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Editor's letter

It's almost holiday season, and we're all looking forward to a little bit of time off... Except that in the gaming industry, everyone else's holidays are our bread and butter, so there's no rest for the wicked, as they say. Don't forget to enjoy some downtime this holiday season, it's all too easy to think "I can squeeze in another shift"... Before you know it you're burning out and underperforming, and was it worth it? How many people will look back on their lives and think, "I really wish I'd worked more"?

Have a great holiday season, whatever your religion or nationality. I certainly will be!



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Matt Broughton brings the latest news and features from the ever-changing world of online gaming

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Novomatic leads, others follow.

Bally links new tech

Mobile, Web, social

Bally Technologies has brought together all its mobile, Internet, and social projects into a new division, Bally Interactive. Among its goals is to offer mobile and online games – both play-for-free and pay-to-play – to land-based gaming operators.

And over the coming year, it will integrate its online and mobile technology with its existing tools for managing slot machines, customer relationships and business intelligence, to give operators "a

Land-based firms will get mobile and Web content

single view of the player".

"This is a very exciting step in the evolution of Bally Technologies," said Richard M. Haddrill, the firm's CEO. "As gaming expands outside the casino floor, our technologies will enable operators to reach their patrons wherever they are.

"This integration will enable our customers to stay connected to player trends and behaviour, as well as give their patrons access to player's club accounts when they are at home or on the go," he added.

Win some, lose some

Rank's mixed fortunes

Changing patterns in customer visits, the Spanish smoking ban, and the increasing popularity of mobile gaming have all helped to shape the fortunes of The Rank Group this year.

In the 42 weeks to 16 October, its UK operation Grosvenor Casinos revenue rose three per cent although it has lately been suffering from a lower win margin, which has hit revenue even while customer visits have risen.

Mecca Bingo was up one per cent. Here, conversely, a higher spend per visit has helped offset declining customer numbers.

In Spain, Top Rank España has felt severely the effects of the country's dire economic situation as well as the smoking ban. Total revenue was down by 19 per cent.

However, insisted the company, "while management's focus is on stabilisation, the Spanish gaming market offers long-term opportunities for Rank". Rank Interactive revenue was up 23 per cent thanks in part to the strong performance of mobile, which now accounts for six per cent of interactive revenue.

For The Rank Group as a whole, revenue climbed three per cent.

Trinidad's challenge

Time to get regulated

Trinidad and Tobago could regulate its gaming sector in an attempt to develop tourism, according to a government minister in the Caribbean state.

Currently, it has around 75 casinos and private clubs employing an estimated 10,000 people, and doing business largely without supervision.

"The casino industry has been operating in a very unregulated manner since it started," Minister of Trade and Industry Stephen Cadiz told local media.

"Gambling has been going on in Trinidad and Tobago for centuries but the current regulations under which the casinos have been operating are being abused under the Private Members' Club Act. There is also the problem of money laundering. The government will have to take a decision to regulate this industry."

The country has a population of only 1.2m, nearly all on the island of Trinidad. But regulation would attract foreign gamblers and help to boost the tourism sector, which has been growing but is not proportionally as important to the economy as it is in some other Caribbean nations.

It would also lead to better conditions for casino employees, Cadiz suggested.

IN BRIEF

THREE'S A CROWD? Singapore's government is reportedly considering the issue of a third casino licence, adding new competition for Las Vegas Sands' Marina Bay Sands and Genting's Resorts World Sentosa.

INTERNATIONAL ICE Organisers of January's ICE Totally Gaming expo in London say exhibitors from 51 different countries have now taken stand space. The list is topped by the US, Austria, Germany and Italy.

SPORTING CHANCES Nevada sportsbook operator Cantor Gaming has added new National Football League in-play betting options for all games, available online and via smartphones as well as at its six Las Vegas physical locations. The latest to open is at The Venetian.

BUYING IN Genting Casinos has acquired Fox Poker Club, London's only dedicated Poker facility. Situated on Shaftesbury Avenue in the West End, and opened with a full casino licence just over a year ago, it has more than 20,000 members.

GROWTH HOPES Estonian gaming software developer Playtech plans to raise \$156.5m for acquisitions and joint ventures through a new share offering. The biggest acquisition opportunity it has identified would swallow about 40 per cent of that sum, the firm indicated.

PATENT APPEAL FutureLogic says it will appeal in US federal court a recent judgement in favour of Nanoptix, with which it has been engaged in an intellectual property dispute. FutureLogic had alleged that Nanoptix's PayCheck printers – marketed as JCM products – infringed its patent, but a California court said the patent was invalid.

LEARNING LIQUOR US training firm Health Communications has updated its TIPS for Gaming course, aimed at casino staff whose job involves serving alcohol.

TRIBAL DEAL Table Trac is to supply a casino management system to The Crow Nation's Apsaalooke Nights Casino in Crow Agency, Montana.

Fighting crime with yet more forms

New US Treasury reporting rules will mean extra chores for casino offices

The burden of government-mandated paperwork on US casinos is about to increase significantly as Washington steps up measures to combat money laundering in the gaming industry, according to software supplier NEWave.

The US Treasury's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, also known as FinCEN, is planning major changes to the reporting required from casinos, some effective from the beginning of December and others from 1 July next year. They will bring casinos' reporting requirements into line with those that the federal government imposes on other businesses.

And NEWave – which not coincidentally says its systems can help solve the problem by filing forms automatically – is warning that the new requirements could lead to

operators having to increase their back-office headcount.

"The changes happening in FinCEN are huge, and will affect every single casino operator in the US without exception," said NEWave COO Tom Bechtel.

Electronic completion of forms through the FinCEN Website will now be compulsory, with no paper alternative permitted, and the forms include new data fields and suspicious activity categories. The Treasury estimates that each Currency Transaction Report (CTR) will take 40 minutes to complete, while each Suspicious Activity Report (SAR) will eat up a full two hours.

NEWave, however, claims its software can save casinos between \$100,000 and \$150,000 annually by automating much of the gathering and submission of data.

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How mobile can provide customer service, too

The handset isn't just a channel for gaming

The allure of mobile gaming appears irresistible, to land-based and online operators alike: it's as up close and personal with the consumer as you can get.

New rules in Las Vegas allowing gambling beyond the casino floor will be a great boon for the likes of Cantor Gaming, with its mobile sportsbook, and we can surely expect to see many more such services spring up over the next year.

On the online front, one of the biggest affirmations for mobile comes from Microgaming, probably the leading provider of Web gaming software. It sees an increasing amount of business coming from mobile, and has recently added an Android-based tablet and smartphone app to its line-up. The system makes its debut with eight casino games, and another 20 or more should be added by the end of the year.

Said Neill Whyte, Head of Product Channels for Microgaming: "The explosion of mobile gaming over the last 12 months, driven largely by the increased adoption of smartphones in developing countries, represents a huge opportunity for providers."

But it's not just the activity of gaming itself which can be, well, mobilised. Working with Bally Technologies, the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood, Florida has committed itself to a wide-ranging set of customer services available via mobile apps, available both on Apple's iTunes and the Android Market.

"The mobile app puts the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino right at patrons' fingertips," said Jeanine Repa, Senior Vice President of Brand Marketing of Seminole Gaming. It lets them buy concert tickets, inspect and book hotel rooms, learn about casino game rules, sign up for tournaments, read restaurant menus and make reservations, or consult GPS maps of the venue and surrounding area. They can even order room service while they're playing in the casino so that it's waiting for them upstairs.

Yet more features are planned, too. It seems that far from being a pure threat to land-based casinos' revenue streams, mobile could become another way to enhance them.

Mass. market opens

Three licences available, after 20 years of talk

While many eyes in the US casino industry are fixed on the possibility of three licences being granted in south Florida, a gaming bill has quietly been signed into law in a much sedater state: Massachusetts.

