



The Infinite Plasma set-up from Advanced Products Group involves nine screens in a three-by-three configuration.

## Atmosphere is the Key to Success at Popular Sports Bars

Running a successful sports bar is all about creating the right atmosphere says Sean Russo, the assistant general manager at Toronto's popular Loose Moose Tap and Grill. And when it comes to creating atmosphere, he is not simply talking about the decor of the bar, although that is still important.

Instead, Russo says two other factors are much more vital. For starters, it is imperative the staff be courteous and involved. "If you were to go to a fine dining restaurant, you would expect the staff to be able to speak intelligently about the wine list." He adds, "Likewise, at a sports bar you want the staff

staff, there's a good chance they will stay longer and return more often.

That leads to Russo's second point. The staff needs to be aware of what sports are on in a given shift. It's such an important issue at the Loose Moose that Russo says they have one manager whose sole responsibility is to keep track

If there's a big European soccer match available in the afternoon, or the crowd looks like they may get a kick out of a DVD of sports bloopers, then that's what will be up on the screens.

Making the trip to the local sports bar even better these days is the fact that most are filled with new plasma or LCD large format screens, as well as High-Def signals, that create an unforgettable viewing experience.

Andrew Salaman, general manager of Advanced Products Group, says with the price for this kind of technology dropping over the past five years,

Knowing your customers and being able to interact with them keeps customers coming back

to be able to engage the customers about what is happening on the televisions." Because when the customers are having a good time interacting with the

of all the different sports options for every shift of the week. Just keeping the TVs programmed to TSN and Sportsnet all the time isn't good enough anymore.



Games are a good way to build leagues and form tournaments.

sports bars have created a sort of Las Vegas-style sensory overload experience. With commercial grade screens, bars can run the units up to 16 to 18 hours per day. That's dramatically more than the seven to 10 hours per day expected from residential units.

While investing in 42' plasma or LCD screens is a good jumping-off point, Salaman says bars looking to make a statement may want to look at their Infinite Plasma set-up which involves placing nine screens in a three-by-three configuration that includes the option of matrixing the individual pictures into one huge

image encompassing all nine screens. Another WOW factor option is to try one of the company's new Aquivo outdoor screens. This all-weather option is sure to be a hit on patios across the country.

Bars can also choose to have their multiple screens all hardwired together to a single control point. That makes switching around between games much easier. And that's important to Bruce Gouriluk, owner of Big Guy's in Winnipeg. With 16 televisions at his location, he has enough units to provide viewing options for customers that want to keep tabs on multiple games.

Gouriluk also keeps a good segment of his TVs allocated for NTN Buzztime trivia and other casual games his customers like to play. For instance, even 20 years after its launch, NTN's QB1, the interactive prediction football game, remains a hit with bar patrons.

The company also has a few other new game offerings, including Race Day, a prediction game built around the increasingly popular Nascar Racing series. NTN also offers billiards, mini-golf and casino-based games.

Steve Breitner, regional sales manager for NTN Buzztime Canada, says these games offer bars a great opportunity to build leagues and form tournaments. Whether you have a small neighbourhood pub or are part of a national chain, Breitner points out that there are plenty of slow times in a week. NTN Buzztime games are a good way to drive business during down times and build added customer loyalty. Breitner also points out that advances in technology have allowed the cost of NTN to come down recently. This makes the return on investment even more attractive to bar operators.

Another new addition coming to the Canadian sports bar scene is the introduction of Take 5 Billiards. The British Columbia-based company will be placing top-end Diamond Billiards tables in bars and outfitting them with a wireless remote time management system. This will give the company the ability to monitor their tables wherever they are from a central control point. By monitoring a particular location, they will be able to analyze the business cycles at a particular location. This will give them the requisite knowledge to be able to properly set prices to drive maximum business.

Each table will also come with a 37' inch monitor that will broadcast what is happening on the table onto the internet. Customers will now be able to keep tabs on their favourite bar, even when they're at home. The company also has plans to use the screens to set-up some interaction and instruction from professional pool players.

When it comes to setting the right tone at a sports bar, there are clearly plenty of options. High-end pool, NTN, high tech AV equipment and making the right staffing choices are just some of the ways operators can find the right balance for their location. ♣

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