

PING PONG PARLOURS

Structured Sessions

Ping Pong Parlours are temporary table tennis venues that occupy otherwise empty retail units in Shopping Centres. Although Parlours are unstaffed and provide an informal and unstructured setting for people to freely enjoy social table tennis, running more structured activities allows Parlours to offer an additional extra to visitors and improve their experience.

By introducing more structured sessions into Parlours, Shopping Centres are able to enhance visitor experience, whilst generating further positive PR and attracting more people to the Parlour and the Centre alike. Local table tennis clubs and leagues are also able to benefit from these sessions, as they are able to attract and communicate with hard to reach people and groups – which could result in recruiting new members and increasing income. Finally, the visitors themselves are able to be more social and interact with other members of the community, as well as further increasing their physical and mental wellbeing by taking part in physical activity.

Session Ideas

There are various sessions you can run within Parlours, either for specific groups or to encourage everyone to join in. See details of the three sessions ran in the Intu Milton Keynes Parlour for inspiration;

1. Women and Girls Session

In order to engage more females in the sport, we ran a free one-hour women and girls' only session within the Parlour. The session was advertised one week before the event with two posters within the Parlour and a Facebook Event, which targeted females in Milton Keynes and was boosted for £20. People were encouraged to join the event, in order to give an indication of the number of people attending.



The session was delivered by a Level One qualified female coach, who plays at a local club. It was thought that a female coach would make the participants more comfortable. At the start of the hour, participants were asked what they wanted from the session. As the majority of participants were beginners, they wanted some basic coaching tips and fun games. We started with practising forehand, backhand and serving, followed by an introduction to the rules of the game. After 20 minutes, we moved on to playing singles and doubles and finished with a couple of fun games of 'Round the Table'.

The session attracted eight participants, including a group of three friends and one of their mothers, a mother-daughter pair, and one current and one previous Table Tennis England employee. The group of friends saw the event on social media, and the mother-daughter pairing saw the posters within the Parlour.

Overall the session was a success, with all participants enjoying the sessions and feeling they learnt some new skills. The Facebook Event reached a total of 1,800 people, meaning more people are aware of the project. However, boosting the event did lead to several 'fake likes' on the Ping England page – therefore sharing the event in relevant groups rather than boosting the event might be more worthwhile.

2. Robot Challenge and Exhibition Match



To provide a more competitive session, we hosted a combined Robot Challenge and exhibition match event. The event was advertised with two posters within the Parlour a week prior to the event, along with social media posts on the day of the event.

Over the course of two hours over lunch, visitors could take part for free in the Robot Challenge, where they had 60 seconds to return as many balls fired from the robot as possible. A member of staff manned the robot, and recorded participants' scores and contact details. At the end of the event, the highest scorer received a £100 Intu voucher, kindly donated by the Centre.

At the end of the Robot Challenge, we hosted an exhibition match directly outside the Parlour on a Ping table tennis table. The match involved a former Welsh Senior player and a former England Schools International player.

Only eight people took part in the Robot Challenge, which was far less than anticipated. The exhibition match only made a handful of people stop to watch, with the majority of people looking at the match as they walked past. The event may have been more popular if promoted more on social media, or by inviting people into the Parlour to take part in the Robot Challenge. We believe the exhibition match wasn't particularly successful due to people not knowing that it was an exhibition match, therefore this could have been advertised better.

3. Generic Session

To engage a wider range of people in the Parlour, we ran a free one-hour session on National Fitness Day that anyone could attend, from 5-6pm. The session was advertised one week before the event with two posters within the Parlour and a Facebook Event.

The session was delivered by a Level One qualified female coach, who plays at a local club, with support from two Table Tennis England employees. On arrival at the Parlour, seven people were already playing on the tables however didn't know the event was being put on. After being told what the session could include, everyone decided to stay for the duration of the event, with one more joining to make a total of eight participants. The majority of participants were competent players therefore didn't want any basic coaching tips, instead they were interested in competitive games. The first 20 minutes of the session involved 'King of the Table' where participants played first to five points and the winner stayed at the top of the table, with others following a ladder system. Following this, participants played several games of singles against each other, with many wanting to take on the session leader as a challenge. The session finished with a game of 'Round the Table', with knocked-out participants either continuing to watch the game or playing on the other table.



Overall the session was successful, as all participants enjoyed the competitive atmosphere and games. One group of four friends said they come to the Parlour every day, and it was an exciting event to be a part of. The Facebook Event reached a total of 153 people, with only one person responding to the event – a noticeable lower amount than the women and girls session.

Top Tips

Sessions within Ping Pong Parlours can either be one-off or more regular, for example once a week or once a month. Sessions can be run by Centre staff, local table tennis clubs or leagues, or local community groups.

Here's some top tips on running sessions within Ping Pong Parlours;

1. Promote your sessions far and wide!

Use posters in the Parlour and throughout the Shopping Centre to advertise your sessions. You should also consider using social media to spread the message, or using a Facebook Event to let people know key information. Make sure you include dates, times, details of what the session will involve and a point of contact should anyone require any more information.



2. Be ready to adapt

It's a good idea to have a rough plan for your sessions, but be prepared to be flexible and adapt your games or drills. This could be needed due to number of participants or particular needs of those taking part. Remember to keep the participants at the centre of the sessions and to ensure everyone is involved – perhaps ask the participants what they would like from the session, so that you can meet their needs and expectations and keep them coming back!

3. Utilise local links

Make the most of different local links that could assist in promoting or leading sessions, such as local table tennis clubs, community organisations or local press. If you're running a session for a particular group, get in touch with local organisations who work with those groups – for example for older people reach out to a local U3A group to see if they would promote the session to their members.