"There is a way to do this that does not compromise, and will not compromise, the character of the [state]," said Governor Deval L. Patrick, who gave final approval to the legislation permitting one slot parlour and up to three casino resorts, after nearly two decades of debate.

Already jockeying for licences are Mohegan Sun, which has plans for Palmer; Ameristar Casinos, which is arguing for a venue in Springfield; and Hard Rock International, which has joined forces with Paper City Development to propose a 100-acre site in Holyoke.

"We are planning a state-of-the-art facility with a wide range of non-gaming amenities," said Jim Allen, Chairman of Hard Rock International, setting the tone for what is likely to be the successful approach to Massachusetts: high quality, and plenty of wholesome leisure activities away from the casino floor. The tax revenues won't hurt either, of course.

GAMING PEOPLE

AGEM Marcus Prater, Executive Director at the Association of Gaming Equipment Manufacturers (AGEM), has signed an extension to his contract that will keep him in the post until 2015. He took up the role in 2008.

ARISTOCRAT Aristocrat Technologies' Senior Vice-President and General Counsel Tom Smock is to leave the company at the end of the year after five years.

ASPERS British casino Aspers at The Gate in Newcastle upon Tyne has named Ally Myles as General Manager. With more than 35 years of experience in the casino sector, he has most recently been General Manager at Gala Casino in Dundee.

BALLY Srinu Raghavan, Vice President, is to oversee Bally Technologies' games and systems business in Asia Pacific, while remaining Managing Director of its Indian development centres and continuing to lead South African systems operations as well. Meanwhile, Kurt Gissane has been promoted to Managing Director of Asia Pacific, based in Macau. Also at Bally Technologies, David Durst is now Western Region Sales Manager in the US. Previously, he was a Senior Sales Account Executive for Aristocrat Technologies, and Director of Systems Sales with International Game Technology (IGT).

BOYD Richard Flaherty has joined the board of directors at Boyd Gaming. He retired in 2010 as Dean of the Eberhardt School of Business at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California, having previously held a similar post at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

DIGIDEAL Terri Brady takes the new position of Vice-President of Sales at DigiDeal.

DR GAMING TECHNOLOGY Georg Steiner joins Belgium's DR Gaming Technology as Senior Business Development Director. He was previously with Amatic.

GLI Gaming Laboratories International (GLI) and its affiliate TST have expanded their European e-gaming team, hiring Aurora Merino Salas as Business Development Manager and Magdalena Podhorski-Okolow as Development Representative. GLI has also hired Georges Alain Didier Flores as Development Representative for Latin America, based in Lima.

INCREDIBLE TECHNOLOGIES Incredible Technologies in the US has added Beena Blake as Western Regional Sales Manager and Andi Long as Midwest Regional Sales Manager.

ISLE OF MAN Garth Kimber is leaving the Isle of Man government to return to the private sector, and a replacement to fill his role as Head of E-Gaming Development is being sought.

MARYLAND LIVE! Jody Madigan has been named Chief Financial Officer of Maryland Live! Casino.

NEWAVE Rob Jackson is the new VP of Sales at NEWave.

SUZO HAPP Harald Wagemaker has joined Suzo Happ's European team, based in the Netherlands, as Regional Sales Manager responsible for Scandinavia and eastern Europe.

TCSJOHNHUXLEY David Heap, Group Chief Executive of TCSJohnHuxley, is to step down on 1 March next year. He will be replaced by Catherine 'Cath' Burns as Global Chief Executive Officer, who comes to the firm from Bally Technologies in Macau, where she has served as Vice President Asia Pacific since 2006.

TROPICANA Thomas McCartney has resigned as President and Chief Operating Officer of Tropicana Las Vegas.

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Stateside

Sharon Harris finds patience is a virtue

Whatever happened to Chris Christie's predecessor? Advocates of former New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine should consider this. Since his 2009 loss, Corzine has led the MF Global financial firm, which just filed for bankruptcy protection after making horrendous international investments. Add in accusations of the mixing of customers' funds with the firm's for investments.

The court-appointed trustee overseeing MF Global's liquidation has discovered accounting gaps of an estimated \$1.2 billion in customer funds, twice the earlier projections. Securities regulators and the FBI are investigating the missing money. Corzine has hired a big time white collar crime defense attorney.

Before his resignation last month, a public outcry motivated Corzine to reject a \$12 million severance package. What! Are there any performance and honesty standards left? Corzine is hardly dumb, having led Goldman Sachs from 1994 until his ouster in 1999. What are we to conclude?

Although Corzine seemed nice enough, he did little for New Jersey but raise taxes and employ policies that doubled unemployment during his four years. His contributions towards improving gaming were negligible.

This year, the news is potentially more positive because 64 percent of New Jersey voters wisely approved developing legislation to legalize sports betting at casinos and racetracks. To pass, federal law must still permit sports betting.

Proposed legislation for potential national action would authorize the New Jersey Casino Control Commission to issue licenses. If Christie signs this by year's end, the state's attorney general will push to overturn the 1992 federal Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act (PASPA).

Thanks to New Jersey's bureaucratic lunacy, the state missed the federal deadline to legalize sports betting. Congress established a 12-month time frame, from PASPA's January 1, 1993 enactment date, for those states that operated licensed casino gaming for 10 prior years to legalize sports wagering. The language obviously was directed at New Jersey.

However, New Jersey forfeited the opportunity to carve out an exception for itself. Smart thinkers would have ensured that New Jersey at least had the option by putting everything in place. Currently, PASPA permits sports betting in only four states – Nevada, Delaware, Oregon and Montana.

If anything can be done, optimistic projections

would be to start at the beginning of the 2012 NFL season. The National Football League (NFL) objects to betting on its games, but the reality is that hundreds of millions are wagered during the season.

Any legalized New Jersey sports betting will ban gambling on intrastate college games and any games involving a New Jersey college.

New Jersey is desperately seeking innovative alternatives to traditional gaming, as are Connecticut's Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun Indian casinos. Both states must reinvent themselves as neighboring New York expands its gaming program.

Even neighboring Pennsylvania, with their statewide casinos' 250-table game increase and 30 percent revenue jump this year, must step it up. They count millions from New York as customers, but the new competition will challenge their position.

After 10 years of delays and licensing corruption, the new three-level Resorts World racino recently opened at the Aqueduct Racetrack complex in Queens, one of five New York City boroughs. Owner Genting New York, a subsidiary of England and Southeast Asia's largest gambling company, grossed \$14 million in the first 10 days. The casino will pay 44% in taxes to New York State. The numbers are no surprise, considering over eight million people live within the five boroughs.


Players can reach the casino by subway, from midtown Manhattan's Time Square and elsewhere throughout the region, or drive and park in one of 6,500 parking spots. There are 5,000 video gaming terminals and electronic table games for their gambling pleasure and multiple outlets offer casual and fine dining. Future plans call for a climate-controlled bridge to the nearby subway station and a shuttle to Kennedy International Airport.

Gaming is proliferating throughout the Northeast, from Maryland to Maine, home to 25 percent of America's population. So, how do established casinos win back customers who have sampled and enjoyed more conveniently located properties near their homes?

Is the answer comps and other freebies? Atlantic City's 11 casinos think so. In September, refunding an average 40 cents of every gambling dollar won totaled \$115 million in promotional allowances and expenses. Resorts spent the most; Trump Taj Mahal the least. Comps include free rooms, drinks, cash gifts, event tickets and promotional gaming credits.

What will the other states do in 2012? We'll have to wait and see.

The court-appointed trustee overseeing MF Global's liquidation has discovered accounting gaps of an estimated \$1.2 billion in customer funds



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Blends are back

CI's drinks expert **Marcin Miller** explains why a blended whisky is by no means a bad thing

Despite the sustained growth in sales of single malts, blends still represent over 90% of the Scotch whisky industry. For many years blends were ignored by whisky experts and connoisseurs. Why? Because, generally, people are snobs. If the first whisky you ever drank was a Dewar's or a Bell's, as you grew older, richer and more sophisticated you demonstrated your change in status in your choice of car, watch and, yes, drink.

