we love the software updates. The new features keep it exciting and allow us to introduce variety to our customers,” said Alexa.

Susan explained that “if we could, we would open up laser tag businesses everywhere, but *smart* expansion is key.”

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