

CREATING AWARD-WINNING EXPERIENCES WITH QUBICAAMF

Director Massimo Matteuzzi talks COVID-19 recovery, industry accolades and the future of bowling

QubicaAMF is a leading provider of high-quality, innovative products for bowling and entertainment centres. The firm, which has developed over more than a century, has been celebrating a number of client wins at the most recent Bowling Center Architecture and Design Awards.

“Bowling is a traditional game but at the same time it is for families, friends, professionals and it’s good for a lot of people who just want to have fun. The audience is wide and it is very entertaining,” says Massimo Matteuzzi, QubicaAMF’s EMEA sales director and Country Managing Director for France. He is one of the key figures behind the firm’s continued growth in the European market.

“The company has a clear mission, which is making bowling amazing. So we want to entertain people who are bowling on our lanes and our equipped venues. Simply put, QubicaAMF has become the largest and most innovative bowling equipment provider in the world.”

International experience

Matteuzzi is a seasoned professional, having studied at top institutions around the world including Institut Européen d’Administration des Affaires (INSEAD), close to Paris, to learn business management.

Matteuzzi has also worked in a diverse range of sectors including high-end furniture and publishing. A core component of his career was with one of the largest cosmetics companies in the world.

“I am not from the leisure and entertainment industry, that’s clear!” he says. “It has been a learning curve for almost two years and that’s because you have to learn what is really specific to the bowling industry. It is very interesting – I have been exposed to many fascinating business models and thankfully we are in a good position.”

The history of QubicaAMF

The company has US headquarters in Richmond, Virginia, with its European headquarters based in Bologna, Italy.

QubicaAMF is a combination of Italy’s Qubica and American corporation AMF. Qubica was founded in 1993 by three visionary leaders, Roberto Vaioli, Luca Drusiani and Emanuele Govoni. Its mission was to become the market leader for scoring management systems.



Massimo Matteuzzi



Within the space of a decade, they had become a significant name in the industry. By 2004, management was holding discussions about a potential merger with AMF. On 14 June 2005, AMF Bowling Products and Qubica Worldwide officially announced that they were merging to create a strategic alliance, forming QubicaAMF Worldwide.

The firm now supports clients with regional offices found in the UK, France, Australia, Mexico, Hong Kong and Australia, alongside its two headquarters.

Delivering reliability

For many Family Entertainment Centres (FECs), bowling lanes are a critical part of the venue's infrastructure. This means that unexpected downtime can really hit revenues. QubicaAMF,

therefore, ensures that they are available should assistance be required. Notable chains including Bowl Center, Bowling Star, Games Factory and Speedpark for the French market, as well as Hollywood Bowl, Tenpin Bowling and Lane 7 in the UK, entrust QubicaAMF with delivering their bowling equipment.

“The biggest chains are working with us, fact. Not only because of the products but because they know that they can get some very good technical support and customer service. We have more than twenty people working as Technical Support Managers from our bases in Italy and the USA. Some of them are working seven days a week – I think that our support and service are unmatched.”

“Let's say that bowling business is a long-term partnership most of the time – it's not a typical retail business.”



Cruising the pandemic

The biggest impact on the bottom line for FECs has been the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the suspension of normal activity and the permanent closure of some centres. This has understandably had a knock-on effect on manufacturers, with many attractions and FECs delaying or cancelling investment projects. QubicaAMF however appears to be balancing any losses with new opportunities.

“I have to admit that from 2014 to 2019, the company was working at a very favourable pace, and the trend was extremely positive. We were achieving new records year by year, and then the pandemic came.

“For the leisure and entertainment industry, the pandemic period has not been the best but we have managed to survive very well. Of course, we have had some negative results. But now after the pandemic, I would say we have fully recovered, and we are in a situation which is extremely positive.”

“We will overachieve 2022 expectations, so projections by the end of the year are favourable, not only for the EMEA region but internationally. So the “restart” has been good and promising.”

With most of Europe regaining a sense of normality, other factors are coming into play.

“Now we are almost out of that crisis, we have a war in Europe which is not helping, and which will inevitably result in not only an increase in the cost of raw materials but a scarcity too. However, we have managed to cope with everything and for the time being, we are in a favourable position.”



