

Kingpin

Richmond

Kingpin is aiming to reclaim the game of ten-pin bowling for the 'hit and giggle' masses. But with a sports bar and a high-spec lighting and audiovisual component, Christopher Holder and Kevin Poulter discover there's a lot more to Kingpin than strikes and spares.

When it comes to ten-pin bowling I doubt if I'm the only one who would instantly think of those hard-bitten Leaguers with their Fred Flintstone shirts, prosthetic gloves and that mesmerising spin they put on the ball... Kingpin is something a bit different. It doesn't cater for the 'pros', instead it caters to the idea that ten-pin bowling is a fantastic 'hit and giggle' lark for anyone between the ages of five to 80. But wait 'Barney Boy' there's more. By day Kingpin might be a haven for gaggles of kids giggling about their weird new shoes, but by night Kingpin turns on the atmospherics to transform itself into a relaxed nightspot. An on-site sports bar, called the XBar, keeps night-time patrons lubricated and allows for traditional bowling alley distractions (arcade games and pool tables) to be pursued to the accompaniment of a high-spec audio/visual experience. There's even scope for live bands and DJs. In short, Kingpin seems to be breaking every rule of marketing – ie aiming to please everyone all the time – but it's doing it rather well. The original Kingpin (located in the good-time palace of Crown Casino, Melbourne) was such a success that the owner, EDG (Entertainment Development Group) is rolling out (if you'll pardon the pun) Kingpins across the country and, indeed, licensing the idea overseas.

Venue Magazine rolled up its sleeves and visited the recently opened, Kingpin, Richmond, to learn more about the design concept, the lighting and the audio/visual aspects.

The Concept – Gary Berman, CEO of EDG

Venue: Gary, we're more used to seeing new bowling alleys stretching for miles in low-rent outer suburban sheds, but here we have Kingpin neatly nestled in the rafters of Richmond's new Victoria Gardens shopping mall. It's a very different model. In fact, would you say that Kingpin is a 'bowling alley with a bar' or a 'bar with a bowling alley'?

► **Mood, fun and comfort** – Kingpin eschews the traditional plastic bowling alley seating for something considerably more inviting. Backlit translucent picture panels are a nice touch, while ceiling-mounted projectors are also clearly visible.



Gary Berman: Like its name suggests, the emphasis is on the bowling. But like our other venue concepts (for example, Bar Code – where the focus is on playing pool; and Score – where the laser-based combat game takes centre stage... see the 'Fun & a Beer' box item for more) the idea was to combine social activity with sporting action. We aren't the only ones to 'reinvent' ten-pin bowling as a social activity but we differentiate ourselves by being cool and fun to be in; but not threatening, exclusive, too dark or too nightclub-oriented. To answer your question, the bar and the sale of alcohol was never the focus. We added the bar and other facilities to cater for the hen's/buck's nights, 30-plus birthday parties etc, but all in a way that is still inviting to children and their parents.

Venue: So during the day you have kids and parents, you have the suits dropping by after work and you have the social set at night. How does Kingpin keep pace with the change in clientele?

Gary Berman: Largely by changing the lighting and music. In the afternoons we feature a playlist of Top 40 hits – programming that 10 year olds would listen to – then change to a different mix of music for the people coming in after work to have a drink or a game. Of course, as the night wears on, the sound levels go up and the lighting in the XBar and over the bowling lanes becomes more intense.

Venue: I gather EDG is licensing the Kingpin concept overseas?

Gary Berman: That's right, we have negotiated new licences in Chicago and Delhi. Both venues will be launched under the Bar Code moniker, but incorporate the bowling as well. We've also had a Bar Code in operation at Times Square, New York, for a number of years.

Venue: What do you offer the new licensees?

Gary Berman: We supply training manuals, give them the operational management tools they need... basically we share all our information but leave it up to the licensee to make locally-focussed improvements to the formula.

Venue: Will we see more EDG licensees and/or wholly-owned operations in Australia?

Gary Berman: Yes. We have plans for new venues in Melbourne Central (the refurbished shopping centre), and in another six or seven key locations in Sydney,

Brisbane and Adelaide.

Venue: I recall that my local bowling alley as a teenager was a magnet for BMX-riding ne'er-do-wells, but Kingpin looks about as threatening as a church fete – there's nothing dingy about the place during the day, the staff are fresh-faced and enthusiastic... I imagine this was always the intention?

Gary Berman: I think you put your finger on it. If you put yourself in an arcade – a teenage hangout that's dark and dingy – then you shouldn't be surprised that you'll attract a certain type of downmarket clientele. Make it bright and high quality, and a different crowd is attracted. And, if it's a place that mums and dads feel happy about coming to, you find that any teenage antics tend to be tempered.