It is also a cultural phenomenon; young adults seldom drink what their parents enjoyed. That is why the UK is the one market where blends are not appreciated. Similarly, young middle class Russians do not routinely choose vodka. Those Spaniards who can still afford to go out do not turn to Brandy de Jerez. They choose J&B, Cutty Sark, imported rum and London dry gin... The French drink more Scotch whisky in one month than they do Cognac in a year.

Interest in blends may have increased because of the global economic downturn. It may also be due to the success of TV series such as *Mad Men* which are set in an era that predates the success of single malt, in a testosterone-driven world fuelled by Cutty Sark. Or perhaps it is merely cyclical and it is time for the blends to have their moment in the sun. According to leading whisky commentator, Dave Broom; "Blends are versatile and complex; they fit any mood and any occasion perfectly. Blends are made to enjoy in any way you want; they are less restrictive than single malts but equally complex."

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing so it has become an unquestionable truth that blended whisky is

inferior to single malt whisky. It is time to challenge that way of thinking.

Of course, the revolution has already started. Johnnie Walker, by far the best-selling Scotch in the world, realised a long time ago that an ascending ladder of quality and price could offer a lifetime of security and status; the brand loyal can move from Red to Black to Green to Gold to Blue and, now, beyond. I bow to no-one in my respect for Johnnie Walker. Without the success of Johnnie Walker, whisky enthusiasts wouldn't be able to buy Lagavulin or many other Diageo

single malts. Further, without big blends investing in new markets, the whisky category wouldn't be able to enjoy growth. However, in an increasingly competitive world, bar managers have to have a point of difference. Use your list as an opportunity to educate your customers with new or less predictable whiskies.

Cutty Sark, launched in 1923 and the best-selling Scotch in the USA in the 1960s, has been under new ownership for nearly 18 months. It is the original, easy-drinking blended Scotch, made for mixing and has been attractively repackaged; there is talk of exciting plans for new expressions to be launched. This is definitely one to watch. Compass Box, consistently labelled as 'innovative', has just launched Great King Street; it appears radical but, surely, is not very different to the original ethos of Cutty Sark. It is of very high quality, with almost 50% single malt content, and makes a really good highball.

Blends are made to be drunk long, unlike single malts. Whereas single malts are made for savouring rather than for sessions, blends are generally lighter, more uplifting and can be enjoyed all evening and into the early hours. Perfect for a night at the casino...





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TAKING GAMING TO NEW HEIGHTS

Latino America

Ricki Chavez Munoz reports on what's happening in South America

Es difícil cubrir mucho en una columna como esta, especialmente sobre la feria más grande de Latinoamérica, y dejaremos el "review" de SAGSE Buenos Aires 2012 para la edición de enero/febrero 2012 de nuestra revista hermana Casino International Americano. Sin embargo, hubo un momento catártico durante una de las conferencias de Encuentro Yogonet Ey!II, organizadas en paralelo, donde Nicolas Dienot, director de Clover Gaming, nos abrió un poco los ojos con su presentación "Mitos y realidades en la industria de los juegos de azar".

Sin comentar sobre los puntos específicos de la charla, solamente diremos que el profesional de origen francés especializado en Latinoamérica, expresó ciertas dudas sobre los alcances impuestos por la tecnología de corte en la industria donde las nuevas aplicaciones pueden asumir capacidades equivocadas o supuestas.

Ya hemos escrito sobre la dependencia de los elementos de seguridad en la tecnología moderna con la recomendación de que esta solamente debe ser un complemento del esfuerzo humano y personal; y es aquí donde la fantasía y mito chocan con la realidad de una operación de casinos y donde una dependencia exagerada en el último grito de la moda electrónica puede resultar en ansiedad y pérdida cuando la tecnología no responde o tiene un uso defectivo causales humanas o de diseño.

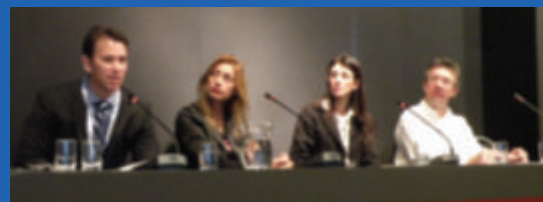
El 2012 promete ser un año inquieto para la industria y confiamos que Latinoamérica mantenga su ritmo de crecimiento con nuevos casinos en Perú, Colombia, Panamá y Paraguay, para empezar, y me imagino que ya tendremos más noticias cuando nos veamos en el Show de Londres, durante los días 24-26 de enero de ICE 2012. Les deseamos muchas felicidades familiares en Navidades y un grande y venturoso Año 2012.

Saludos,
Ricki.

It is difficult to cover some items in much depth in a column such as this, especially news and items on Latin America's premier expo, so we shall leave the SAGSE Buenos Aires 2011 review to the Jan/Feb 2012 edition of sister title Casino International Americano. Nonetheless, there was a cathartic moment during one of the conferences in the Encuentro Yogonet Ey!II, which runs on parallel with the show when speaker Nicolas Dienot, director of Clover Gaming opened our eyes a bit more with his presentation "Myth and Reality in Gaming".

Without touching on any specific point of Dienot's address, the comment we make refers to doubts expressed by the French-born Latin American expert on some perceived assumptions that new cutting edge technology applications may impose on the industry, either through technological or human shortcoming.

We have published an item on the existence of over dependence in modern technology by Security experts, recommending that technology should be only a complement to the work done by personal crews, because this is where myth and reality do clash in a casino operation. The point made is that an exaggerated use of the latest technology gadget can bring about anxiety and loss if there is no response or defective use of the fashionable device, whether these are the result of human error or deficient design.



Nicolas Dienot (derecha) con Deron Hunsberger (Shufflemaster), Elizabeth Romano (TCSJOHNHUXLEY) y Martha Mateus (COPAG)



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Presidenta de Costa Rica se olvida de promesa electoral

La Ley de casinos, que fue una de las principales promesas en la campaña política de la ex ministra de Justicia, y hoy actual presidenta de la República, Laura Chinchilla, con el principal objetivo para la recaudación de fondos para financiar los programas de seguridad ciudadana en Costa Rica con impuestos a todas las operaciones de juego, sean estas casinos tradicionales online, incluidos los sportbooks, se ha entrampado en las comisiones legislativas, donde las discusiones se centran en definiciones antojadizas y no en cumplir diligentemente con una necesidad real del país.

Un año y medio después de su elección, los ministros y aliados políticos de Chinchilla en la Comisión de Hacienda no logran entender que tan pronto se apruebe la Ley de casinos el gobierno tendrá a la mano los fondos que se generen por la operación de los negocios de juego y apuestas. Sin embargo, discusiones sobre el expediente 17551 de la Ley de regulación de apuestas, casinos y juegos de azar, tiene a los legisladores cuestionar sobre si uno u otro es el objetivo de la iniciativa: si generar recursos para el equipamiento del Ministerio de Seguridad Pública o controlar la actividad en el país. La respuesta es que ambos objetivos ivan de la mano!

A inicios de noviembre pasado se aprobó un texto sustitutivo a la actual norma proponiendo cambios en el cobro del impuesto a las casas de apuestas: "para las mesas de juego de US \$300 cuando operen menos de 10 horas y de US \$500 cuando operen más de 10 horas". Es decir, un cambio insignificante a las operaciones de juegos que ya pagan impuestos y nada de nada que toque a los sportbooks.

En junio pasado, la Fracción del Partido Liberación Nacional propuso los cambios a las regulaciones e impuestos en un nuevo texto a la Ley de Regulación de Apuestas, de Casinos y Juegos de Azar, que presentaron ante la Comisión de Asuntos Hacendarios, especialmente prohibiendo que "los concesionarios de las licencias para este tipo de establecimientos no contribuyan a sufragar gastos de campañas electorales de los partidos políticos o las donaciones directas o indirectas a candidatos electorales".

