



Bingo, South-of-the-Border Style

by Randee Kerns

For everyone who has been to Mexico, Latin America or South America, you have seen a much different style of bingo with a much higher energy level than the bingo we are all used to in the United States or Canada. While a 90-number game with a fast-paced ball call is the normal bingo in Central America, South America and Mexico, there are 75-number US-style games played in those countries.

"In order to create a fun and exciting bingo experience and also expand the customer base for U.S. games, it would be beneficial for managers to create and advertise special sessions catering to players in areas where they have a significant immigrant population from Central America, South America and Mexico."

In both types of games you see a much higher level of energy from the players as well as much more conversation and interaction among them while the game is going on. In most halls you see and hear players being very animated, chanting for the number or numbers they need to win and generally displaying their emotions while playing the game.

In Central America, Mexico and South America 75-number games are mostly played by organizations that run one session per week, a couple of sessions per month or a session per month. There are some locations in these countries that have 75-number games and play five or more sessions per week. The bingo sessions that are run once a week or less are much like smaller games in the U.S. where the players are attending the game for a social activity as much as for a chance to win prizes, but in all cases there is a very high energy level in these games.

For immigrants from these countries coming to a bingo hall in the U.S. is a big cultural change. If they carry on conversations in their group at the game surrounding players are not happy. If they chant for the number or numbers they need for a bingo, players around them are not happy. If they display their normal emotions while playing, the surrounding players are not happy. Many immigrants find the U.S. bingo atmosphere to be too big a cultural change to be comfortable playing in or if they do play, they really do not get the same enjoyment from the experience that they are used to.

In order to create a fun and exciting bingo experience and also expand the customer base for U.S. games, it would be beneficial for managers to create and advertise special sessions catering to players in areas where they have a

significant immigrant population from Central America, South America and Mexico. In these sessions the managers need to allow conversations to go on at the tables, allow chanting of numbers and generally allow an increased level of energy from the players to enhance their bingo experience. In creating these special sessions the managers would also be advised to have some bilingual staff available to assist the players.

One other aspect of U.S. bingo that immigrants have had to adjust to is how cards are priced and purchased. In Central and South America as well as Mexico bingo cards are normally sold by the single face or sheet for each game. Dealing with what a player receives for a buy-in package is an entirely new concept for these players. They think in terms of buying single cards or sheets for a fixed price in order to play and not what they need to buy in a package for an entire session.

In making a decision to create these special high-energy sessions, managers need to consider how cards will be sold. Creating a system where players buy single three on sheets to play and buy as many or as few as they want for each game for these sessions will help to achieve a higher level of player acceptance, particularly for new players the session attracts. This system allows players who have enough money to play just a few cards for all of the games or even to play just a few games to participate in the enjoyment of the game.

In most of the bingo games in Central and South America that are played once a week or less, the prizes are normally a percentage of sales or a small fixed prize, so the players are accustomed to smaller prizes being paid than are U.S. players and this lends itself to the pay by the card sales. Bringing a south-of-the-border style atmosphere to a session at a bingo hall is an opportunity to increase the customer base for the hall, make new bingo friends for everyone and introduce U.S. players to a different style and atmosphere to expand their cultural horizons. ♣

Randee Kerns is in Regulatory Compliance and Sales for Planet Bingo. He can be reached by calling (360) 789-5201 or email rkerns@planetbingo.com