Research & Development is key at QubicaAMF

One thing that has remained consistent over the decades is QubicaAMF's commitment to innovation. The firm has invested vast amounts of money and resources to ensure that each product delivers for its clients. Matteuzzi explains:

"We are credited as having the largest R&D team in the bowling industry. Currently, we have more than 70 people employed both in Bologna, Italy and Richmond, Virginia. We are talking about software engineers, electromechanical engineers, managers and more.

"You can imagine the number of technical competencies which are residing in these teams so it is a complex environment and organisation. If you look back two or three years, this team was made up of fifty-plus people, now we are seventy-plus people."

Going against the trend, QubicaAMF continued with product development during the COVID-19 crisis.

"Even during the pandemic, the company decided not to stop investing," adds Matteuzzi. "If you invest during crisis periods instead of resting, then you get a competitive advantage. This will pay back short and long term.

"Our R&D is big and complex, and I would say that it is a trademark of QubicaAMF today. From the CEO of the company, who is very passionate about product development, downstream, this makes sense to all the company."

With ongoing technological and sporting research, QubicaAMF has crafted a portfolio of products which suit a wide range of environments. Its name can be found in venues ranging from vintage bowling alleys to the most advanced leisure destinations.



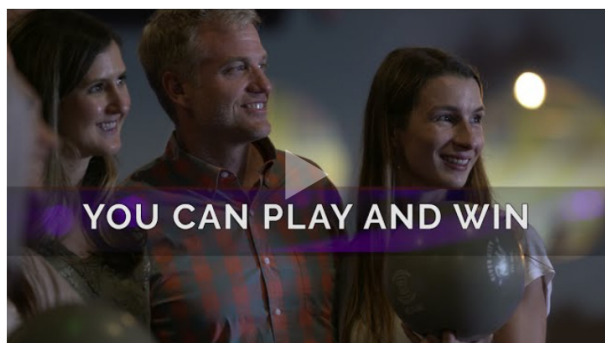
EDGE String

Amongst all its investments into R&D, QubicaAMF has not forgotten its roots as a manufacturer of traditional bowling alleys. EDGE String delivers the classic tenpin bowling experience, enhanced by unique QubicaAMF technologies that ensure fun for guests and longevity for operators.

"Practically speaking this is a great machine. EDGE String is clearly a big success and the reason is quite simple. The machine is well built, easy to operate and easy to maintain. It is a machine which is taking money from the first day of installation. And, it is delivering a very good experience in terms of bowling."

The basis of the concept goes back generations, however, there is a reason why EDGE String retains its popularity.

"The string machine is not a new technology. But we are the only company that decided, before I joined, to really focus on this and create the perfect one. So within the String machine segment of the business, I name the EDGE String a real category killer."



Hyperbowling

Hyperbowling's key audiences are Gen Z and Millennials, providing an added gaming element to bring bowling into a new technological era. Hitting the bumpers is encouraged with lit-up moving targets on the side of the lane, and multipliers that can boost players' scores, thanks to QubicaAMF's patent-pending HyperBump technology.

"This is a totally new concept. HyperBowling is a new way of playing bowling. It is unleashing the full potential of bowling, so you are applying the logic of a video game on a bowling lane. It is not just a projection, it's really interactive."



Conqueror X

Unbeknownst to bowlers, QubicaAMF is also key to maintaining the behind-the-scenes software which helps ensure facilities can run efficiently and profitably.

With QubicaAMF's Conqueror X ecosystem, FEC and bowling operators are granted access to a range of different features. These include lane management and bowling modes for casual staff, as well as business dashboards with statistics, dynamic pricing and order management for owners.

Operators can also easily access maintenance and service plans with a few taps of the screen.

"This is absolutely the most sophisticated and powerful solution in the market whenever it comes to bowling management systems."

Fly'n Ducks

A lesser-known bowling variant but growing in popularity is duckpin bowling. Provided in a flexible format, Fly'n Ducks is available in four lane measurements beginning with a 24' lane surface up to a full size regulation duckpin bowling lane.

"Born in Baltimore [US] in 1900, it's a different kind of bowling – it's not bowling for kids, it's definitely more for adults."