La propuesta de la Fracción del PLN incluye un impuesto mensual sobre la actividad de los centros de apuestas, casinos o juegos de azar del 15 % sobre el ingreso bruto mensual, que sería destinado a financiar programas de seguridad ciudadana para combatir la delincuencia, además de un impuesto de US\$ 250.000 para los call centers de apuestas online o sportbooks que operen centros de apuestas virtuales y un impuesto de US\$300 por cada una de las mesas de juego autorizadas en los casinos, así como US \$150 por cada máquina.

Sin embargo, las comisiones siguen sin llegar a un acuerdo para reemplazar a la Ley del 1978. Una ley se puede diligenciar o complicar según la voluntad política que exista en sacarla adelante. En Nicaragua ha existido esa voluntad política, que se manifestaba urgente en las promesas electorales de la presidenta Chinchilla porque la regulación de casinos actual de Costa Rica de 1978 es obsoleta y débil, y la ex ministra de justicia solamente requiere de la voluntad que le hiciera prometer la nueva ley cuando candidateaba a presidenta y poner en línea a su ejecutivo para diligenciar la nueva Ley de casinos en su país.

2012 is gearing to be a busy year for the industry and we trust that Latin America sustains current growth with new casinos for Peru, Colombia, Panama and Paraguay, just for starters; and I can imagine that we'll have more good news on this account when we next meet during the London Show at ICE 2012 on January 24-26. Here is wishing you an enjoyable family Christmas plus a fantastic and fortunate New Year.
Cheers,
Ricki.

Costa Rica president forgets electoral promise

New casino legislation was one of the principal promises made by the ex-Justice minister, now Costa Rica President Laura Chinchilla, when she was in full electoral campaign. The new casino legislation was promised as the engine to generate income from taxation to fund much needed national security programmes in the country, and would include levies to all gaming operations especially remote and online companies operating the so called "call-centers", that for decades have Costa Rica as a business base.

New gaming legislation projects have been mired in commissions who seem to seek new interpretations to the meaning of gaming and life, as Chinchilla's political allies fret and posture for celebrity status instead of dealing with diligence to bring about the gaming legislation changes Costa Rica needs.

As never ending discussions on the Project 17551 called Regulation Act of Betting, Casinos and Gaming to control on and off line operations in Costa Rica continue to mesmerize Chinchilla's ministers and legislators, the Finance Commission approved early in November a consolation change on tax to gaming houses of US \$300 to gaming tables operating up to ten hours and US \$500 when they exceed this time. And still nothing about a "call-center" gaming levy.

Last June, the Fracción del Partido Liberación Nacional (FPLN), proposed Gaming legislation changes to the Exchequer Commission expressly vetting electoral campaign contributions from "gaming licence holders to political parties whether direct or through another means for use as political candidates". The FPLN proposal also included a yearly tax to "call-centers" at US \$250,000, and monthly tax to each gaming table of US \$300 and slot machine at US \$150.

However, Chinchilla's government officials and political allies have turned procrastination into a habit when dealing with the new gaming law in Costa Rica, where all that is needed is the political will to expedite this necessary piece of legislation. A far cry from the heady days on the joustings when the security of the country was a promise and a priority to the ex-Minister of Justice on her way to the presidential chair. President Chinchilla just needs to impose her much vaunted will to put her minister and allies in line and gets this much needed gaming law into being.

COLJUEGOS is the new regulatory agency in Colombia

A new Industrial and Commercial State Company to be called COLJUEGOS, under the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit, will be responsible for regulating the operation of the

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COLJUEGOS reemplaza a ETESA en Colombia

Una nueva Empresa Industrial y Comercial del Estado, que se llamará COLJUEGOS, adscrita al Ministerio de Hacienda y Crédito Público será la encargada de regular la operación de la industria de juegos de azar en Colombia, en reemplazo de Etesa que está en proceso de liquidación.

La decisión del Gobierno Nacional hace parte de una reestructuración de varias entidades del Estado que buscan mayor eficiencia y controles en la administración pública. El Presidente de COLJUEGOS será nombrado por el Presidente de la República, Juan Manuel Santos, y su gestión se realizará de la mano de una Junta Directiva y varias vicepresidencias.

Juan Carlos Echeverry, Ministro de Hacienda de Colombia aspira a pasar de \$ 400.000 millones (US \$210 millones) de recaudo anual por concepto de explotación de juegos de azar a \$2 billones de pesos (U \$1.040 millones) por anualidad, a favor de la salud de los colombianos, de acuerdo a recientes declaraciones a la prensa nacional.

Buenos Aires pugna por impuestos de casinos flotantes

El Gobierno Autónomo de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires ha confirmado que apelará la medida cautelar interpuesta por la empresa Casino de Buenos Aires S.A., mediante la cual ordena a la Ciudad que se abstenga de realizar cualquier acción para cobrarle impuestos a los ingresos brutos por la facturación de los casinos flotantes, Estrella de la Fortuna y Princess, que operan anclados en Puerto Madero.

El viernes 12 de noviembre, Pablo Cayssials, titular del juzgado Contencioso Administrativo Federal N° 9, había otorgado una medida cautelar a favor de la empresa propietaria de los millonarios casinos de Buenos Aires como consecuencia de la apelación realizada por la empresa propietaria de los casinos después que, a mediados de octubre pasado, la Corte Suprema emitiera un fallo dejando sin efecto una medida cautelar previa que fuera presentada la empresa Cirsa en 1999, entonces propietarios del casino flotante "Estrella de la Fortuna".

La medida cautelar de 1999 le daba jurisdicción a la Nación Argentina sobre el casino flotante en perjuicio de la ciudad de Buenos Aires, donde en efecto se encuentra anclado la nave, y el fallo de la Suprema le devolvió a Buenos Aires la posibilidad de ejercer poder sobre el casino flotante Estrella de la Fortuna y ahora también sobre su 'hermana' Princess para la ciudad capital argentina pueda cobrar los impuestos de ley que se encuentran pendientes desde ese 1999.

El fallo de la Corte Suprema había declarado "abstracta" la causa judicial de 1999 "referente a la jurisdicción de los barcos casino", permitiendo mediante este fallo el cobro de impuestos a la Administración Gubernamental de Ingresos Públicos de Buenos Aires mediante una retención bancaria. La pugna legal entre Buenos Aires los casinos flotantes es no solamente por una recaudación anual de más de US \$ 75 millones, sino por los tributos que datan desde 1999.

gambling industry in Colombia, replacing ETESA, which is in the process of being liquidated. The new body will start operations on 1 January 2012. It is hoped that it will be successful in combating illegal gambling as well as securing gaming tax compliance.

The National Government's decision is part of a restructuring of several state agencies seeking greater efficiency and control in public administration. The COLJUEGOS President will be appointed by the President of the Republic, Juan Manuel Santos, and the organization will be managed by a Board of Directors and several vice presidencies.

Juan Carlos Echeverry, Colombia's Minister of Finance, wants to increase the present \$400,000 million Colombian pesos (US\$210 million) collected annually for the health and welfare of the country's citizens from the operation of gambling and betting businesses. Stating that this amount was not adjusted to the actual revenues generated by the exploitation of gambling and betting in Colombia, Echeverry's plan is to collect some 2 billion pesos (US\$1,040 million) within a period of two years.

Buenos Aires in Battle of River Plate with floating casinos

Just when the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires thought the battle was won over the River Plate casinos, "Estrella de la Fortuna" and "Princess"; enters judge Pablo Cayssials, to grant an appeal presented by Casino de Buenos Aires S.A., owners of the vessels anchored in the middle of the Argentine capital city entertainment district Puerto Maderos, with a volley of contentious legal arguments to outflank the city officials who were ready to tax the casinos that have been outmaneuvering the city in a legal case that dates back to 1999.

