



## Overview

Over the last two decades, we've been so honored to establish and develop many terrific relationships with outstanding amusement and entertainment operators. We recently had the chance to sit down with one such operator: Nick Edwards, President and CEO of Edwards Entertainment Company. Nick and his team are the family behind the highly successful brand of now three locations, The Fun Station in Iowa.



Relationships, data, and a keen eye for innovation are the name of the game for this team. In this CenterEdge Client Spotlight, learn how they took one 20-year-old small indoor family entertainment center and turned it into a popular three-location destination featuring trampolines, adventure attractions, elevated food and beverage, and more.

## Q&A

### **Question 1: For those who haven't heard about The Fun Station, how did you get started?**

My wife and I are from the Cedar Rapids area, and about nine years ago, our oldest was turning three. Everybody wanted to celebrate his birthday, so we said, "We'll come back home to Cedar Rapids for the party." We started planning and remembered there was a place called the Play Station when we were growing up. It's been around since 1993. My wife said, "Oh, let's go. Let's celebrate the party there. I haven't been there in years!"

Little did we know that it was the very last day that the previous ownership was going to have the Play Station open, and my background was in resorts and water parks. So I'm just thinking, "The place is so busy, why would anybody want to close it down?" The owners were there, and we ended up talking to them about what I did for a living and how they were putting the facility on the market. Two to three weeks later, we moved back home, and away we went. It's wild how things all work out, and looking back on it now, it's crazy to think we bought that business just like that.

## **Question 2: When you acquire a new location, what are some of the changes you implement right away?**

With our Cedar Rapids location, it used to be just an indoor play area, and we have since overhauled the play areas. We've added indoor climbing, different laser mazes, and arcade games. It was a 20-year-old business, so it was old with outdated systems and technology. You know, this is where CenterEdge comes in. We implemented CenterEdge for the point of sale, waivers, parties, and online sales.



## **Question 3: What made you decide to implement CenterEdge in your facilities?**

We went through so many software demos to find a solution, and the CenterEdge point of sale system, with its touch screens and ease of use, was just a game changer from Day One. Before, it had been cash registers and spreadsheets - no historical data. So after switching to CenterEdge in 2014 and going through our first summer, we were thrilled to see how amazing the data we could get out of the system was. Now, nine years later, with all this historical data, we're able to see trends across the different locations year over year or per item.

## **Question 4: What is a change you made that you were surprised made a huge difference in your revenue?**

Food is a huge part of what we do. We used to be pretty concession-style with our food, and we overhauled that back in 2018. Why can't we have a great nacho, and why can't we have great wings and flatbreads, fancy milkshakes for parents, etc.? Now I'd say 35% of our revenue is food. We've noticed that by really elevating the food, Moms definitely will say, "Let's go to The Fun Station." The kids are coming to play, but maybe she's coming for the food. We love that.

It helped that it was pretty simple to transition the food from a point-of-sale aspect with CenterEdge's food and beverage management system. It's been pretty flawless from selling it to sending the tickets back to the kitchen, very user-friendly.





**Question 5: With all the changes you made, it sounds like reinvesting in your business is important to you. How does CenterEdge help you in those efforts?**

I don't know what we would do without CenterEdge, to be honest with you. Over the years, the brand has changed; our offerings have changed. We're all about change. So, as CenterEdge has rolled out new products, it has allowed us to elevate our offerings.



If we look at our membership program, we have kind of a unique opportunity there because all of our locations are within about an hour of each other. We have three different tiers with the membership program. Guests can pay month to month, or they can buy annually, and we allow them to use their membership at any of our locations. The new membership platform just made that so much easier to manage, and memberships are a great marketing tool because guests see the real value of being able to use them at any location.

**Question 6: The Fun Station brand continues to grow, what's one thing you think is key to the success of that growth?**



Our management team. It's really unique because most of them started with us from a young age and have bought into my way of doing things. I'm kind of a wild crazy leader, and it's been neat because we have some individuals that have worked with us for nine or ten years now. It's incredible to see them grow with our company. There's one thing you can't replace with someone, and that's history - different years and different situations that we've been through, and I think that's made them pretty successful.





## **Question 7: What do guests think of your growth as you take over these existing locations and rebrand?**

It's really neat. Just as we have announced our new location going into Dubuque, the feedback has been amazing. People are really excited, and we are hearing, "Hey, we travel to your Cedar Rapids location or to your Quad Cities location." We're thrilled about that and think people are really looking forward to the variety of attractions we're adding to the Dubuque location. It's amazing to see this brand, which used to be this little location in Cedar Rapids, slowly getting bigger and bigger. Looking back nine years, it was never the intention to have multiple locations, but it's worked out, and thank goodness we have a great management team and staff to help make it possible.



## **Question 8: What are you most looking forward to as you begin to open the latest location?**



We're going to add our signature attractions and climbing areas to the existing trampoline areas, which we're also revamping. We're replacing some other lower-performing attractions with zip lines, swings, and we're adding Slick Slides. It's basically new technology, like a water slide without the water, and there's a special mat you slide down on. It's incredible! It's also in a mall setting, which is new for us. Just a lot to be excited about!

## **Question 9: What advice would you give to a new operation or facility starting out?**

I think it's important to definitely do your research. The FEC industry is really big, but it's still so, so small. There are so many different resources to reach out to. I would encourage people to reach out, ask questions, and bounce ideas off other operators and industry vendors. There was a lot I didn't know, and I wish I would have known there were so many resources available, especially if you're getting into it without any previous experience.



## Question 10: What are the plans for the future?

Aside from the relaunch of Dubuque, I'm excited to get Cedar Rapids and Quad Cities fully functioning with Dual Pricing. Dubuque has been on it since July, and the savings have been incredible so far.

But as for plans for the facilities, we've always got our eye on something. We take our whole family to IAAPA, and my three kids are amazing product testers. I mean, they think there's an unlimited checkbook [laughs], but I'm sure we'll find something fun to take home. As I said before, we're all about change.

## Conclusion

With a keen eye for continuous improvement and a firm grasp on the essential data that reveals what's working and what's not, it's no wonder that The Fun Station team has been able to grow year over year. Reinvesting in your business and the team that makes it possible is a savvy way to ensure success in the years to come. We're thrilled to partner with The Fun Station, and can't wait to see how they'll keep "bettering their best."



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