

Go, ye, and convert thy brother's game

By Perry E. Miller
Technical Editor

Video games are making a comeback. The sudden emergence of the video cocktail table has brought new blood into the industry for manufacturers as well as operators--new people who are enthusiastic about the business and are bringing fresh ideas into it.

These newcomers see a bright future for video games. But established operators are also experiencing a resurgence of video games. Second generation video games like Atari's Tank and Midway's Wheels are producing excellent returns for their owners. Video games are becoming a vehicle of good earning power.

But among all this enthusiasm and excitement, there still remains to a large extent the problem of reluctance from operators and distributors to buy a new video game. A well established operator, thinking about his old two-player tennis games that are gathering dust, told me "to buy a new video game is throwing good money after bad. Look, I've been in this business some 15 years and have never had so many machines collecting dust. What these machines need is more than one game built into them, to make them last longer."

Some manufacturers are addressing themselves to this problem. "The operator has to be shown that the manufacturer is on his side. We are planning our future games so the player can select any one of three games. Also, the operator can replace three or four logic cards and change the three games. This gives the operator the advantage of keeping the earnings up without buying new machines," says Bob Nallick of Technical Design Corp. Technical Design Corp. isn't the only manufacturer thinking along these lines. Electromotion will soon market a table with the capability of offering

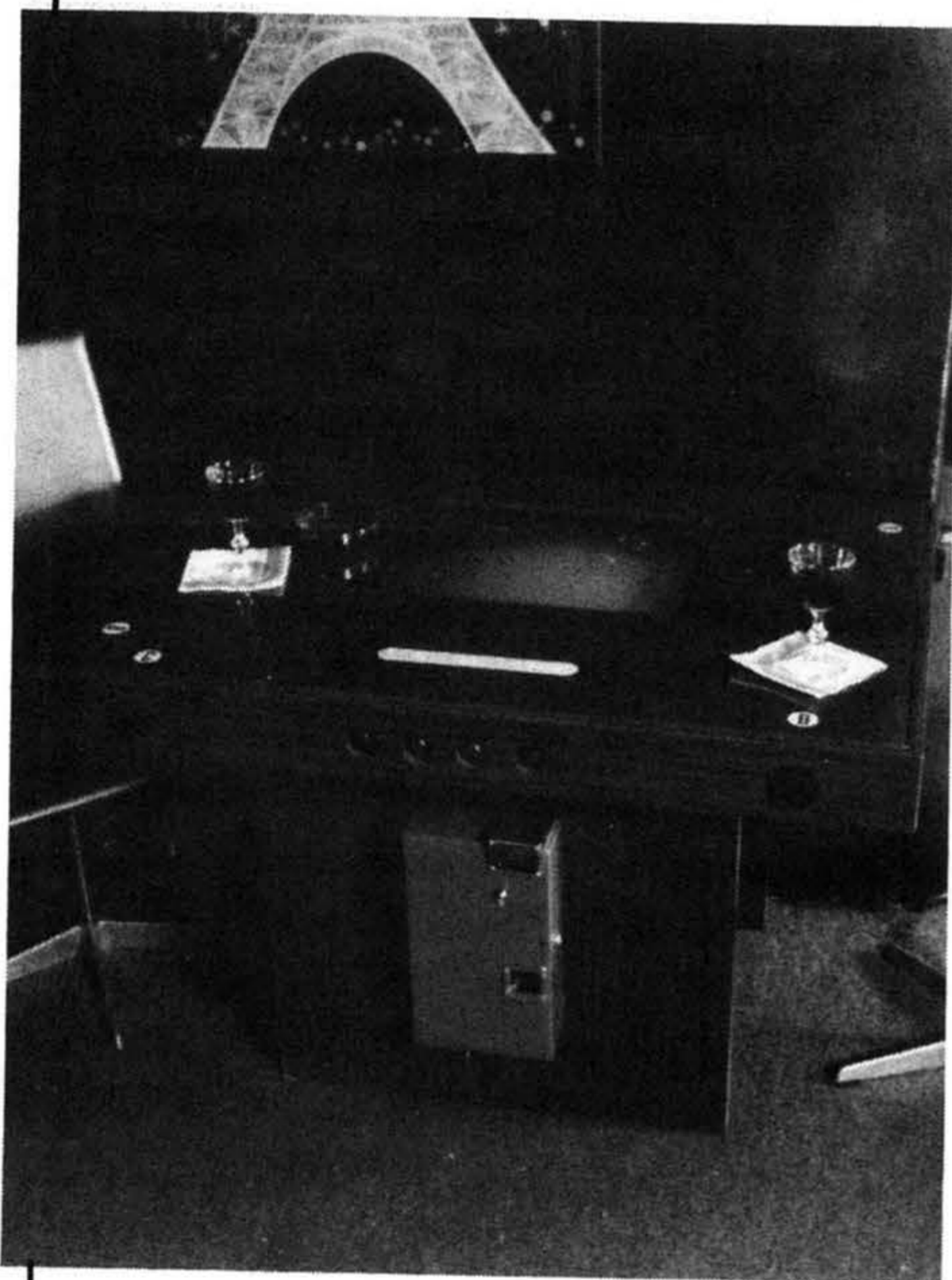
12 different games. According to Gene Smith, the game will make use of a modular concept and, "You can carry a complete inventory of games in a briefcase."

