

lessons learned

ipm visits the new **schlitterbahn vacation village** in kansas city and walks away with some ideas
by *Martin Palicki*

The new Schlitterbahn Vacation Village opened in Kansas City this summer with the first phase of its multi-phase waterpark resort project. Significantly smaller than the other Schlitterbahn parks, this is clearly a work in progress. But that doesn't mean guests aren't having a fun day in the water, and it certainly doesn't mean there aren't lessons to be learned from the process.



Chose a location that is already popular. Schlitterbahn's park is located just the other side of the freeway from the Kansas Speedway and a thriving shopping/entertainment development. The attractions should feed off of and support one another.



Avoid controversy. Schlitterbahn became the target of a negative advertising campaign after a local carpenter's union alleged the park had stopped using local workers for construction and brought in workers from Texas to finish the project. The park contends 0.5% of the park's budget has been spent on Texas contractors, and touts the \$178 million invested in the local community and hundreds of seasonal jobs. The park's Marketing Director, Chris Ozimek, says the campaign was ineffective and the park had "a great inaugural season."



Maximize the amount of time spent together as a group in the water. Experience-based attractions, like a waterpark, are best experienced with other people. Schlitterbahn offers a wide variety of multi-person slides, and their unique system of queuing while floating in a lazy river, helps guests focus less on waiting in line and more on splashing and playing with one another.



The Master Blaster water coaster is the most popular slide with its innovative floating queue and conveyor belt system.



Bars are not for children. Schlitterbahn's tempting swim-up bar is a welcome sight for a weary adult's eyes, but locating it in and as part of one of the children's play areas is neither relaxing nor appealing. There's a time for family play, and there's a time for mommy's little getaway.



"FREE" is a great marketing campaign. Providing free life vests, free parking, and free inner tubes adds perceived value to a family's visit. It also creates a better experience. After all, who wants to be chained to an expensive tube all day in the hopes of preventing petty theft?



Work continues on the resort destination with visions of its ultimate grandeur only beginning to materialize.



Creating a full-day experience will keep guests (and their wallets) at your park longer. Schlitterbahn raced to get the first phase of the large resort open, and the result is, unless you're into just laying out in the sun, a half-day experience. With only four major slides to choose from, the park needs more areas to explore. Announcements on the next expansion phases are expected soon.



Whenever possible, make it easier for people to spend money. Schlitterbahn provides each guest with a bar coded wristband that scans as their admission ticket. Guests can also load up wristbands with money and just scan the band for use at the park's restaurants and bar. It's hard to say which is more beneficial: added revenue from the free-flowing nature of cashless transactions, or the convenience and care-free feeling it provides guests.



Price carefully. Price tags matter more now than ever. If guests don't feel they got a good value for their money, they won't come back, and they will let others know too. Schlitterbahn's \$30 price tag seems steep for the limited number of attractions already built. The park has used various discount and marketing promotions to soften that impact on guests, but really ought to double the size of the park to justify that admission amount.



Employees can make or break you. Schlitterbahn's staff were genuinely helpful and attentive during a recent visit. Lifeguards, especially, can sour a trip if they appear to be unprofessional, careless or inattentive. In Kansas City, not only did the employees seem to enjoy their jobs, but they excelled at performing them.



If you choose a theme, choose wisely. A quick scan of internet message boards is guaranteed to uncover at least one person who wonders "What is a Schlitterbahn, anyway?" Since the name isn't self-explanatory, the park relies on the environment to tell the story. At Schlitterbahn, the theme is confusing, and appears to be a mismatched collection of found items. A theme is certainly not necessary, but when attempted, it should be clear and support the overall mood, feeling, or story of the park.



Guests await the next wave to come rolling through the Torrent River.

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