

Published in August 2008 issue of *International Bowling Industry*

An FEC in your future?

Across the nation, multi-tasking lifestyles are creating a new kind of entertainment place. It sounds a lot like a bowling FEC

by Randy White

© 2008 White Hutchinson Leisure & Learning Group

It wasn't all that many years ago that we analyzed consumer spending on retail purchases and at entertainment destinations based upon demographics and disposable income. The basic underlying theory was that a person's demographics, combined with their disposable income, could be used to understand and predict their spending. In fact, a lot of consumer analysis is still performed on this basis.

Welcome to a whole new world. Money is no longer the sole currency by which consumers make their spending decisions. Time is the new currency. And for upper-middle and higher-income consumers, disposable time is often the more important deciding factor than money, especially when it comes to away-from-home leisure.

Families, especially, are time pressed today. They have more things they want to do than they have the time for and suffer from what has been dubbed "time poverty". Often the difference in cost of a few dollars is not important to them, and they are even willing to pay a premium to save time. What is important to them is to use their valuable time well and to save time whenever they can. You might call this the new multitasking paradigm: do as much as you can in the least amount of time.

This multitasking trend is evidenced in recent research by the [*International Council of Shopping Centers*](#) (ICSC) that shows that consumers are spending more money per visit, but making fewer trips to the mall.

In 1996, the average shopper visited a mall 3.2 times per month and spent \$66.70 per trip. In 2006, the number of visits dropped by about 10% to 2.9, while spending per trip increased to \$99.90. Adjusted for inflation, \$66.70 in 1996 would equal \$85.70 in 2006, so spending per trip has increased faster than inflation.

The other thing that has changed about time, or more specifically, about leisure time, is that it comes in new size increments. We no longer take those two week, or even one week vacations, or at least, not as often. We take our extended leisure time in smaller increments, but more frequently. It's now a long weekend here or a few days there.

According to the [*Travel Industry Association*](#), the average length of a vacation has dropped from about five days in the 1980s to 3.5 days today. Suzanne Cook, the *Travel Industry Association's* research director, said, "It's hard to even

imagine how vacations can get much shorter than they are now and still resemble vacations.”

Data from the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) show that in aggregate, the number of full-time employees who took less than an entire week off has more than doubled since 1990. The percentage of all workers who took a full week off on any given week has declined by about a third since 1990.

According to labor economists, the trend toward shorter and more frequent vacations is more commonly found at white-collar jobs where workers have specific knowledge that cannot be easily duplicated by co-workers filling in. A Family and Work Institute 2004 survey of workers found that 43% of workers felt "overwhelmed by everything they have to do when they return home. John A. Challenger, chief executive of [Challenger, Gray & Christmas](#), an outplacement consultant, sees it this way, "If you go away for a week or two weeks, that might leave a hole and you might be blamed for something that goes wrong.

In fact, the consecutiveness that the Internet has brought to doing business is also destroying the sanctity of weekends, as you can stay connected 24/7. The division between work, leisure and home life has blurred.

The concept of time poverty, limited disposable free time for leisure, and shorter vacations is reinventing how we use our leisure time and is driving a trend toward multi-tasking leisure venues. Consumers are looking for one-stop leisure, a single place they can go for a meal and entertainment, versus going to one location for a meal, then taking time to drive to another for entertainment. And if you are talking about loading up the kids in the car to go from one location to another, you are not only talking about more time, but a lot of effort.

Examples of multitasking venues include bowling FECs, family buffet/entertainment centers, concepts that combine pizza and games, theaters that offer dinner and a movie. There are even single venue combinations of cinema, restaurant, bar, games and bowling. These are all fulfilling consumers' needs for efficient use of their leisure time, which explains their growing popularity.

Society's changing perspective about their leisure time is having, and will continue to have, an enormous impact on location-based entertainments such as bowling centers. No industry that succeeds by capturing dollars spent in leisure time will be immune.

Randy White is the CEO of [White Hutchinson Leisure & Learning Group](#), a 20-year-old company that specializes in the design and consultancy for location-based leisure venues, including bowling centers, FECs, eatertainment facilities and children's play and edutainment centers. Randy can be reached at randy@whitehutchinson.com.