It is difficult to escape this nautical nightmare for the city of Buenos Aires, as it has claimed all along that Cirsa, the Spanish casino giant, had anchored its highly profitable mini armada in the city itself in the River Plate and not in national territorial waters, as claimed by them, which in effect gives the federal government licensing and taxation rights over the local Buenos Aires government.

The appeal granted by judge Cayssials to the owners of the River Plate floating casinos, has stymied the Supreme Court ruling that in mid-October ruled in favour of the City of Buenos Aires, quashing the Cirsa 1999 appeal. Now city officials have vowed to counter appeal on this never ending legal skirmish so that Buenos Aires can claim a stake on yearly taxes that amount to some US\$74 million and the tax backlog since 1999.

Quite appropriately, the Supreme Court had ruled in favour of the City of Buenos Aires declaring that as "abstract" the decision to grant national status to the city waters of River Plate. In a country where there have been some highly questionable gaming licensing decisions, another one by the now called "Juez Caiman", in a company with strong links to ex-president Kirschner, sets the scene for a bitter new Battle of River Plate, which this time has spilled into the Argentine court rooms and the dingy corridors of power.

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CGS 2012 presenta un equipo nuevo de trabajo

La empresa organizadora del Caribbean Gaming Show 2012, CGS Group LLB, ha anunciado la formación de un nuevo equipo de trabajo para la producción de la cuarta edición de CGS 2012. Elizabeth Leiva, CEO del evento dice que ambos exhibidores y participantes en el evento verán los beneficios que traen la incorporación de Carmen Valverde en marketing y Peter Stephen en producción para añadir sus experiencias al equipo de CGS, que tiene a Martha García como Show Manager y a Gonzalo Cayo en Servicios Corporativos.



Elizabeth Leiva puntualizó: "Después de estos años desarrollando el mercado del Caribe, este evento de la industria del juego va a dedicarse a llegar a toditas las islas y países de la región. Puedo asegurarles que existen más y más empresas que van a participar en nuestro Show que este año se realizará en un mejor local en el corazón de la ciudad de Santo Domingo. Un hotel 5-Estrellas será el centro de convocatoria para recibir a todos los proveedores y ejecutivos de compras de más de 24 países, quienes esperan pasar dos días o más haciendo negocios y disfrutando de lo lindo de este maravilloso país".

República Dominicana cuenta con más de 60 casinos, y con la Asociación de Casinos y la nueva Comisión de Casinos dando soporte a la cuarta edición del CGS 2012, durante los días 21-22 de marzo, este evento se apresta a reforzar su supremacía en la región. Al mismo tiempo, la recientemente fundada Caribbean Gaming Association será patrocinadora del Show.

"El CGS 2012 contará con operadores, reguladores, proveedores, mesas redondas, conferencias, la prensa internacional, y mucha diversión y entretenimiento ien un país que lo tiene todo!", dijo Elizabeth Leiva con mucho entusiasmo, concluyendo: "Venga y sea parte de este gran Show... ¿Hay algo mejor que un Gaming Show? Por supuesto que sí. ¡Es un Gaming Show en el Caribe! Por favor no tenga recelo en contactarse con nosotros para mayor información".



Elizabeth Leiva con Pierre-Paul Cote de AMAYA

CGS 2012 presents a brand new team

The organizers of the Caribbean Gaming Show 2012 have announced a brand new team for the production of CGS 2012's 4th Edition. Elizabeth Leiva CEO of the event says that both exhibitors and visitors will benefit from the addition of Carmen Valverde in marketing and Peter Stephen in production to the experienced CGS team, where Martha Garcia is Show Manager and Gonzalo Cayo in Corporate Services.

Elizabeth Leiva, adds: "After all these years developing the Caribbean market, this gaming show is going to hit in all islands and countries of the region. More and more companies are now joining our Show, which this year is moving to a better location in the heart of Santo Domingo city. A 5-star hotel will receive all suppliers and buyers from more than 24 countries, who are looking to expend 2 days of business and relaxation."

The Dominican Republic with more than 60 casinos, the Casinos Association and a new Gaming Commission on board, is going to open its doors next March 21-22, 2012 in order to reinforce its supremacy in the region. The newborn Caribbean Gaming Association will sponsor this event. Trade Show, Round Tables, Conferences, International Press, Operators, Vendors, Regulators, and lots of fun and entertainment, in a country that has it all!

Leiva adds: "Join us and be part of this great Show... is it something better than a Gaming Show? Yes it is! It is a Gaming Show in "The Caribe! Do not hesitate to contact us for further information."

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“I don’t want to fight the government

By Paulo A. Azevedo In Las Vegas

Las Vegas Sands Corp. and Sands China Ltd. chairman **Sheldon Adelson** wants to cooperate with the government to solve the dispute over Cotai parcels seven and eight. In an exclusive interview with **Macau Business**, he also unveils his next investment targets and what he would have done differently in Singapore and Macau

Is the Cotai Strip becoming what you thought it could be, now that Lawrence Ho has opened City of Dreams, Francis Lui has inaugurated Galaxy Macau and with Sands Cotai Central opening next year?

Sheldon Adelson: My original plan called for 20 lots on a U-shaped strip, coming down the strip to the roundabout and then going right at the road that takes you to the power plant, then coming back up by the Macau Dome.

My idea was to rebuild half or more of the Las Vegas strip, to create the critical mass. I do not mind that other people are coming. I want other people to come because it validates the critical mass nature of the development.

Look, nobody wanted the land before. It was sitting there for a long time.

You can take that as a compliment.

There is another compliment. Secretary [for economy and finance Francis] Tam is now saying that in

order for developers to get their new casinos approved - presumably that means whatever the amount of casinos they can build, including the number of tables they can get - they need to bring directly proportional non-gaming amenities. This has been the matrix for me since I came to Macau.

Are you surprised with the 3-percent cap on gaming tables announced by the government for the next 10 years starting in 2013?





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I am surprised because it is not the cap on tables that really makes the difference. What makes the difference is the number of places that are competing for the customer.

When a customer comes to Macau, different operators approach him. What counts is how many approaches he gets and how much marketing and promotion each property does to bring people to Macau.

No customer knows how many tables are in each property and none of the customers care. Putting a cap on the tables may have the desired effect of limiting the number of places to bet but all the government really has to do is to limit the number of sublicenses [operations run by third-parties under the gaming license of one of the city's six concessionaires, which in return is entitled to a fixed cut].

That is the problem. They don't limit the number of sublicenses. Stanley [Ho Hung Sun] has 60 VIP rooms and close to 20 sublicensed casinos. A casino by any other name is still a casino.

I am very glad to see that the government has finally said there is a matrix of non-gaming amenities that you have to provide in order to get the "golden ring".

And you are bringing more non-gaming facilities?

More than anybody, by far.

Enough tables

With parcels five and six, (now re-branded as Sands Cotai Central, a better name, by the way) opening next year, you need more gaming tables. How does the 3-percent cap impact Cotai Central?

We have the tables. We grandfathered in because we started the project several years ago before they came up with this limitation.

I believe the government has already allowed you 400 tables for Cotai Central. Was it less than an operator with this size of investment would expect?

This is going to be the largest building ever built in the world, almost 1.3 million square metres.

I respect the fact they want to limit development. We just disagree [on the method]. There is more than one way to do it, rather than putting a limit on the number of tables.

If they are trying to discourage people from developing new properties, they could simply say "You cannot develop new properties". That is all there is to do.

We are correct in following the integrated resort model with all the non-gaming amenities connected.

I am going to write a letter to the government suggesting there ought to be

something like 30 percent of the space in hotel rooms, 15 percent of the space should be for MICE [meetings and conventions] and of that, 10 percent should be exhibitions space and 5 percent congress space. Maybe 15 percent for retail, spas and showrooms etc. I am going to prepare a matrix that will show what percentage of space should be devoted to each separate amenity.

That comes to 60 percent. What about the other 40 percent?

