

A bright future

Like the vast majority of visitors and exhibitors at IAAPA, Sacoa has one eye on the future

AT IAAPA, Sacoa will be introducing new products as well as a range of new software features that will further enhance its offering.

"We will be displaying our EZ system which offers simple installation through a new all-in-one kiosk design that incorporates a preconfigured server inside the cabinet and can manage up to 60 games or other attractions with our wireless card reader," says Brian Duke, business and marketing consultant for Sacoa.

The EZ system is designed for smaller locations or unattended game rooms while delivering all the same benefits of the Argentina-based company's full PlayCard System.

Visitors to the Sacoa booth will be able to see a hands-on demonstration of all aspects of the product, seeing the card system in action, from buying and swiping to analysing. In addition, the mobile recharge and online purchasing functions have been upgraded to provide even more features for guests and customers. "We are expecting to have a lot more interactive displays for attendees to see, touch and feel in our booth," says Duke.

When it comes to emerging trends in the industry, RFID has been something of a buzzword recently but the technology was proving inconsistent or very expensive to use. "Since we are operators who think like operators, Sacoa did not rush into it because RFID was unproven and not as economical as magnetic cards," continues Duke.

"Now that the operating cost has become reasonable, we are proceeding with our new product that will be perfect for larger amusement and water parks where using a card is not as convenient. While the hardware had to be adapted to read an RFID signal, all the basic elements of our debit system remain the same as reading cards with magnetic strips."

The most successful new product launched by Sacoa at last year's IAAPA was probably the HDT Wireless card reader with touchscreen and built-in "e-tix" capability; its all-in-one design making for easier installation and proving very popular with customers. Also, the Mini ReCharge kiosk has proven to be a low-cost unattended alternative to full-service kiosks or traditional manned POS stations. The ability to recharge a card quickly with cash and get back to playing has been a plus for many locations.

The breadth of the IAAPA show offers Sacoa an opportunity to access a range of markets, says Duke: "Since our PlayCard system can be used in a wide variety of industries, types of locations and sizes of operations, IAAPA is perfect for drawing attendees from everywhere around the globe and every type of business."

"While we used to find most customers were only buying for game rooms and arcades, we are now seeing increased business from

trampoline, laser tag, paintball and Airsoft arenas.

"Because IAAPA is recognised as the largest of all exhibitions for the leisure industry, it still draws many international attendees and exhibitors," continues Duke.

"We almost always see the largest operators in Orlando, especially since most manufacturers view IAAPA as the most important show and introduce new product there first. And every manufacturer will exhibit at IAAPA, but not all the other international shows.

"Operators that are watching expenses closely are more likely to only attend the local exhibition to save money but the larger operators will usually attend both or maybe just IAAPA where they can see it all."

FECs continue to be the biggest sector of the amusement industry for Sacoa, mainly because of the combination of games and



attractions as well as food and beverage offerings at most FECs. "This year, we are beginning to see new types of businesses exploring the options," says Duke.

"It sometimes takes locations many years to grasp the concept of a new idea, be willing to change their way of operating and embrace the thought of going cashless. Many are just now realising that there is truly a return on investment for debit systems and that switching from coin or token can actually make more revenue. We specifically work with our customers to provide the maximum ROI for them, since we know all locations are different."

He adds: "The fact that we also operate the PlayCard System at our own locations gives Sacoa a lot of experience and an advantage over our competitors."

Like a lot of visitors and exhibitors at IAAPA, Sacoa always has an eye on the future: "As we mentioned before, new technology is always something players are seeking, whether a location or operator wants to admit it," says Duke.

"Hi-tech or new items are easily understood by today's youth and they embrace it much more often than adults. That's why we developed e-tix years ago, even though it has taken some operators until now to start implementing. The kids understood it, liked the fact that cards held the tickets they won and they didn't have to carry large piles of paper tickets.

"It is easier and eco-friendly," says Duke, "allowing a location to save money and promote 'Go Green' when they switch to e-tix. The next step will be RFID and Sacoa will continue to use new technology whenever possible, as soon as it proves reliable and affordable for our operators."