

# power of the draw

super charging attendance with unique physical interactive revenue generators *by Jan Shaw*

With a sluggish economy, budget and funding cuts, and lower penetration for local drive market attendance, the ability to offer new and unique experiences is crucial for museums, aquariums, zoos and parks. Although we hear negative reporting on the news about the downturn of the U.S. and World economies, as history shows, a bad economy boosts Family Entertainment industries. It is during this time that families tend to draw closer together and seek entertainment to escape the troubles they face, while spending more quality time together. Parents would rather spend their discretionary dollars on activities with their family than anything else. They are taking more "Staycations" in their local and regional markets. This is a double-edged sword for most facilities. While keeping local dollars local is a great boost, it compounds a serious problem that most edutainment facilities have - how to refresh the "same-old same-old" experience by creating new experiences to attract visitors to return again and again to their venues.

For most museums, zoos, aquariums and parks, their local market has seen and experienced cornerstone exhibits, while touring exhibits are brought in to attract new patrons. Budgets are limited, especially with budget cuts that only go so far. While it's important to get the most out of available funding programs, it is not always easy to keep information fresh and informative on limited budgets. It is important to implement engaging exhibits and experiences that will not only attract families, but will continue to generate revenue by encouraging visitors to return again and again.

It's easy to cite the economy as the cause of the downturn of visitor attendance. But if numbers are slipping rather than growing, it may be due to a "been there done that" attitude by visitors. On the other hand, families are now seeking low cost alternatives, and are once again returning to museums, zoos and aquariums in much higher numbers in recent months. This is the time to capture attendance



Super Swing against the Earth made for a unique experience Photo by Sans Gear NZ

with staying power, so that families will spend quality time (and dollars) at your facility, rather than other activities.

One excellent example is the experience that SpaceCenterHouston (SCH) [www.spacecenter.org](http://www.spacecenter.org) had with Aktion AttraktioNZ™ activity during Summer 2008. Marketing Director, Roger Bornstein and the SCH team realized that their visitors had seen and experienced "Space", and if SCH did not get proactive and offer their visitors something different, they would begin to see declining numbers, and needed a draw that would generate positive revenue. SCH enlisted the services of EDG ([www.entertainmentdesigngroup.com](http://www.entertainmentdesigngroup.com)) to develop "something new and different." The end result was a physically interactive themed experience called "Daredevil Island", an action adventure themed exhibit that ran 3-months throughout Summer 2008 to encourage families to actively participate in a physically interactive attraction with challenges, rather than watching a passive exhibit. To satisfy the "something new and different" mode of thought, Sans Gear NZ' Aktion AttraktioNZ™ [www.sansgearNZ.com](http://www.sansgearNZ.com), a new category of Physically Interactive Device was featured as the cornerstone attraction. If you are unfamiliar with Aktion AttraktioNZ™, they are one-of-a-kind devices built with safety fall protection that allow unrestricted physical activities enhanced with aerial fun that targets the entire family of all ages. Thanks to the Krush KushioNZ® Safety Landing /Fall Protection System, visitors enjoy an exciting physically challenging experience that, until now, was impossible - yet done in complete safety, with no special training, and without the need for harnesses and belay systems.

Space Center Houston launched the Super SwingZ™ as the major draw attraction for

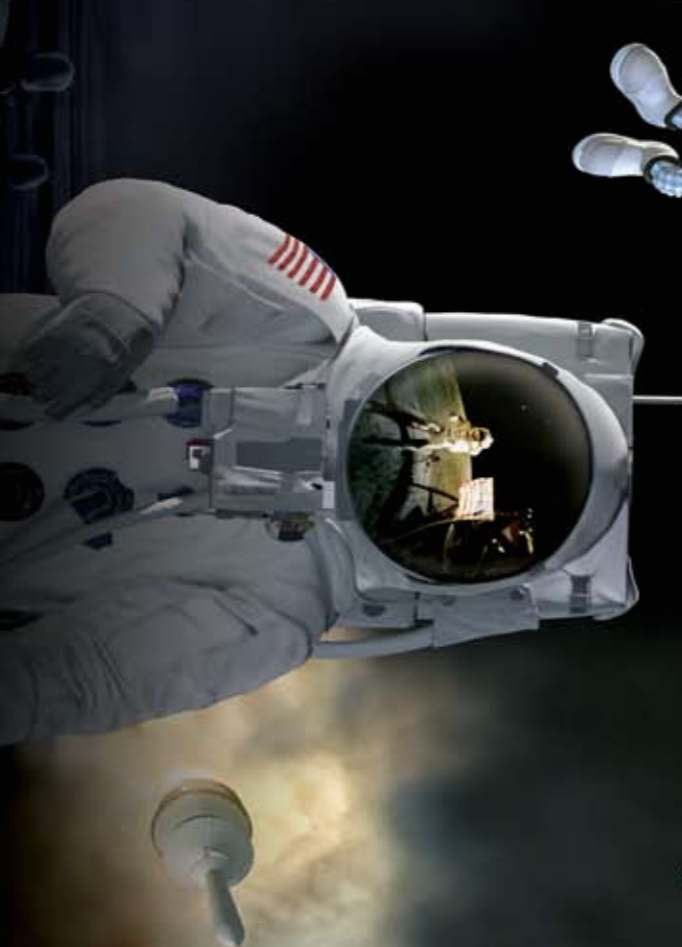
Daredevil Island, and was the first Sans Gear NZ' Aktion AttraktioNZ™ in the United States. As a result of the unique marketability and drawing power of the Super SwingZ™, Space Center Houston had nearly 300,000 in attendance during the 3-month period, or 40,000 more attendance than the Summer 2007. The Super SwingZ™ provided a 15% growth in gate attendance over a very successful summer in 2008, at a time when most of their local completion was down 15% in the same market. This provided Space Center Houston with a leveraged 30% growth over their local competition. During the past six years, Space Center Houston's best Guest Excellence rating was 54%. The Industry average Guest Excellence Rating is 67.5%. However, the Super SwingZ™ garnered a 93% Guest Excellence Rating - an incredible 35% jump. The Aktion AttraktioNZ™ was featured for only three seconds on SCH's summer promotion commercial, but proved to draw a wide demographic with minimal exposure, resulting in fantastic revenue increase. As Paul Spana, Exhibits Manager SCH reports, "It was simply the best summer we have had in the 16-year history of Space Center Houston."