"Ya, that's fine for the future, but what about my old Winner IV? It just sits there grossing \$10 a week. Why doesn't some guy provide a method for turning it into a new game?" some operators ask.

Well, there are manufacturers who are doing just that, converting old video games into new money producing machines. Presently there are two types of video game conversions--the cabinet conversion and the logic board conversion. The cabinet conversion transforms your old upright video game into a cocktail table. Manufacturers like Edcoe Mfg. and Service Co. and Electronic Concepts Industries Inc. make cocktail table cabinets, which will accommodate your old video game. Edcoe's kit is complete with the top of the table prewired, mounting board for the TV and full instructions on the conversion. All you have to do is to exchange components from your old game to the new cabinet. If you don't care to do the conversion yourself, just send the thing to the factory and they will convert it for you. This type of conversion allows you to obtain a cocktail table at one-third the cost of a new unit. Edcoe offers their unit for about \$200.

Cabinet conversion manufacturers do not offer any changes in "logic." This second type of conversion is probably the most exciting area because your old tennis game can be transformed into a new video game.

A small conversion board with a few IC's on it is mounted on the main logic board of your old game and wire leads are connected between the two printed circuit boards. Sometimes an edge connector is used; so the new conversion pc (printed circuit) board becomes a plug-in module. The main point is that a whole new game can be created by changing the logic.



Oil wells don't pump out
all the oil in 6 months.
Like an oil well,
Kiddierama keeps right on pumping.

Give your old video 'religion,' convert it into a cocktail table

There are many different "new games" to choose from. Advanced Automation Associates provides a kit which converts Allied's Paddle Battle into a new updated tv game with three paddles per player and top and bottom lines. An additional feature is that the ball is not always served from the goal line. The end result of these modifications is that Paddle Battle can be returned to the same locations where collections have gone "dead" and provide "new game" collections. Advanced Automation Associates' kit consists of a printed circuit board with flying leads for connecting to the game's circuit board. "Hookup requires only a soldering iron and ten minutes," according to Val Rayboy. All of this for only \$49.95 per kit.

JRW and Video Games Inc. are offering a conversion in logic, which converts old pc boards into an improved Flim-Flam game. Joysticks which provide full court play and a curve button allowing each player to change ball direction are some of the game features. Also, each player can choose one of three paddle sizes. This allows a beginner to play an expert and win some of the time. JRW and Video Games Inc. can convert most two-player tennis and hockey logic boards. Send your old pc board and front panel to them and they will send you a front panel with new controls and your converted pc board with instructions for installation. Cost \$225.

Another company providing conversion kits is RDM Associates. They have a wide variety of different logic board conversions. Super-Pro is one of their conversions and is an ideal game for a cocktail table. Super-Pro is a conversion for Midway's Playtime. Two goalies are added to provide a two-and-four-player game. This game also has a one-player feature which is found on some of RDM's two-player tennis conversions. One player can just play against the machine. A rotating wall with holes in it is the target for the player. The player tries to hit the ball through the moving holes. If the player is able to beat the machine, he obtains a free game, but the holes become smaller making the game more difficult to play. There are four patterns of

increasing difficulty for the player to play against. An additional feature is a free game, if a mystery score is matched.

RDM Associates does custom conversions also. If you have an idea about how your "dead" video game should be converted, here is your chance to get it done your way. "We feel that many operators have good ideas about how they would like their games converted. We are here to help the operator obtain a money-making machine at a reasonable cost," says Steve Perry of RDM.

For you readers in Europe there is a company, International Cybernetic Machines Ltd. in Dublin, Ireland, that is providing logic board conversions for Europe. ICM converts video games like ALCA's Ping-Pong to a new video game with eight different games. ICM makes the same logic board conversion for Midway's Winner, but adds a color monitor. Some of the games in color are truly spectacular.