Venue: I was here during one of Kingpin's UV nights – with predominantly UV lighting and fluorescent bowling balls – that was something to behold. What was the inspiration for that idea?

Gary Berman: Kingpin has exclusive rights to a vodka called UV (which itself is brewed to glow in the dark!), so we wanted to create a UV night. The next step will be uniforms that glow, using glow sticks, offering giveaways and the like. Again, it's all just about having fun.

Strike a Light – The Lighting Design

Kingpin's lighting design brief was a varied one. By day, the venue needed to be bright and inviting, while at night needed to turn on the nightclub-like 'pyrotechnics'. Of particular interest for a venue of this ilk, Kingpin's interior is predominantly white. During daylight hours, with natural light streaming in, the white décor contributes greatly to the airy/cheery atmosphere, but after dark, the white interior presents a number of challenges and opportunities for the lighting designer. In this case, David Bird, of Vision Design Studios, took on the task. David has an enormous breadth of experience and is currently up to his neck working on the new Spencer Street Station redevelopment in Melbourne.

Venue: Kingpin is very much a 'Jekyll and Hyde' venue wouldn't you say David – its daytime and night-time atmosphere is very different?

David Bird: Certainly there's a daytime white look – a bright place where you can bring young kids – while, come midnight,



Fun & a beer - more about EDG

EDG began operations in 1996, its principal focus on designs for businesses in Asia. EDG's big break arrived when Crown Casino moved into its current site on Melbourne's Southbank. Crown was seeking development ideas to augment its core gaming operations. EDG waded in with a brace of perfectly complimentary venue concepts – Bar Code, All Star Café, Score, Galactic Circus and Next Blue. Whether the venue was 18+ or general admission, each was non-elitist and fun. In effect, this philosophy has insulated EDG from the vagaries of what's hot and what's not – if you're never aiming to be at the cutting edge of hip, then it follows that you're far less likely to go *out of fashion*.

Venue magazine asked Gary Berman to explain EDG's philosophy further.

Gary Berman: We were looking for entertainment ideas that provided a different fit between restaurants, bars, nightclubs and cinemas. We always want to provide some form of entertainment other than eating and drinking – whether it be bowling, arcade games, pool tables, lasers... each venue has something that fills that niche. Take Bar Code, for example, which is basically a pool hall with a bar and a few extra arcade games... yet we're not going for the traditional pool player, we're courting people who like to play pool for fun. In some ways, our venues fill a void like Planet Hollywood filled a void, but unlike Planet Hollywood we're planning on being a commercial success!

Venue: Virtually every licensed venue tries to find ways of maximising its revenue from alcohol sales, but it's almost like you're trying to discourage alcohol consumption.

Gary Berman: I wouldn't go that far. But we certainly see our concepts fitting into a future where drinking for drinking's sake is going to be less and less socially acceptable. Whereas, alcohol served in moderation with food or as an adjunct to an entertainment offering is only going to become more and more popular. I'm obviously in the booze business and maybe I hold an unorthodox view but I think just going into a pub and ordering a drink is going to be virtually frowned upon in years to come. You're just pouring a drug into your system and there are so many problems that are associated with alcohol. For EDG, alcohol is just another aspect of what's on offer; it's not the be all and end all. Sure, you can also have a drink, but it's not the key driver. The key driver is the environment – it's a nice, safe, clean, fun place to go and spend an hour.

» The clever use of ambient lighting and natural light, combined with a carefully zoned audio system ensures the bar area is inviting and easy to communicate in.



» **Kingpin** embraces a club atmosphere by night with the use of a full complement of par cans and UV lights on club-style lighting bars.

you'd be lucky to see a hand in front of your face – very much a nightclub look.

Venue: How did those two extremes impact on your lighting design?

David Bird: I had to design an infrastructure such that Kingpin could markedly change the look and feel of the space quickly and painlessly.

Venue: For example, you have nightclub-like lighting bars over the bowling lanes.

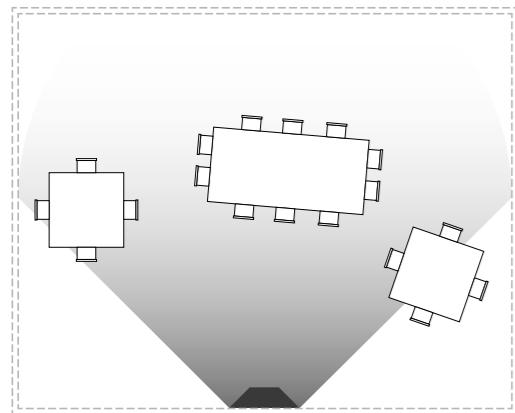
David Bird: That's right and they're nightclub-type fittings. So you can program

that setup for abundant UV light, which is very much a night-time look. The Coemar moving lights are straight out of a nightclub handbook... all we're missing is the smoke machines!