Although the jungle adventure theme and physical activities were a departure from the standard Space branding for SCH, the model proved to be extremely successful and exceeded all anticipated market and performance benchmarks. Physical Interactivities that appeal to the full family demographic is the new future. And with child and adult obesity on the rise, Aktion AttraktioNZ™ are a perfect fit for physical activities that may be themed for any experience, exhibit, park or venue. "Adventuretainment" is the key to explosive gate and higher revenue to offset the soft market pinch that museums, aquariums, zoos and parks are feeling. **ipm**

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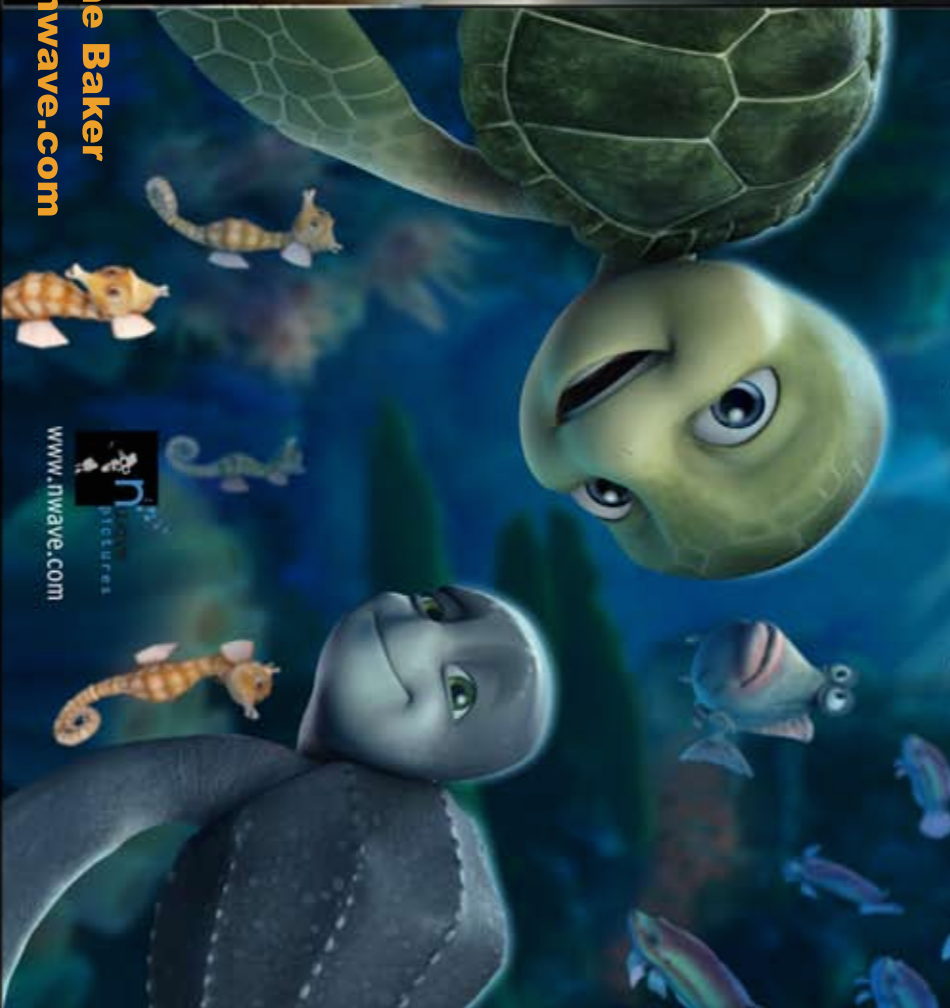
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