For other things. But the casino should be no more than 5 or 10 percent of the total amount of space. Whatever number they come up and think is optimum. I do not think we need more than 5 percent. The developer that does not want to put up the [non-gaming] amenities, should be penalised by having the percentage of the casino in relation to the total amount of space reduced.

Fortunately, the government announced the table cap after Sands China Ltd. secured a US\$3.7 billion (MOP29.6 billion) loan agreement. Do you think operators that wish to develop in Cotai might face difficulties in getting bank financing due to the new rules?

Banks will not loan money without assurances from the government that there will be sufficient equipment, approvals and labour to both construct and operate the resorts so that they have the best chance of getting the money back.

At the last minute, there was enough demand [for the Sands' loan agreement] and we took another few million dollars [US\$200 million] just to have extra cash and consider paying dividends.

We did not absorb all the available cash in the market by far. There is plenty of cash in the market and it is up to the credit worthiness of the applicants. But I talked to many banks and they say that without assurances that the operator will have sufficient equipment and labour, they are not going to loan any money.

Let's sit and talk

On parcels seven and eight, Sands China Ltd. took the case to court after the government did a U-turn and decided not to grant you the plots anymore. Do you really think you can get them back?

We have an obligation to our shareholders. We are a public company and we have to pursue all the available avenues of appeal. If, in the final accounting, all the appeals are rejected, then we will be rejected. We have an obligation to protect the interest of the company.

We obviously disagree with the government. There is no reason to take it back but I

understand what the government is trying to do. If we could sit down and have a discussion about how to resolve the matter, we would welcome that opportunity.

If the government doesn't grant you the sites, will you sue to try to get back the US\$100 million-plus that Sands has already invested in them?

I do not want to sue the government. I would much rather sit down and amicably negotiate out a solution.

Have you already suggested that to the government?

Yes. I have given instructions for that to happen. I do not know exactly what happened.

We are there together. I have changed the face of Macau for the positive. I do not want to fight with the government.

This is their country but I think there are certain things that should occur. We call it grandfathering, meaning when you change a law, whoever is in the midst of taking certain steps, should be allowed to continue to complete whatever they are doing. Apparently not.

To finish on the sites, there is one parcel left, number three. Any concrete plans?

We are ready to start it. There are some answers that we need from the government before we could start it.

So the ball is in the government's court?

Yes.

Could the government say it is going to take that site as well because you are not developing it?

We own the site. We paid for it. It is a lot different from seven and eight.

[According to the land grant contract, Sands China Ltd. is required to complete the development of parcel three by April 2013].

Paying a dividend

You said recently that Las Vegas Sands Corp. might pay dividends to shareholders next year. Will Sands China Ltd. follow?

Yes.

Stock market volatility has been huge and gaming stocks are no exception. Does it keep you up at night?

No. I do not worry about that because I know that over the long term this is like gaming. Over time, the live averages change in the house advantage. It all leverages itself. I know over so many years of doing business that everything is in cycles. It goes up and down. Everything is volatile.

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I don't understand why rumours are enough to have such a strong impact on stock prices. Look at Macau, look at Singapore, and the numbers have been nothing but amazing every single month. Where are these panic attacks coming from?

It's hedge funds and day-traders, which are opportunists, not long-term investors. If the bad news gets around, the stock will go down so let's spread the bad news. When the good news comes, let's help spread the good news and the stock will go up. They could be in and out in an hour to make money. In a minute, sometimes.

These issues do not affect the fundamentals of any commercial enterprise.

People have not sufficiently studied in order to talk about the slowdown in China. Over 90 percent of the Chinese visitors to Macau come from Guangdong province. There is plenty more people from adjacent provinces like Fujian and other places where visitors could come from.

They are saying it is going to affect the liquidity of the junket representatives. We have talked at length with them and they are saying there is plenty of money. It is not an issue. People are throwing money out at them.

Macau is a success story. Singapore too is a success story, but surely even you must be surprised with the numbers. Did you expect the results would be like this?

No. I knew that there was an explosive opportunity and that if the market was correctly approached it would be big, but I never knew how big.

Macau brought in US\$24 billion last year in gross gaming income and this year it is bringing over US\$30 billion. I never thought that we would get to that so fast.

When we first came to Macau, there was only about US\$2.5 billion of business. Within two years, without adding a table, without adding a chair for somebody to sit at, it doubled to US\$5.5 billion.

Everybody laughed at that and said that it was due to the excitement of the Sands Macao effect creating a lot more business. It was not that.

More and more

How happy are you to have a foot in both Singapore and Macau?

Very, very happy.

I believe Asia has the potential for many more properties and we hope to be able to set

up a network of properties that help to feed each other.

For instance, if we are going to Korea, a lot of the very big Korean players are not going to play in their country because they want neither their social circles nor the government to see them. So, they will leave Korea and go somewhere else to play.

Let's say I am also going to Japan. The same thing with the Japanese. What will happen is the Japanese will go to Korea and the Koreans will go to Japan. The high rollers will come from other countries.

Everybody is talking about your plans for Spain. Are they still on track?

Yes.

What is the situation with the project?

We are in constant discussion with the government about the local legislation and what kind of grants and incentives they will give to us. Under the present legislation in Spain, it is not conducive to develop a strip of integrated resorts like the original plan we have proposed. We are talking about 12 hotels with 3,000 rooms each.

For instance, the government requires everybody who comes in to show his or her

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passport but they do not know why. When you get down to some of the bureaucratic explanations, they say the European Union wants to prevent money laundering.

We have to change the law. [It is understandable] that when you go to the cashiers' cage and you put out your cash to buy the chips or the tokens, you have to show your passport, rather than show it when you come in.

We cannot have 70,000 to 80,000 people a day coming to each property and showing their

passport. It is ridiculous.

You are telling them to bring whatever regulations they have, bring them now and not in the middle of an investment like happened in Macau?

Right. We are anticipating everything that can go wrong and we are discussing with the government. The government is very supportive. They want this development because it could be over US\$30 billion.

In Madrid?

Either on the city limits of Madrid or the suburbs of Barcelona. We probably have 1,000 pages of research provided by different consulting firms to each aspect of the gaming and non-gaming amenities to see how that will work out.

Let me provoke you. Given the experiences you had in Macau and Singapore, what will you try to avoid in Spain?

You just put the finger on it. [We are trying] to anticipate all the issues that can arise during the course of the development and try to resolve them upfront so there are no surprises and no changes.

For instance, everything to do with labour: the availability of labour, our ability to bring in if there is not enough Spanish labour – but our policy has always been local labour first –, the ability to deal with the unions, the ability to train the labour, things like that.

Also, the moving around of tables. What difference does it make if I take this table that is sitting here and move it over there?

Currently, the government needs to approve it. We are trying to convince the bureaucrats that there is no fundamental need or desire to wait two or three months to [get the approval to] move a table from this location to two metres away.

Aside from Spain, do you see any other place that you would like to invest?

Yes. Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand. I do not know about Thailand because the subject of legalisation goes off and on. There are rumours they will do it and there are rumours they won't.

I think it is much more serious in Korea, Japan, Vietnam. I do not know about Taiwan. Taiwan has been talking about the islands but nothing substantial regarding operators opening in Kinmen or Matsu.

Japan and Korea: would you enter alone or would you like a local partner to go with?

We like to invest alone unless we are required to invest with local partners.

Learning curve

One and a half years after the opening of Marina Bay Sands, what would you do differently if you could?

I would build more MICE space, more exhibition space, more hotel rooms and more casino space.

Do you feel you are running out of space?

That is correct. We are running almost 99 percent occupancy [rates] in the hotel.



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More than seven years after the opening of Sands Macao, what would you do differently in Macau?

I would do exactly what I have done. There is not much I would do different. I mean, business wise.

I might have built several places at once but we were doing other properties: we were building Singapore, we were building the Palazzo [Las Vegas]. We were building too much.

