

Leading from the front

A track record for flexibility and innovation has helped Elmac remain competitive for more than three decades

OVER a period of more than 30 years in the coin-op field, Elmac has continued to adjust and react to the needs of the market.

Responding to changing demand, the Padova, Italy-based company has moved from the production of PCBs and video games, to slot machines and beyond to remain at the forefront of its field.

In the last 12 years, Elmac has focused its business on ticket redemption machines and products that can help the operator to manage these machines in a simple and fast way.

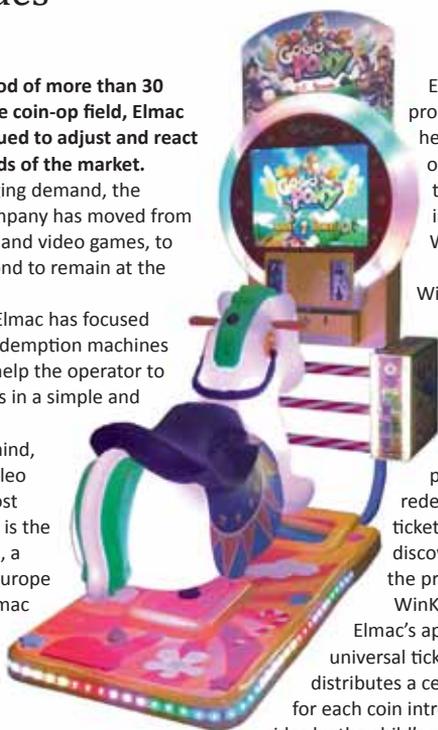
With these aims in mind, Elmac produced its Galileo Pro Ticket Eater, the most recent version of which is the EVO Twin. Furthermore, a lot of locations across Europe and the east use the Elmac WinMT management software, which is frequently selected thanks to its user-friendly interface.

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"After 12 years of use, the challenge with the ticket redemption machines has been to find a way to conquer new customers - apart from just teenagers," says Elmac owner Tiziano Tredese.

Elmac also operates in bowling alleys, family entertainment centres and seaside arcades but found that the effective use of ticket redemption was far from universal across these locations. "We noticed that ticket redemption was virtually unknown in two main categories of customers: children and bowlers," says Tredese.

"The fact is, children usually play only on kiddie rides while bowlers bowl, perhaps drink a beer and then go home."



Elmac addressed this problem head on and helped to raise the profile of ticket redemption in these markets with two innovative products; WinBowling and WinKiddy.

The production of WinBowling, a special ticket dispenser that gives a certain amount of tickets for each frame or strike, claims to be a world first. With WinBowling, players are obliged to redeem the tickets in the ticket redemption area and discover the Ticket Eater and the prizes.

WinKiddy, meanwhile, is Elmac's appealing and bright universal ticket dispenser that distributes a certain number of tickets for each coin introduced into the kiddie rides by the child's parents.

Usually kiddie rides are located outside of the arcades but with WinKiddy, that location becomes less important as the players are obliged to redeem the "free" tickets inside the arcades, so they discover the complete Elmac redemption system.

Ultimately, with these two simple new products from Elmac, the ticket redemption area has acquired two new categories of customers.

"This is our core business," says Tredese, "to deliver to operators a quicker and more profitable return on investment for their games."

In order to increase customers' interest in ticket redemption further, Elmac has



also developed a special smartphone app for any mobile device, which maintains contact, at all times, with a venue server that is running the WinMT software.

Through the app, players can check the loyalty points they have available or book a prize. Alternatively they can make a booking for a bowling lane or for a birthday party, as well as other functions.

In addition to these in-house products,

Elmac is also the distributor of Allied Tank Attack, made by InJoy Motion, the two successful interactive kiddie rides Go Go Pony and Submarine Ride, the newest Fishbowl Frenzy game, as well as all the titles from Bay Tek, Benchmark, Bob's Space Racers and Five Star Redemption.

existing product lines," said Verstraeten. Her company's E-Claw range, for example, features interactive technology and RGB lighting. Its Mistral and Wizard of Oz pushers, meanwhile have become hugely successful.

In recent years, Harry Levy has been implementing ticket features on a number of its pushers, broadening their appeal and bringing them into line with the growing popularity of redemption. "This not only enables the player to play for money from the machine, but also to work towards a prize; a great incentive we find," said Clifton. "On our cranes we have mostly just improved the quality of the mechanics and have made them look a great deal better with lighting effects and various aesthetics. This feels like the general trend in the last decade."

The concept behind both pushers and cranes, said Balaban, is both "classic and effective" so Coast to Coast tries to be as innovative as possible while maintaining their core elements.

"We have tried many things over the past 15 years," Balaban said. "We have added a game within a game to give the player bonus plays, while playing the regular crane game, added a pushing assembly to push areas to push over candy to the player, added a second claw to the playing area and all sorts of things.

"But, all in all, the basic staple of the old-time single claw is the one that keeps selling and making money."

