

Putting the family first

Family-friendly, value-for-money entertainment is what the amusement industry - and Universal Space - is all about, says Steven Tan

UNIVERSAL Space has in only a matter of a few years become one of the most recognisable names in the amusement business.

The company, which has its manufacturing base in its native China, has additional offices in Canada and a service centre and warehouse in the US.

"In 2001 we opened our offices and R&D unit in Toronto, Canada, and this was the first step in being able to reach out and work more effectively to the US and European markets," explained general manager Steven Tan. "Two years ago we opened our first US service and support centre enabling us to ensure that machines and parts were now locally stocked for the American distributors and operators."

Through the network built through these two international locations, he said, UNIS has been able to watch and understand the western market and to target the opportunities it presents.

UNIS specialises in the production of redemption games, prize machines, arcade video games, kiddie rides and other types of indoor rides. Today, its products can be found in amusement locations in over 50 countries and it works with a number of the industry's leading distributors. In the UK and Ireland it partners Instance Automatics and at EAG International this month it will be working with managing director Ian Eason to present its leading products.

"Many of the 2014 new releases performed extremely well in the UK and Ireland, as well as throughout Europe as a whole, especially our impressive redemption pieces Up and Away, Pirate's Hook and Fruit Mania," said Tan. "EAG is

certainly one of the largest European shows that we attend and it is very important that we show a good presence there."

Instance Automatics, he revealed, has increased its stand size by a further 30 per cent for this year's edition of the show – a decision he described as "testimony to just how important a show it is."

Following their successful launch at the IAAPA Attractions Expo in the US in November, UNIS' latest line up of games will be on show in London. Among them will be the two and four-player video redemption title Safari Ranger and the two highly interactive redemption games Monkey Shake Down and Barrel of Laughs, the latter being the next in the company's Carnival Series of games.

The soccer-themed Beat the Goalie will no doubt create some head-to-head fun, while UNIS' Kiddy Zone range, including Duo Drive, Seaway Submarine Ride and Learn, Jungle Claw prize grabber, water squirting game Bunny Pond and Rocket School Bus ride are expected to win over a large audience.

"The games which we are presenting at EAG are family games, aimed at children as well as adults," said Tan. "They appeal to a large target market within affordable budgets."

There are a number of issues facing the European amusement industry, one of which is the ongoing economic turbulence that many countries continue to face. It is a factor that has influenced UNIS' approach to family-orientated game design.

"The UK, as with much of Europe, has struggled continuously since 2008 with the recession and therefore

money is tight and operators choose their machines on a budget," Tan said, "and the range that we produce are affordable and produce sound earnings."

This concept of family-friendly, value-for-money entertainment is at the heart of all that UNIS does and, said Tan, is a trend likely to continue to influence the international pay-to-play amusement industry in the years to come.

"Definitely a growing trend is the family entertainment market and family restaurants," he said. "In the US and many Latin American countries, our machines are part of the mainstay for venues and I think this trend will start to grow further in the UK and Europe - families spending time together in value-for-money restaurants that offer entertainment for the children at the same time."