Yes, I would have done several places simultaneously [in Macau]. I would have gone ahead and done [parcels] five and six, then I would have started seven and eight and have [site] three finished.

[Originally] I was going to do them in sequence. For instance, I would finish the pilings in one property and then I would move the equipment and the crew to the next lot and so on. But with the recession, my crew could not handle it. It was too much for us to build.

Jacobs caused 'hurt'

The judicial saga with former Sands China Ltd. chief executive officer Steve Jacobs created a lot of noise around the company in Macau. Is it possible for you to measure the negative impact created by the case?

I am too trusting of people and I did not think somebody was that malicious to go out of his way to do criminal things. I cannot measure it but it certainly caused us a lot of hurt.

When the people went to make a settlement with him and to fire him, the first thing he did was to threaten us. Once threatened, we could not make any deal.

These were very honest members, very outstanding members of the board. Once he threatened that he was going to make up stories and he had evidence, they could not capitulate to his demands. He made a bed for himself.

The image I have of you is that you are

always ready for a fight...

I am not ready for a fight. I do not want to fight but we are ready to defend ourselves against improper and untruthful allegations.

He did it very cleverly. He went to court. In the United States, anything that is said in court is protected from liable or slander or any claim against untruth. In Macau it is not. In the rest of the world it is not. So he brought in the press to watch what he filed. I am sure he gave them copies.

When we win the case, we will go after him in a way that he won't forget because none of what he says is true and he can't prove it.

You were one of the first people to think of a way to expand into Hengqin Island, next to Macau, to host some of your non-gaming projects. Years later, the island will be developed by the Macau and Zhuhai governments, and some private businesses. You are not there. What went wrong?

I do not think it went wrong.

My former management was enthused about it and I was not that enthused because we were a simple real estate development.

From my point of view, they needed my convention expertise to develop and operate a big convention centre. We were discouraged because we were told that the central government did not want any casino operators operating on Hengqin Island, even if it was non-gaming. As it turned out, that was not the case. But that was not what we understood at the time, so we passed.

Still, it is just the beginning and the island is six times bigger than Macau. If the opportunity comes, would you think about it?

We are only in the business of doing integrated resorts. We are not going to get into any other business.

Business aside, here you are now, among the wealthiest people in the world. I am sure many are asking themselves: "With all these

billions, why doesn't he stop? How much is enough?" It is not just an issue of money, is it? What drives you?

Accomplishment. To accomplish things that other people cannot do and to change the way other people do things.

Looking back, what makes your heart beat faster with pride and what saddens you?

This morning we were talking about the joblessness [in the U.S.] and the sad part of people who are out of work. One of my colleagues said he got 17 calls in one day from people looking for jobs.

That really makes me feel sad because I remember my parents who were both uneducated and my father had a lot of difficulties in getting a good job. I remember the sad times when there was no money. They had to borrow money from moneylenders, from shylocks, to put food on the table.

What makes me proud are all the accomplishments.

The biggest accomplishment that I have and that makes me the proudest has to do with medical research.

I have changed the status quo of medical research because of my new "business model". It is not business. It is a research model of conducting collaborative medical research [through the Dr Miriam and Sheldon G. Adelson Medical Research Foundation].

Did you know that we opened a drug treatment centre in Macau? We have a clinic there. It is a labour of love from my wife. She is a doctor of internal medicine and she developed a subspecialty in treating drug addicts. We have one in Israel, in Tel Aviv, where my wife comes from, and we have one here in Las Vegas.

My wife has sent, many times, doctors, nurses and medical people from both clinics over to Macau. Now they have a couple of hundred patients and they are doing an excellent job and sharing treatment research, which is published in medical publications.

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New ways to play

What can multiplayer games do for your casino business, and how are suppliers rising to the challenge of updating old favourites with new technology?

Multiplayer games meld the old with the new, usually providing the gameplay of traditional stalwarts such as Roulette and Blackjack through the latest screen-based, digitally-driven technology. So, while the essence of the play that they offer hasn't changed much (although there is the occasional all-new game), the means of delivery to the consumer is constantly being updated.

In this feature, we take a look at the latest developments in multiplayer gaming from a selection of suppliers. Other vendors to consider, which we couldn't include this time, include Alfastreet, Casino Technology, International Game Technology (IGT), Novomatic, Royce & Bach, and Zuum.

Amatic Industries

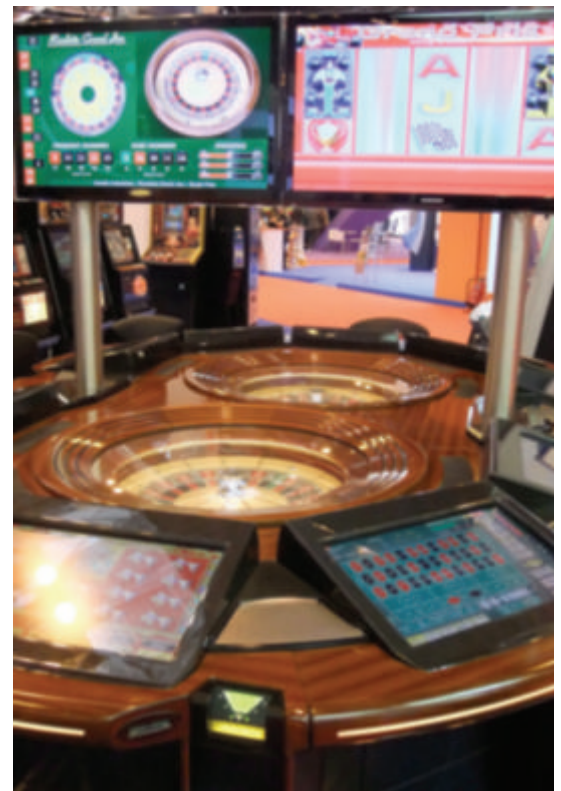
Amatic's latest multiplayer product is the Roulette Grand Jeu 22 WS, designed and manufactured in Austria and taking the precision engineering of the Roulette Grand Jeu a step further.

The Roulette Grand Jeu 22 WS combines all the features of its predecessor with a host of new ones. It's fitted with widescreen 22-inch monitors, the most evident innovation, and available in three versions – as a five-player, eight-player or ten-player unit, with an individual integrated computer on each player terminal. The ten-player version has two wheels; in essence, it brings together two five-player Roulettes including information monitors placed centrally between the two.

The Roulette Grand Jeu 22 WS conforms to the latest SAS standard, and player tracking is integrated into the system. All mainstream payment options are available, for example electronic card, TITO and cash.

Amatic's electronic Roulette games can be operated with a live Roulette wheel, run by the croupier. The Live Multi Wheel, meanwhile, allows operators to offer players the chance to play on several Roulette wheels from the Amatic terminals for added entertainment value. A jackpot system can also be integrated.

Security features are based on the Amatic Media



Control System (AMCS), which offers options such as random wheel speed, door and dome monitoring and a power backup system. Real-time messaging via email or mobile phone provides 24/7 machine monitoring.

Another new electronic Roulette option from Amatic Industries is the Grand Jeu Double. Players have double the chance to win on this multiplayer system incorporating two electronic Roulette wheels and four large monitors.

Apex Gaming

Quikker is a completely new, patented card game from Apex Gaming. Players bet on possible combinations of two cards – on the numbers, the sum of the numbers, the card colours and the suites. Players can thus stake money on a wide range of possible outcomes. The company reports that consumers understand the game quickly and suggests that it combines some of the best features of





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Why multiplayers?