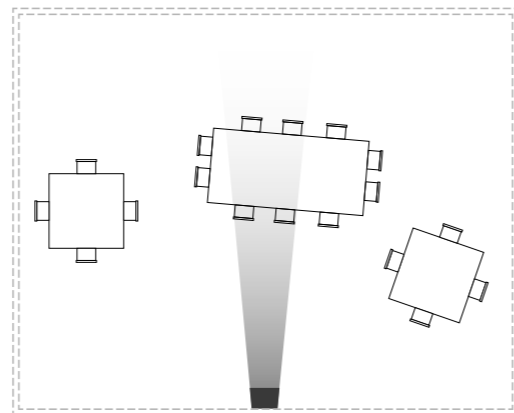
Venue: I guess the biggest point of difference between Kingpin and a regular nightclub is the fact that it's a predominantly white space rather than a black space. Does the white interior make your job easier or more difficult?

David Bird: A black box interior is like

lighting blotting paper – you point a light somewhere and it stops. Meanwhile, white acts as a reflector, so aiming a light will produce much more light for your dollar. Having that white canvas makes it very easy to change the look and feel of the room. In effect, the 'canvas' is the building, and you're using lights to paint the walls with light. So you can have an orange look today, blue tomorrow, or with moving lights you can display corporate logos. For example, if IBM was to hire Kingpin for



Loudspeaker coverage: having a wide-dispersion speaker (see left) spreads the sound evenly and ambiently across a wider area. Meanwhile a more focussed dispersion (see right) creates 'hotspots' – great for the dancefloor, not so desirable for seating/socialising areas.



» **Loudspeaker Coverage** – when to focus your sound and when to spread it around

Themeteck's John Weston referred to the Bose 802's 180-degree pattern of sound dispersion and the desirability of such a wide dispersion in a venue such as Kingpin. What's he talking about exactly?

Think of a speaker as being like one of those adjustable-pressure nozzles you have on your garden hose. Regardless of how you adjust the spray setting on the hose you're still shooting the same amount of water, it's simply a matter of how wide you want to spread that water around. Now think of the punters as being the

pot plants that you're watering. Set the nozzle to a wide 'dispersion' and the pots get a gentle, even dose of water. Set the nozzle to the 'fire hose' setting and you might be able to shoot the water a greater distance but the pots get a real pounding – soil and muck goes everywhere. Yes, the same applies to speakers. The narrower the dispersions, the greater 'throw' and more concentrated power you get, but in more low-key, conversational areas this often just causes you problems – you miss some tables, while other patrons

get blown off their chairs. The wider the dispersion (as on the Bose 802s) the wider and more even the sound coverage.

Of course, if you're trying to focus sound onto a dance floor then a more narrow dispersion (fire hose setting) is desirable – put lots of energy into one spot. That's what King has done as well, by using a pair of narrower dispersion EAW speakers for the XBar dance floor. Horses for courses... but it's worth knowing when to keep your focus narrow and when to spread your sound around

– CH.

an evening, its logo could be displayed in all the monitors and splashed over the walls via the moving lights... all using the distinctive blue of IBM. Saying all that, the downside of the white interior is that you have to be far more careful where you're pointing those lights.

Venue: So on one hand you're getting more of an effect for your dollar thanks to the white interior but it can also easily splash light where you don't want it?

David Bird: Correct. For example, because of the extra reflections, we found it a challenge to keep the lights away from the video screens – our effects need to be in harmony with the visuals and not wash out any programming.

Venue: Speaking of reflections, the white plastic material on the ceiling adds something special.

David Bird: Sure. It's a glossy polymer called Monocryl that was installed as a false ceiling, and then heated to make it taut. It naturally hangs still until the air conditioning and the subwoofers start to shake it. We skim light off the pulsating panels, and that way we achieve a shimmering effect (often coinciding with the beat of the music) for nothing. A further bonus is in the way the material reflects the vision from the row of monitors above the bowling lanes.

AudioVisual King Hit

The recurring themes of Kingpin is versatility and flexibility, and much like the lighting, the sound and video installation needed to keep pace with the varied uses and clientele of Kingpin. John Weston of Themetech has been involved with many of the EDG ventures and undertook the task at Richmond.

Venue: This certainly wasn't a standard nightclub audiovisual installation job was it John?