The company has hit upon a new concept with a patented new claw designed to look like a real hand with fingers. This is incorporated into its new Brew Buck-it crane, in which it picks up empty beer bottles. "We have had the best response of any new game we have introduced so far," he said. "People all over the world have been coming up with really new and unique ideas to use this game for promotional opportunities, in addition to having the player win actual beer when trading in the empty bottle for a full beer at the bar."

Still respectful of the success and longevity of the crane concept, but nonetheless keen to bring further enhancements, Sega, in collaboration with manufacturer ICE and UK operator Playnation, has developed a new crane that, while not reinventing the concept, has certainly brought it up to date, said Burke.

"Grab N Win is the crane of all cranes for the 21st century, in our view," he said. "It may look the same, but internally the work that ICE has done on the software and mechanics to bring it up to date is incredible. It looks like a crane but from an operator's point of view it has been designed so all of the things that cause them headaches have been ironed out."

The software that controls the machine and its lighting and sounds has been re-written "from scratch," and its design is intended to deliver maximum reliability.

ICE's Coppola takes up the story: "The software settings that are in the game rival some of our redemption game settings. Customers have absolute control from the type of music they use, to the LED pattern, how long the crane will 'dig' for the prize and can even programme the crane to a specific style of plush, and then take those settings on a SD card and programme cranes in the field.

"The Grab N Win cranes will revolutionise

how operators set their routes, and will allow them ultimate flexibility and most importantly accountability, which will lead to more profits in the cash box. The days of spending hours on location counting plush, re-calibrating the claw to new plush, and other various accounting steps have all been simplified with the Grab N Win series."

The demand for such features prompted ICE to make the decision to dedicate valuable R&D resources to creating an "all-in-one" crane designed to appeal to the masses, from the small operator to the large-scale route businesses, he said.

"The software upgrades, along with implementing the 100 per cent green LED lighting, has really set the bar high for the crane market."

"We've not changed the wheel but changed the way the wheel works," Burke continued. "It looks the same but when you get inside it is different completely. We've worked on every little flaw with cranes and made it perfect.

"What we've done is probably as far as we need to go; we've improved things behind the scenes and kept the tried and tested, age-old concept the same." **Universal Space is due to bring its latest crane, Jungle Claw, to the market soon and is targeting the children's market. According to the company's Steven Tan, the machine boasts a "very cute" design and the button decks and merchandise windows have been placed with young players in mind.**

Another area in which it has led innovation, though, is video redemption. With its Fruit Mania game, it has taken the concept of the pusher and repackaged it in an imaginative, cutting-edge way.

Explained Tan: "If the wheel is not broke, don't mend it! But then at UNIS we have certainly taken the pusher and put a twist on it in the form of Fruit Mania, our video redemption 'pusher' game launched in November 2012, displaying all the attributes of a pusher but in a digital form... And it does have the great advantage of not creating coin jams!"

What this proves is that the traditional form of gameplay we associate with pushers and cranes remains an integral part of the amusement experience, in whichever form it takes.

"We launched a Chinese version of Fruit Mania as an app, which is popular in Asia, so with our digital pusher, we have already pushed through and created a significant step forward," said Tan, although he acknowledges that these machines are still as relevant today as they ever were.

"In general, I do not think massive changes are needed for pushers and cranes; their charms and attractions are because they are what they are. If we change that fundamentally, I do not think that they would be within that group of pay-to-play machines any longer."

Harry Levy's Clifton agreed: "This style of product is a classic product whereby the experience can't be replicated on a smartphone or tablet," said Clifton. "It's the look and feel of the game and the fun the player has. Family-style products have gained in popularity while other styles of products have lost their appeal."

How important to the success of these pusher and crane machines is the prize element and how is this aspect evolving and developing?

HELGA VERSTRAETEN, ELAUT:

"Since the early years, crane product has always been the most important element of the revenue. Bonus features, jackpots and collectable cards have added to the excitement and longevity."

CHRIS CLIFTON, HARRY LEVY:

"The prize element is always a crucial factor and the way it is won. It should feel achievable and create excitement while in play and after. We evaluate all our machines over a lengthy period in order to get this right. As always a successful machine is fun to play and has longevity."

STEVEN TAN, UNIS:

"The prizes obviously need to be appealing; bright prizes for cranes certainly attract the players, but they do need to be current, not older merchandise filling the space."

GARY BALABAN, COAST TO COAST:

"Some people have changed to high-end items, like tablets and phones and other electronics, but after a while these seem to fade out. Maybe because the customer knows that the odds of them winning a \$100 item for \$1 to play the game are very slim. We find that good quality plush is still a good seller in the cranes. Licensed product that the customer will instantly recognise is the way to go. They know these are expensive items in the retail store, thus they have a high perceived value to the customer."

JOE COPPOLA, ICE:

"The prizes inside the game are the main driving force behind the traffic and number of games played with a crane. The crane can look absolutely amazing but if the prizes inside are not displayed in an inviting way or the prizes just are not something the player wants to win then the crane will not earn well."

