

AUX ATELIERS: THE UNIQUE FEC CONCEPT POWERED BY QUBICAAMF

Inside the ground-breaking €8 million complex created by two passionate French entrepreneurs

Aux Ateliers is one of the largest FEC complexes in France. Its offerings range from children's birthday parties to corporate team-building events and seminars. Its four-star hotel features a separate car park, and activities at the FEC include a 170-square-metre climbing area, a trampoline park, laser games, a billiard room, and 24 bowling alleys. These face a 45-metre-long LED screen, on which videos, birthday messages and photos can be projected.

There is a range of dining options to suit everyone, from pre-schoolers in need of a quick refuelling break to serious gourmets requiring quality wining and dining. The three different F&B options include a bistro, a street food corner, and a cosy wine bar on a mezzanine.

The project, which cost in the region of €8 million, has created around fifty jobs. It is the brainchild of two entrepreneurs and childhood friends with a passion for bowling and gastronomy: Christophe Boillot and Anthony Serra.

Aux Ateliers taps into several emerging trends, such as supersized FECs and eatertainment, but is also a ground-breaking endeavour in its own right. Its unique positioning across the sport, leisure and gastronomy sectors also makes it an ideal flagship for QubicaAMF, a leading provider of high-quality, innovative products for bowling and entertainment centres, QubicaAMF is a fusion of Qubica and AMF, the world leaders in hardware and the world leaders in software specialised in the bowling sector. In France, two out of every three bowling centres use the company's solutions.

To see the products in action, blooloop spoke to Valentin Saulnier, manager at Aux Ateliers and a member of France's National Bowling Team, as well as Guillaume Chêne, sales and marketing director at QubicaAMF. They discuss keys for success in the sector, and the new opportunities Aux Ateliers brings in terms of business model, marketing, and customer experience.



QubicaAMF and Aux Ateliers

Introducing the relationship between Aux Ateliers and QubicaAMF, Chêne explains:

"Aux Ateliers is a unique FEC concept and the perfect showcase for us. It's a place where we put together the most cutting-edge equipment – everything from the pinspotters to the lanes, the scoring and all the software that come with it.

"Aux Ateliers is also unique in its combination of the ability to practice bowling as a sport, and as an entertainment activity. That is a big topic here in France. Plus, it is a place where the top-level players go to train, like Valentin and his girlfriend, Alexandra Lopes, who are both part of the national team."

QubicaAMF provides both software and hardware at Aux Ateliers.



Bowling, while popular, is not a growing sport in France in terms of the number of people in the Federation:

"We believe it needs promoting," says Chêne. "Building this kind of FEC is key when it comes to communicating bowling to new generations. The more players there are at the leisure level, the more chance there is of people going on to practise it as a sport and, ultimately, as a high-level sport."

Aux Ateliers draws people to bowling as a fun leisure activity where they can socialise and spend quality time together as a family or group of friends. It can also host corporate engagements.

"Bowling as a fun pastime rather than a sport has been a very popular activity for years now," he adds.

Embracing new technology

Boillot originally used traditional free-fall pinspotters for his two bowling centres, says Saulnier. However:

“Pinspotters are going through what is, essentially, a revolution. The most efficient pinspotters now have strings attached to the pins.”

With a string pinspotter, there is no interference with how the pins fall. The pins are pulled back into the rack, and the machine resets any pins that were not knocked down by the roll.

“It’s so much more efficient, both for sport and entertainment bowling,” Saulnier says. “Christophe decided, on my advice, to move away from the way things had always been done previously, and to open the new centre with string pinspotters. We certainly don’t regret it. We have already run more than 10 competitions. This system makes it so easy to manage the competition, as well as day-to-day sports bowling.”

Initially, Boillot, who had only ever run centres with the conventional pinspotters, had reservations about adapting to new tech. But now, he has been converted, says Saulnier.

“He now realises – we both do – that it’s a no-brainer. We no longer need to worry about time loss due to the mechanical issues that would arise with mechanical pinspotters.”

String pinspotter adoption is accelerating across the USA and all over the world. This is rapidly improving bowling operations and helping operators to deliver both authentic sport bowling competition and exciting entertainment that is easier, more efficient, more profitable, and more sustainable than traditional free-fall pin spotting machines. In turn, this is cutting costs and making operations stress-free. QubicaAMF is an industry leader in this newer technology with its EDGE String Pinspotter.



A passion for bowling

The two owners, Boillot and Serra, have very different backgrounds but a shared passion for the business.

“One is a specialist in bowling and other leisure activities; the other is a well-known chef,” says Chêne. “For Aux Ateliers, their vision was not to conform to the current trend and open a bowling centre. Instead, they wanted to open an FEC, with a variety of activities, including bowling, laser tag, climbing, trampolining, and so on, as well as a good restaurant, and a good hotel. They provide a whole range of experiences in one place.

“For instance, if you’re a company coming for a seminar, and you also want to enjoy wine, great food and to do some bowling, and stay for a couple of days in a nice hotel with a great restaurant, it’s ideal.”

A new type of FEC and bowling centre

Aux Ateliers serves a broad demographic spectrum and range of customer expectations. In terms of long-term strategy, its vision and positioning are unique.

