

# REBEL SPIRIT, PRACTICAL BUSINESS

Brothers Matthew and Ben Jones bring it all to their UK-based Roxy Ball Room chain

## At First Glance

- ⇒ Brand development
- ⇒ Each location's unique architecture
- ⇒ Prebooking success with online reservations = awesome cash flow

By Paul Lane

**U**K-based Roxy Leisure's mission statement reads: "Roxy Leisure was founded with a rebellious spirit, going against the norms of what was around us. We are dedicated to bringing a fun experience through great gaming, great beer, great food, and great music. Our objective is to champion a competitive, socializing revolution to new cities across the country."



Joel Mitchell

Brothers Ben and Mathew Jones first went into business in 2004 when they had the idea to build and operate bars and restaurants. The locations offered top quality food and beverages in settings that were a total contrast to the traditional English pub. At the time, they operated as the Jones Bar Group. In 2013, Jones Bar Group morphed into Roxy Leisure and now has nine Roxy Ball Room venues in the UK. Bowling was introduced at the Roxy Lanes venue in 2014.

Joel Mitchell, the brand development manager for Roxy Leisure, says, "Splitting the company into two



Mathew Jones



Ben Jones



## FEATURE



The lanes at Roxy Ball Room

separate operating divisions [in 2013] allowed us to concentrate exclusively on the Roxy Leisure business. We realized we were at the forefront of the social competitive gaming scene." It was six years before the next Roxy Ball Room venue included bowling; four lanes were installed in the Roxy Ball Room in Liverpool in 2019, closely followed by a ten-lane installation in the Birmingham location in January 2020.

Why six years between venues to include bowling? Joel explains, "All our venues are housed in existing shells; one was an [un]used warehouse housing forklift trucks; one was a British homestore retail outlet; one was part of a shopping center; and yet another was

a 1920s hotel. Space was the only issue we had; bowling is a massive attraction for us. We knew early on, from [our experience with] Roxy Lanes in 2014, that the need for city center bowling was there. For us, it was just about finding city center space that was big enough." Joel continues, "We try to incorporate elements of the original shells as features, for example, exposed brick, beams, and girders." Roxy Ball Rooms' distinct industrial style is designed by CEO Mathew Jones.

Each Roxy Ball Room venue offers a variety of competitive and social leisure amenities. The Liverpool venue features nine American pool tables, four 22-foot tournament-standard shuffleboards, six Olympic-standard ping pong tables, nine-hole indoor mini-golf, four beer pong battle stations and four full-size bowling lanes, plus extensive food and beverage service. Other venues include a mix of these same gaming features, plus an arcade loaded with 40-50 games and karaoke booths. Roxy Leisure owns their own arcade machines which enables them to rotate machines between venues.

Bowltech UK Ltd is the supplier of bowling equipment for the Roxy Ball Rooms. Lanes at the Liverpool location are from System 300 in Finland, with walnut approaches and arctic birch lanes. The pinsetters are manufactured by the German company SES, and the automatic scoring system is from Steltronic in Italy. "Roxy



The ping pong tables are a major draw to Roxy Ball Rooms across the UK



Leisure is a great and extremely focused group of guys to work with. Their unique offering through the Roxy Ball Room brand is proving to be extremely popular. Bowltech UK is proud to be partnering with Roxy and continuing to provide bespoke installations with new and unique product introductions in each venue," says Nick Keppe, managing director of Bowltech UK. Roxy Leisure will be adding six lanes to the Manchester location and another eight lanes at the Nottingham venue. This fits the company's long-term goal of opening two new venues every year.

Success in the hospitality industry relies on employees. It is in this regard that Roxy Leisure excels. Joel explains that, "What we look for when hiring new employees who deal directly with customers is a person with his or her own [unique] personality coupled with the desire to help people. Everything else can be taught. The Roxy experience is not robotic; it makes you feel at ease and the staff [is] genuinely happy for you to be there."

As for training, Joel explains that Roxy Leisure has a full onboarding and induction process. "We have the Roxy Academy," he continues, "which is a four-week long course that employees who want a career in hospitality undertake to get to the top level of our expectations." Employees wear Roxy branded tee shirts and aprons. Floor-tenders wear blue, bartenders wear orange, and barbacks and chefs wear black. Managers wear smart clothing of their own.

