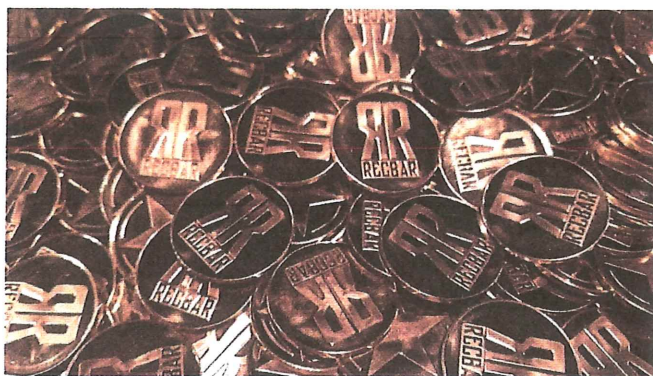
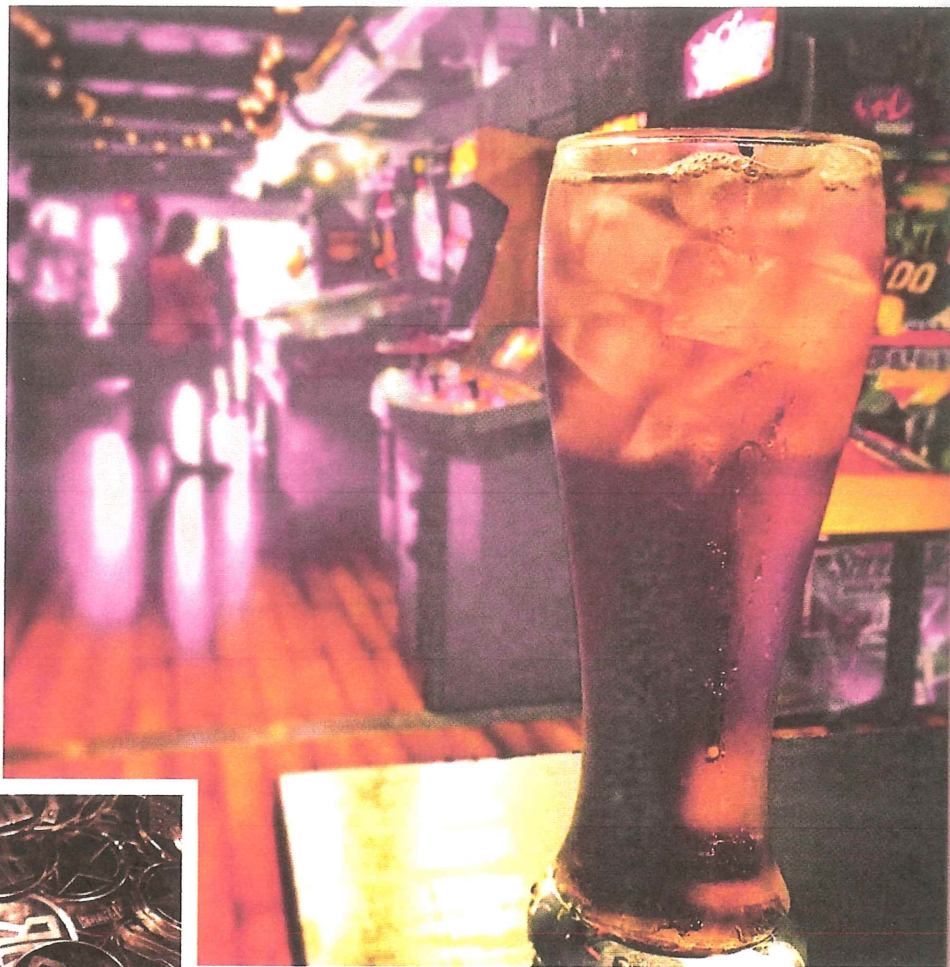


Neo-token: The case for tokens



Whether you're catching the game, going solo, or gaming it up with the family, Recbar has you covered. The Louisville, Ky., center has everything a modern arcade lover might want: revamped pub-menu items, beer, video games, entertainment, and pixilated, token-only game play.

Recbar's 5,000 square feet of gaming space is a time capsule from the golden age of arcades. Of its 45 different gaming cabinets, eight pinball machines, and a variety of table games, the majority are classic titles operated by tokens.