John Weston: No. Obviously it's far more

multipurpose than that. So whatever the mood is at any given time, the music level must match it. If the venue is hosting bowling with kids during the day, then the sound levels and the choice of music must be appropriate to that group. Conversely, at night the system must be able to kick.

Venue: Can you describe to me what the main challenges were in designing an appropriate sound system for this space?

John Weston: It's always a challenge to maintain a constant volume level across the various zones in Kingpin. Localised volume levels can be difficult because of speaker placement. For example, in so many venues, as you approach the bar, you can't hear yourself think. EDG has enough experience to know that patrons don't want deafening volume around the bar. Ideally, patrons step into the bar region and carry out easy communications. Then as soon as your move from the bar area you then get the sensation of your hair being blow-dried thanks to the sound pressure level coming out of the speaker immediately above. The challenge is achieving this in a space where there are no walls and no physical barriers to the sound.

Venue: To ensure that different areas enjoy specific volume levels, do you need to break the venue into zones?

John Weston: Yes, we have the capacity to make the sound louder around the bowling lanes than around the bar, but running the same program material. Sound can be running at a dance level in the XBar but at a conversational level in the bowling alley, coming off the same output source.

When designing a system it's very easy to, say, crank up the output level on the mixer, but people in quieter areas (like the toilets) will have their heads blown off. In my design, regardless of the overall system volume, when you step from the XBar into the toilet, there is still a significant drop in volume.



» A view of the bowling lanes showing two of the 36 CRT monitors in the room and one of the Coemar iSpot moving lights. You can also make out the reflective properties of the floating polymer 'ceiling'.

» Product Focus

Bose 802 Loudspeaker

Bose's 802 loudspeaker feels like it's been around forever... well decades anyway. The current incarnation, the Panaray 802 Series III loudspeaker, has been re-engineered for better performance, versatility and durability. Eight proprietary 4.5-inch (11.4cm) full-range drivers and active EQ help deliver vocals and instruments with smoothness and warmth at high or low SPL. One of the key drawcards of the 802 is its ability to evenly cover a wide listening area. The 802 is quite a low-profile speaker as well... so along with its subjectively good looks, installing the 802 into the right spot in your room (or outdoors) is quite an easy proposition.

» **Bose Australia:** 1800 659433 or www.bose.com.au



Coemar iSpot 150 Moving Light

The iSpot 150 is a good value moving light that sets itself apart by virtue of its compact housing, on-board controller (it can record DMX info and operate programs in standalone mode) and its sleek, eye-catching industrial design.

» **Coemar Desisti Australia:** (03) 9467 8666 or www.cdaust.com.au



» **Kingpin Richmond (VIC):** 1300 131916 or www.kingpinbowling.com.au

» **Lighting:** Vision Design Studios: (03) 9615 3219 or www.visiondesign.com.au

» **Lighting Suppliers:** Lightmoves: (03) 9701 2500 or info@lightmoves.com

» **Audiovisual:** Themetech: (02) 9571 9444

Separate zone volumes are preset by the tappings on the speakers themselves; therefore any overall shift in the output level in the mixer maintains a consistent ambience throughout the space.

Venue: You chose a Bose speaker system for this job. How does that company's speakers meet the criteria you've outlined?

John Weston: The room is awkward. It's as wide as the bowling alleys (10 lanes) then narrows to the XBar at the other end, which is also the live music space. In order to get the coverage and sound pressure levels required, I decided on the Bose system. The Bose 802 speakers are most suitable because they have a wide 180-degree sound coverage pattern. With such a wide coverage, the sound is dispersed more evenly across the room and there are fewer 'hot spots'.

Venue: And what amplifiers are you using to power the Bose system?

John Weston: The system is running on Australian Monitor amplifiers, which we have found to be reliable and durable.

Venue: Who provides the sound and video programming?

John Weston: EDG out-sources that job to a Brisbane-based company called Nightlife Music Video. They use a number of selection criteria such as the personal taste of the operating staff and public pressure as to what is current. People will come in and if they don't hear the music they like, they leave and go somewhere else so it's important for them to stay on top of that area. The programming is constantly running in Kingpin, with vision piped through the in-house television network. The venue runs 22 video inputs, which are modulated and fed to the projectors and televisions.

The system can place any video source onto any screen in the venue, including music video, Fox footy, or a client's corporate video.

Venue: How many monitors and projectors are in Kingpin Richmond?

John Weston: There are five video projectors, ranging from the four-metre main screen, to the rear projection high definition display onto glass in the bowling area, plus 36 CRT monitors. The audio has 15 speaker cabinets and eight subwoofers. «