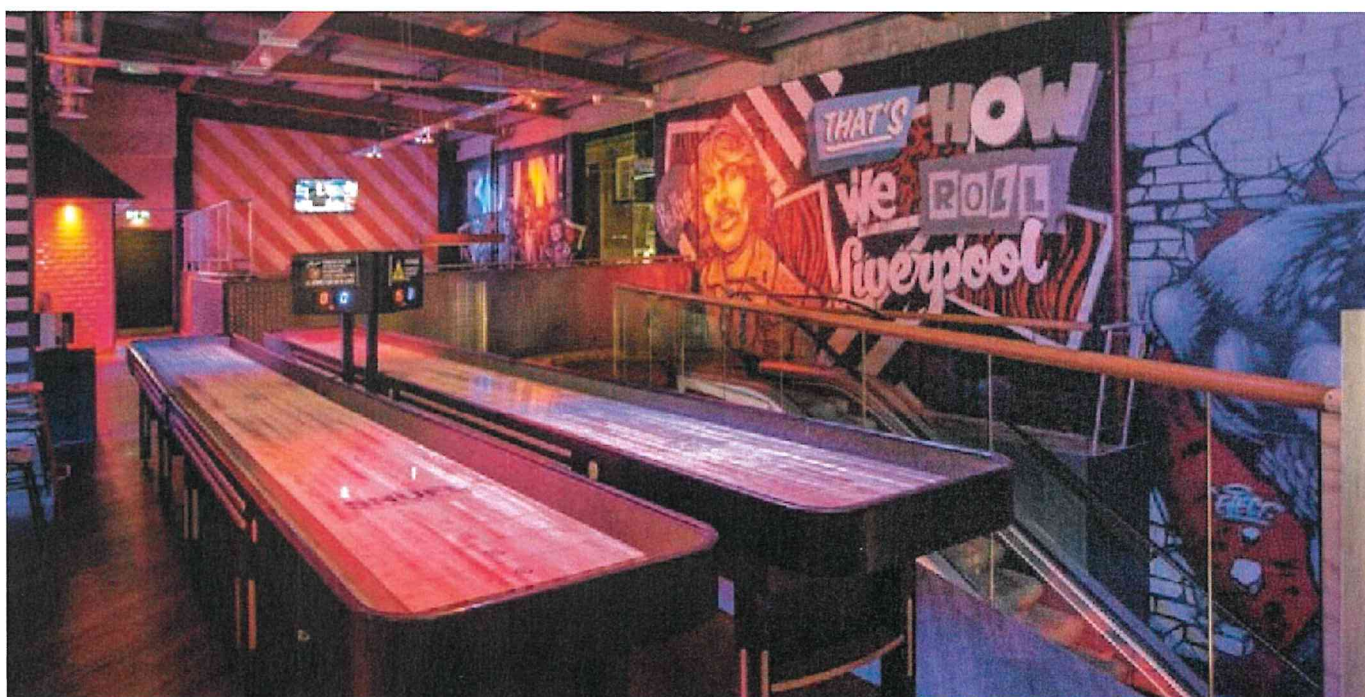
Table shuffle boards are another great game attraction



Neon designs add energy to the game rooms

Most marketing activities are managed by Joel from the head office. This includes local advertising across various media, and direct-mail targeted advertising. "Mass emailing is important and effective; we are coming up to 90,000 subscriptions and growing," Joel says. In step with the industry-wide standard, Roxy Leisure uses social media to advertise. "We recently switched to one [Instagram] account which doubled [the number of followers] in just three months," he reported.

The website has proven to be extremely effective too, which was updated to improve the customer experience. Joel said, "50% of our cash comes from pre-booking through the website." In an old school move, Roxy Leisure relies heavily on





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outside sales calls, because the team feels they get great results, especially with corporate clients. "We are the place for a corporate blow-out party, which is basically our bread-and-butter business," Joel said. "Group bookings — corporate or otherwise — is an area where we outdo most others, as we can offer numerous gaming options in one private area." For example, Liverpool has five enclosed game areas on different floors, and each floor has a mix of American pool, beer pong battle stations, and ping pong. Each area varies in size and can accommodate groups between 30-100 people. Each distinct floor and game area can be privately booked for parties.

Unlike other entertainment spots, Roxy Ball Room's customers have payment options: customers can choose to pay as they go, or tabs can be opened upon check-in. The customer's bank card goes into a card safe and the customer is given the key with their tab number on it. At the end of the visit and payment has been processed, the card is returned to the customer. "We feel customers like to have choices when they visit, and we believe that giving them choices to make payment is a more customer-friendly way to do business," added Joel.

During the global pandemic crisis, Roxy Ball Rooms were affected just like everyone else in the entertainment industry. But in anticipation of being allowed to reopen, at the time of this interview, they had recalled their employees. "All staff have received their COVID-19 inductions and are back on their rosters for cleaning and additional COVID training," said Joel. All employees have received intensive training in maintaining the highest standard of cleaning and hygiene. Each location now requires pre-booking for every attraction; under normal circumstances, reservations are not required. Since Roxy Ball Room venues are generally large, minimal rearranging of game tables and spaces was necessary to comply with the

government restrictions for opening.

While following all of the UK's national restrictions, Roxy Ball Rooms will implement these additional measures:

- All employees will have their temperature checked before starting their shift.
- If any employee shows signs of any illness (no matter how trivial) they will be sent home.
- Bookings are limited to a maximum of six people.
- Bowling lane bookings are limited to four people.
- A party can still book bowling lanes for six people but will be split between two lanes to ensure enough room on the ball returns for one ball per person.
- Social distancing will apply throughout the venues.
- Guests' hands will be sanitized on entering the facility.

The Roxy Ball Room website clearly describes what to expect when visiting a venue and what measures have been taken to ensure guests safety.



Roxy Ball Room developed Table Golf, a new game that is half mini-golf, half pool

Mathew and Ben Jones, along with Joel Mitchell, have achieved their objective to provide competitive, social, game-based venues in cities across the UK. Roxy Ball Rooms are ready to roll in the post-pandemic world. ❖



Paul Lane is former Director of Marketing and Marketing Services for AMF Bowling, Inc. He has been the director of 18 AMF World Cups, an officer in national and international trade associations, and a pro bowler during a career that spans more than 60 countries and 50 years.