The sport is traditionally played on a standard ten-pin bowling lane using smaller balls and uniquely proportioned pins.

"We now have requests coming from the US and Canada where it is popular. We also have requests coming from Europe, such as the UK and France. So, we do expect to have plenty of installations in the coming months and years."

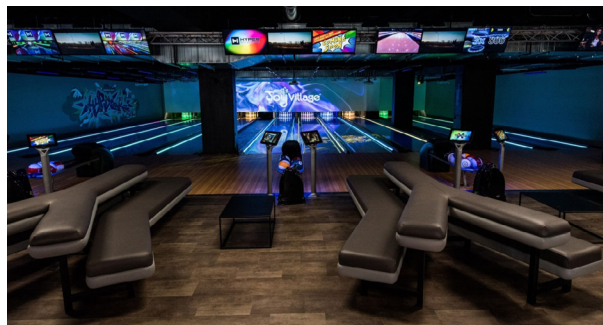


QubicaAMF's award-winning clients

A large number of QubicaAMF's customers won accolades at the 2021 Bowling Center Architecture and Design Awards. This includes Lane7 in Leicester, UK, a cashless venue with a wide range of activities including beer pong, shuffleboard, bars and a retro arcade, all centred around the core QubicaAMF bowling experience.

Matteuzzi says that QubicaAMF's clients winning awards gives the firm even more motivation to keep innovating and improving each day. "We have to be up to the expectations," he adds.

He in particular highlights Joy Village, winner of Best New International FEC Interior. QubicaAMF was the bowling equipment supplier for the site, which uses EDGE String pinspotters along with BES X Ultimate. The lane experience has also been upgraded with Hyperbowling functionality.



Other award winners include Best New International FEC Ancillary Profit Center, FEC Sevenum (Netherlands), and Best Modernized International FEC Interior, WOOP! Arena (Slovenia). Matteuzzi says the latter venue is notable as it is a country which isn't often celebrated in bowling circles:

"The interior design [of WOOP! Arena] is very high-end with regard to furniture and atmosphere. They also have escape rooms, laser tag and virtual reality to complete the offering. They use an industrial style and architecture – it's attractive. Frankly speaking, it is a good example of how great our operators are and how proud we are to enter into these kinds of centres and venues."



Staying ahead of the trends

Being a market leader, QubicaAMF is in an enviable position to spot new trends with a first-mover advantage to prepare for the future. Whilst some major changes, such as those brought on by the pandemic, can be unpredictable, Matteuzzi has already made some vital observations.

"I could say that bowling is now experiencing a 'boom'. We have a lot of requests for new bowling centres and bowling equipment at different kinds of centres. We are not only working with FECs, but the majority of them are."

"What they do see is that the customers, even more so because of the pandemic, are looking for immersive and engaging experiences. This is the reason why we developed Hyperbowling."

There has been a transformation of bowling centres from one or two-hour activity bases to a hub offering an afternoon of fun for families. FECs no longer have just a snack bar – they now feature themed bars, restaurants,

street food, bistros and quality food. "So now that we have a variety of F&B offerings – guests are requesting [food] which is of extremely good quality."

Customers are also wanting more varied activities. This means that FECs are having to adapt to cater for demographics with different tastes with rapid expansion.

"Some centres are becoming supersized. We have seen examples of centres which are looking for big sizes and big spaces. They want to have several attractions and offerings dedicated more to a wider demographic."

The QubicaAMF business

The entire entertainment industry including bowling has recently started focusing on sustainability.

"Last fall at IAAPA I attended a dedicated session on behalf of QubicaAMF to better understand where the whole industry is doing. We are gearing up as a company to start focusing on this matter."

Matteuzzi concludes his forward-looking predictions by emphasising QubicaAMF's focus on being a people-centric business; and how it will benefit the growth of both the company and the industry as a whole:

"We are really a community of people or colleagues sharing the same ideas. They work at the company as if it was part of their own business. Not only are we the largest bowling equipment manufacturer in the world, but we are a community; sharing our visions and ideas on how to entertain people in the bowling business."

QubicaAMF has also recently announced it will support this year's The World Games. The event will become the world's first International Bowling Federation (IBF)-sanctioned tournament using string machines.