The decision to go token or bust meant that owners Corey Sims and Tony Thomas would have to go without the modern advantages of a cashless system. After some research, however, Sims and Thomas realized that they could utilize the nostalgia of

the standard token to their benefit.

Just as Sims and Thomas have long since left behind the days of inserting dollar bills into a token machine, then running off to challenge each other in a game of Galaga, the token has graduated from its nondescript features to serve as anything from miniature billboards to an internal system of cross-promotion. At Recbar, the tokens work just as hard as Pac Man.

LEVEL ONE: FREE PLAY OR PAY-TO-PLAY?

Sims and Thomas knew they wanted the nostalgic atmosphere of pixi-



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lated games, but they had one crucial decision to make before beginning: make everything free-play or pay-to-play.

Having been to more than a few arcades themselves, the pair found that free-play locations were often too busy. Gamers could keep playing with no incentive to stop, which causes lines to form.

Free-play arcades are popular, given the initial enticement, and often make money based on drink sales. But Sims and Thomas also wanted to sell food. The choice was easy: pay-to-play.

LEVEL TWO: QUARTERS OR TOKENS?

Like any good RPG, the action doesn't stop. On to level two: quarters or tokens? Sims and Thomas vividly remember using tokens to play arcade games as kids and figured potential customers would too.

"Having that gold token in your hand is a lot different than holding a

TOKENS

quarter,” Sims says. “We didn’t see the value in quarters that we saw in tokens.”

Sims and Thomas figured that there’s no excitement in handing a customer \$20 in quarters.

LEVEL THREE: JACKPOT

With the decision to use tokens firmly made, Sims and Thomas began researching where to buy them. They scoured the Internet looking for a reputable mint with a decent price and a good catalog to show off similar products.



They kept coming back to TokensDirect, based in nearby Cincinnati, Ohio. They ordered their first batch of 5,000 tokens, costing around .13 cents per token. Now they’re 25,000 in and still going.

Sims and Thomas also knew they wanted a classic look and hoped to incorporate their logo into the token design; after all, the tokens serve as mini billboards for Recbar. TokensDirect worked closely with the team to get the custom token design just the way they wanted.

“We created the design and they

made our logo pop on the token,” says Sims. “They were quick to respond to any questions and had open line of communication. Shipping was swift and reordering was quicker and easier than any other product I have purchased.”

The gold look and heft of the coin makes it feel valuable to customers; the custom logo makes them unique to Recbar. Only six weeks after opening on April 15, Recbar has already seen a return on investment sufficient to justify the initial cost of the tokens. The tokens are valued at a quarter, which is .12 cents of profit at purchase.

LEVEL UP: TOKENS AND PROMOTIONS

Nostalgia was one reason, but tokens also provided opportunities for promotions such as prizes, happy hour token deals, and more.

One promotion doesn’t see tokens clanging from the coin dispenser; they come from the restaurant. The restaurant and arcade are family-friendly every night until 10 pm. Every kid’s meal comes with a dollar’s worth of tokens to spend at the arcade.

Sims and Thomas also intend to use the tokens as giveaways for tour-

naments and incentives to visit during happy hour or family fun nights.

POWER UP: WALKAWAYS

Sims and Thomas expected customers to be excited about the tokens, and they certainly were, but Sims and Thomas didn’t expect the tokens to leave the building.

Walkaways happen when customers pocket the unused tokens and take them home. Tokens end up in kids’ pockets, coin jars, purses, you name it, but because Recbar’s tokens bear its logo, customers are more likely to plan a return visit when the unused tokens reemerge from the pocket.

“We’ll see social media posts after people walk away with four or five Recbar tokens,” says Sims. “The next day they’ll post, ‘Look what I found this morning, I’ll definitely be back.’”

As a small, independently-owned business, Recbar depends on social media for marketing as opposed to more traditional paid media outlets, which makes posts from customers all the more important. Having an active social media presence also allows them to be flexible with their day-to-day promotions and giveaways.

Tokens given at the bar and through the restaurant support the arcade, and customers coming in to the arcade will invariably smell the southern pulled pork cooking, or see a Belgian waffle PB&J sandwich go by on a plate and make their way over to the restaurant.

Recbar is quickly becoming Louisville’s go-to arcade. What makes it all possible is the humble token. When not cross-promoting the different aspects of the arcade, the tiny gold token acts as a miniature billboard, promoting Recbar even when it walks away. This modern marketing twist on what some might call an archaic form of payment offers Recbar’s 21st century patrons a good deal on modern fun. ▲