But what does the manufacturer of conversions have in store for the operator in the future? Steve Perry of RDM says, "I believe that after most of the older tennis uprights

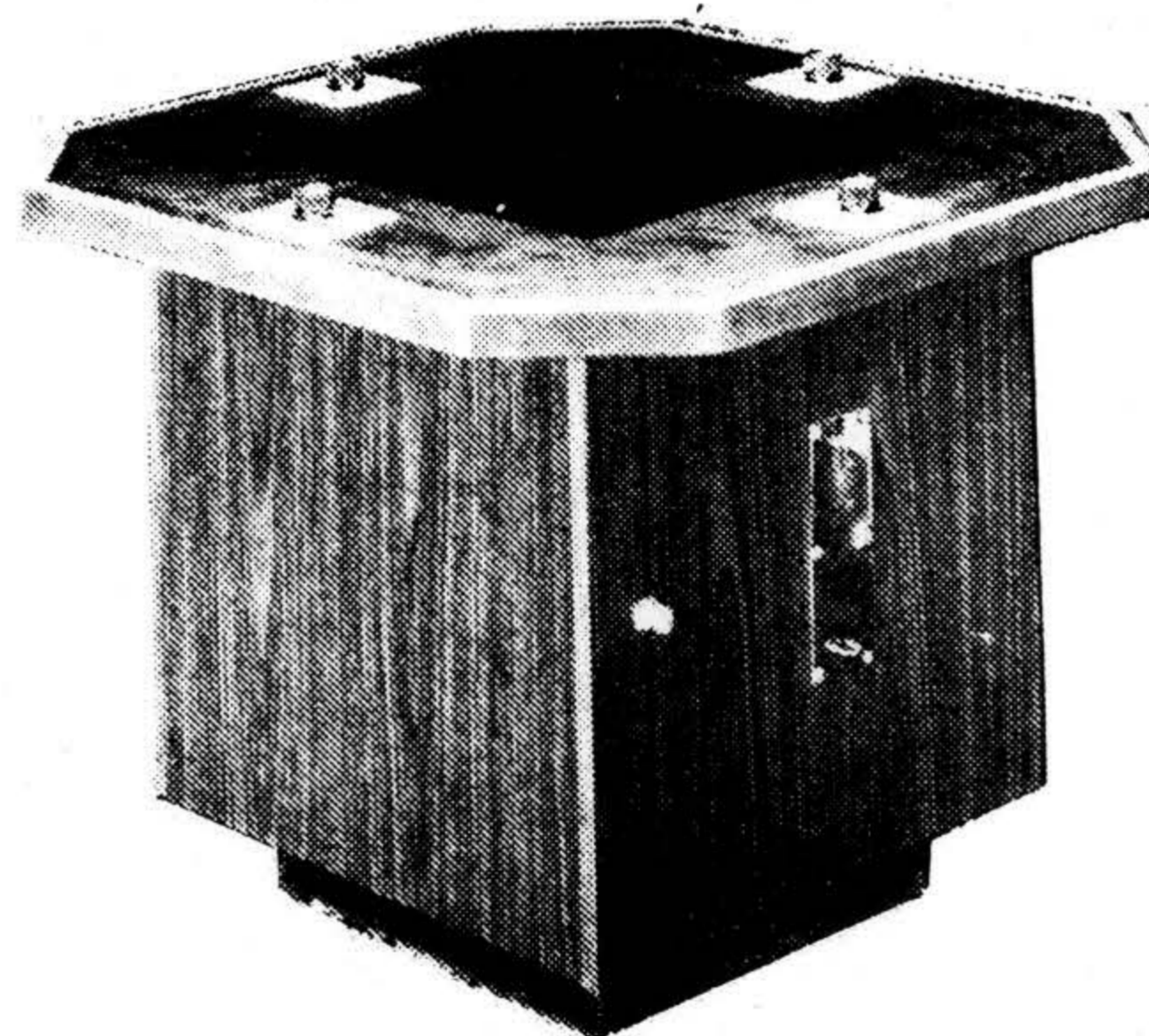
have been converted, there will be few conversions left to do. Of course, there will always be some video game which bombs and needs to be converted. However, I think conversions will turn into new game conversions. That is, we will provide an operator with a new front panel and new electronics to give him a new game."

Video games are a new type of game and will have their ups and downs. Like any new product line, it will take time to grow and mature. Pinball machines did not reach their present level of sophistication in five years. It took several years of trial and error. But as long as the general public continues to accept and enjoy video games, improvements will continue to be made.

Unfortunately, some games dwindle drastically in popularity. And as long as that happens, conversion will arise--to combat noise problems, to add free play, to add more memory, to increase the score capacity, to convert paddles into figures, to count coins electronically, to improve the sound, to add more sound, to add a video playback machine.

I think that conversion kits will play an important roll in the future of video games. The operator will be constantly faced with improving his machines. Because of this, operators will be seeking out digital electronic techs and engineers to help solve their problems. Electronic service centers will spring up all over the world and will be the clearing house for all types of conversions. Distributors will change to meet the competition and loss of revenue. Distributors will start asking manufacturers, "What options do you offer? Can the machine be changed to a new game and will you supply the electronics and the controls?"

Of course this won't happen overnight, but the operator who is struggling with video games today will be tomorrow's success story. He will know what is needed in a machine and know how to put it there when it is missing. He will keep abreast of who is manufacturing conversions and what they have to offer.



**IS YOUR INCOME OFF?
You should be looking
at Kiddierama.**