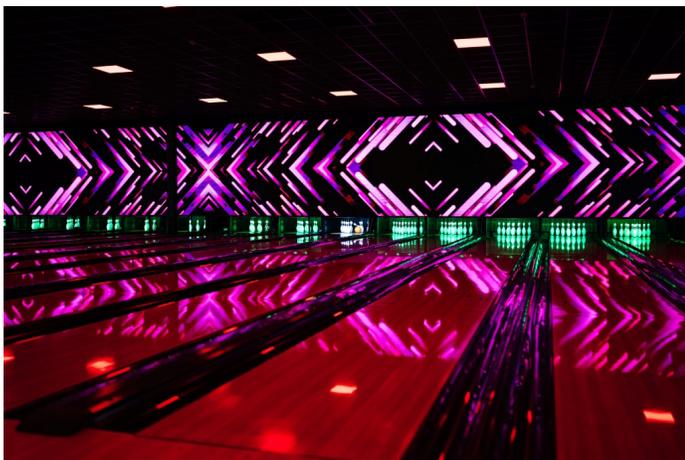
Saulnier comments:

“In the school holidays, we welcome families with children; the place is full of them. During the term time, they are at school, and it makes sense to have a business model. There are three or four different populations that come in at different times. We must be able to adjust our propositions for all customers and to meet – and surpass – a diverse range of customer expectations.”

Chêne attributes the FEC’s success to its distinct offering, the location, the equipment, the experience, staff, and the suppliers, including, notably, QubicaAMF.

“Looking at the business’s success, I would say there are two key factors. Firstly, the strength of the local partnerships. Christophe and Antony, the two owners, know a lot of people in the region. So, they have established a network at the local level, which is really interesting. The second factor is the business’s professionalism.

“It has the feeling of a family business, which gives a special touch when one enters the centre. There is Antony, one of the owners, who is a chef; Christophe, who is an ex-trainer of the French team, and a high-level bowling player; and there is Valentin, managing the venue, who is part of the national team. Then Christophe and Antony’s families also work in the business. It has a homey feel.”



QubicaAMF's worldwide reach

Concerning QubicaAMF, Chêne adds:

"As a result of being the fusion of the leader in hardware with the world leader in bowling software, QubicaAMF, which has a worldwide partnership with the International Federation of Bowling, is the top player in terms of equipping centres in Europe, certainly, and possibly in the world. We also work with the largest chains everywhere in the world.

"This includes the UK and the United States. For instance, in the UK we have got exclusive partnerships with Hollywood Bowl and Tenpin Bowling. We also have a partnership with a challenging new chain, Lane7. In France, we work with 99% of the chains, including the biggest ones such SpeedPark."

Further partnerships include Bowl Center, Bowling Star, Up2Play, Seven Squares, and others.

All the centres implemented by SpeedPark over the last 20 years

have been created with QubicaAMF. In addition, QubicaAMF invests a great deal of money in research and development. This differentiates the company from its competitors.

QubicaAMF, the largest and most innovative bowling equipment provider in the world, has over a century of experience. Its European headquarters are in Bologna, Italy. Furthermore, it has US headquarters in Richmond, Virginia, and a 10-strong team in Paris, France. With 600 employees globally, QubicaAMF builds and fits out more bowling entertainment centres than any other company in the industry.

With an installed base of more than 10,000 centres in 90 countries, the company has a sales and distribution network with a worldwide reach.

Innovation and R&D are key

All of QubicaAMF's software is developed in Bologna, while the hardware is manufactured in the US.

"We have the largest team of developers and R&D engineers in electro-mechanical products, software, electronics and entertainment systems in the industry," says Chêne. "In total, we have around 60 people working on R&D within the company."

Innovation and R&D are at the core of the company's ethos, something illustrated by its focus on HyperBowling, a revolutionary new attraction that extends reach beyond the existing bowling population. A blend of software, mechanical design, futuristic user interfaces, electronics, lights and sensors that deliver a never before seen on-lane experience, QubicaAMF's HyperBowling was awarded the 2018 Brass Ring for Best New Product at IAAPA. Currently, there are 5 (soon to be 10) HyperBowling centres in France.

"Being awarded the Brass Ring for Best New Product at IAAPA was quite a big deal," Chêne comments:

"Aux Ateliers, as it transpired, didn't choose to opt for HyperBowling. They decided to install the more traditional bowling equipment." QubicaAMF's ongoing mission is 'Making Bowling Amazing'. Driven by a conviction that bowling has so much more potential to attract and entertain even more people, the company wants to use its products to help customers fully unleash that potential.

QubicaAMF is also the organiser of the QubicaAMF Bowling World Cup. This is the largest annual sporting event, in terms of the number of participating countries, which promotes bowling on a global level.

A strong partnership

From Aux Atelier's perspective, Saulnier says:

"Initially, I knew QubicaAMF only for its bowling side. But as manager of Aux Ateliers, I discovered that all the activities we handle, the trampolining, kiddie park, climbing, and laser games, are done by QubicaAMF as an all-in-one, complete solution.

"QubicaAMF are extremely supportive, something we appreciate. Every time we have a question or an issue of some description, we





know whom to call; they are always happy to answer. The fact that they are based in Italy makes a real difference, in bowling terms. In the world of bowling, often when you need something solved, you have to speak to someone in the US. Having such great support here in Europe feels more local, so we are happy with that.

“On the sports side, we have a great consultant working for QubicaAMF. He thinks outside the box and is the best person imaginable to give us advice on the sports side. He helps us a lot. We have a lot of support from QubicaAMF.”

Something for everyone

QubicaAMF also has a worldwide partnership with the International Bowling Federation. The company’s pinspotting machine is the official machine for the IBF. This, Saulnier points out, makes sense:

“Here at Aux Ateliers, the focus is on both sports and

leisure. So, when it comes to sports bowlers, they can play using the official bowling machine of the IBF.”

Aux Ateliers’ fusion of high-level sport with broad-demographic entertainment, corporate events, and family fun serves to make it a something-for-everyone destination. It also makes serious sport bowling an engaging and welcoming prospect, something that can only benefit the sport in the future.