- They contribute directly to the bottom line by speeding up play. Estimates suggest that games on multiplayer systems can be two to three times as fast as on conventional tables.
- Headcount requirements are reduced, again improving profitability. Even with a live dealer many tables can be served simultaneously.
- By combining aspects of both slot and table game experiences, they can attract players from both groups, and may help to convert slot players to table games.
- They are a legal way to provide a table game in jurisdictions where only slots are permitted. Multiplayer games may be called Roulette or Blackjack, but essentially are still networked video slots, and usually fall under the rules governing those.
- As a networked gaming system, they allow play and outcomes to be monitored, and games to be changed quickly.
- Many systems allow players to switch between games without physically moving from table to table – dead time during which they are not contributing to revenue. Research by Amaya suggests that where multiple games are available on a terminal, most players will try their hand at more than one.
- Physically, they can be laid out in almost any way, to maximise space on the casino floor – and the per-square-metre profitability. Although often players are placed around a real table, individual terminals can be used too.
- Fully automated systems do away with dealer error and dealer or player cheating.
- Taken together, all these factors mean that profits from multiplayers can be three to five times greater than from comparable conventional table games, according to multiplayer vendor Alfastreet.



Apex Poker

Blackjack and Roulette.

Quikker has full SAS compatibility and so is available for play with TITO payment. It's available in six-, eight- and ten-player versions in a variety of colours, and is delivered as standard with Texas Hold 'Em as an alternative game on the same hardware.

DigiDeal

One of the first to introduce new technology to table games back in 1999, DigiDeal continues to present innovations for the multiplayer market, including its automated X-Table.

Powered by the company's patented Digital Table System (DTS), the X-Table was originally designed to deliver all the key gaming functions within a rich interactive graphical environment. Highlights include a personal 15-inch LCD touchscreen for each player, bill validators and ticket printers, as well as full network compatibility with SAS-enabled accounting and player tracking systems.

New for the X-Table is the ability to be expanded not only with different games but also with extra player seats.

The game library now ranges from classic Baccarat, Texas Hold 'Em, Blackjack, Roulette and Poker to a line of proprietary new games such as Royal Roulette and Racing Card Derby. And to add even more adaptability and to fit a wider range of gaming operations, the company has introduced its new modular X-POD play-on-demand wagering terminals.

The X-POD terminals, it says, provide an easy and affordable way to expand to just the right number of players and seats for a property.

Each terminal offers plug-and-play operation with its own bill acceptor/ticket printer and connectivity to operational and tracking systems. The terminals can connect to the X-Table to increase the total number of positions, or they can be used to create a standalone game area, along with a large flat-screen display and custom stadium seating arrangement.



Interblock

Interblock's G4 Organic Roulette provides players with every wager available on a live game, as well as fast-paced play and the benefit of immediate payouts.

The table is available in either a classic round design or a new football shape, for six, eight, ten or 12 players with optional individual Player Information Displays (PIDs).



The new football-shape design allows players on one side of the machine to see the action taking place on the other side of the table. In addition, each player screen houses a live video feed of the game in play.

The illuminated Interblock logo on the upper panel of the player station even serves as an RFID reader

This gives casino operators an option to optimise the floor layout and maximise their turnover.

Every player station comes equipped with proximity sensor, which prolongs the lifetime of the monitors, while the illumination of the machine helps accentuate the curved form of the player stations with their ergonomically-friendly armrests and footrests. The illuminated Interblock logo on the upper panel of the player station even serves as an RFID reader.

TCSJohnHuxley

TCSJohnHuxley's multiplayer systems all feature hybrid electronic gaming platforms and live game content, allowing players to compete against a live Roulette wheel, dice shaker or card shoe while still enjoying the advantages of electronic betting. Added game security, increased speed and ease of play generate excitement for players and improved profit

THE REAL DEAL

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for operators.

The MultiPLAY system is a hybrid game that employs a single live dealer along with a full-sized electronic multiplayer betting surface that can serve up to 21 player positions simultaneously.

TCSJohnHuxley has continued to enhance MultiPLAY, which is now able to identify individual players and specific bets with its Touch ID feature. The firm claims this allows the MultiPLAY to offer functionality that no other touchscreen-based multiplayer system can, and worldwide patents are pending on the underlying technology.

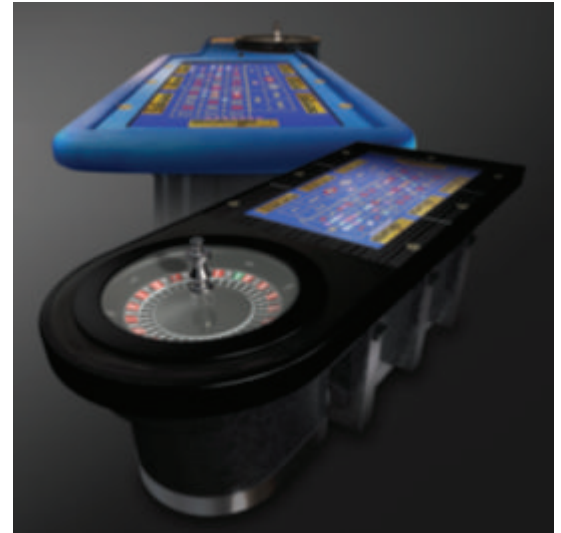
MultiPLAY is available in two table configurations. MultiPLAY Quad HD offers an effective way of quickly delivering live Roulette, Sic Bo or Craps to a large number of customers. By giving operators the ability to adjust games at the flick of a switch, it is possible to maximise game play and revenue, quickly reacting to the time of day and player demand. And, when this option is placed on a double or triple table, different games can be played simultaneously, still using only one dealer.

This version uses a 56-inch screen, with resolution of 3840x2160 pixels (for comparison, a standard HD screen is 1920x1080 pixels), and is available with a range of table finishes and colours as well as the option to add bespoke gaming layouts and chip designs.

The other table configuration, MultiPLAY HD Auto, is a fully automated and cashless configuration which TCSJohnHuxley says can deliver an even greater return on investment. It uses the new automated TCSJohnHuxley Gemini wheel combined with bill acceptors and ticket printers, allowing the casino operator to offer a 24-hour-a-day live-hybrid Roulette platform that requires no dealer or inspection.

MultiPLAY HD Auto, which is designed not only for traditional casinos and electronic casinos but also for slot clubs and electronic arcades, supports TITO payments. It is fitted with individual bill acceptors and ticket printers for each player position, and a fully cashless option featuring smart key technology is also available.

All chip-handling, calculation of winnings and payout functions are fully automated for security, cost reduction and more games per hour, and the MultiPLAY HD Auto can be combined with a Saturn or Gemini wheel or the TCSJohnHuxley Automatic



Dice Recognition system to feed winning results to existing electronic terminals.

Earlier this year, TCSJohnHuxley also signed a distribution agreement with DigiDeal, enabling it to supply the full range of DigiDeal products in specific regions around the world. The addition of DigiDeal products to the TCSJohnHuxley portfolio allows it to introduce traditional table games like Blackjack to “slots only” gaming venues; many jurisdictions in the US and around the world do not allow table games using paper cards.

DigiDeal’s digital table game technology, however, mixes digital play with a live dealer/host with traditional chips to retain the live game feel. The DTS (Digital Table System) platform can be played with real chips, but can also employ money-handling capabilities like ticket-in, ticket-out and virtual chips, with the option to operate in auto-host mode or fully automated. Players are offered on-screen virtual chip selection and betting, real-time card peeking plus up-to-date credit and player bank information.

The hybrid L2V (live to virtual) e-table features TCSJohnHuxley’s Value Verification Unit (VUU card scanning shoe), and the DTS-V hybrid touchscreen live card table offers real card play at electronic speeds. Dealers can draw cards from the shoe at their own pace, and operators can allow players to buy in using any available casino method, including slot tickets, cash, and chips from other tables.

In a nutshell: what are multiplayer games

Multiplayer games are electronic versions of table games that allow players to participate through a screen rather than by physically handling cards, chips and so on. Blackjack, Roulette and Poker are the most common products, although many others are available.

Usually the players sit round a physical table as they would in a conventional game, although some multiplayer systems allow remote playing.

Often, multiplayer gaming takes place entirely on-screen, but real Roulette wheels and dice can also be employed.

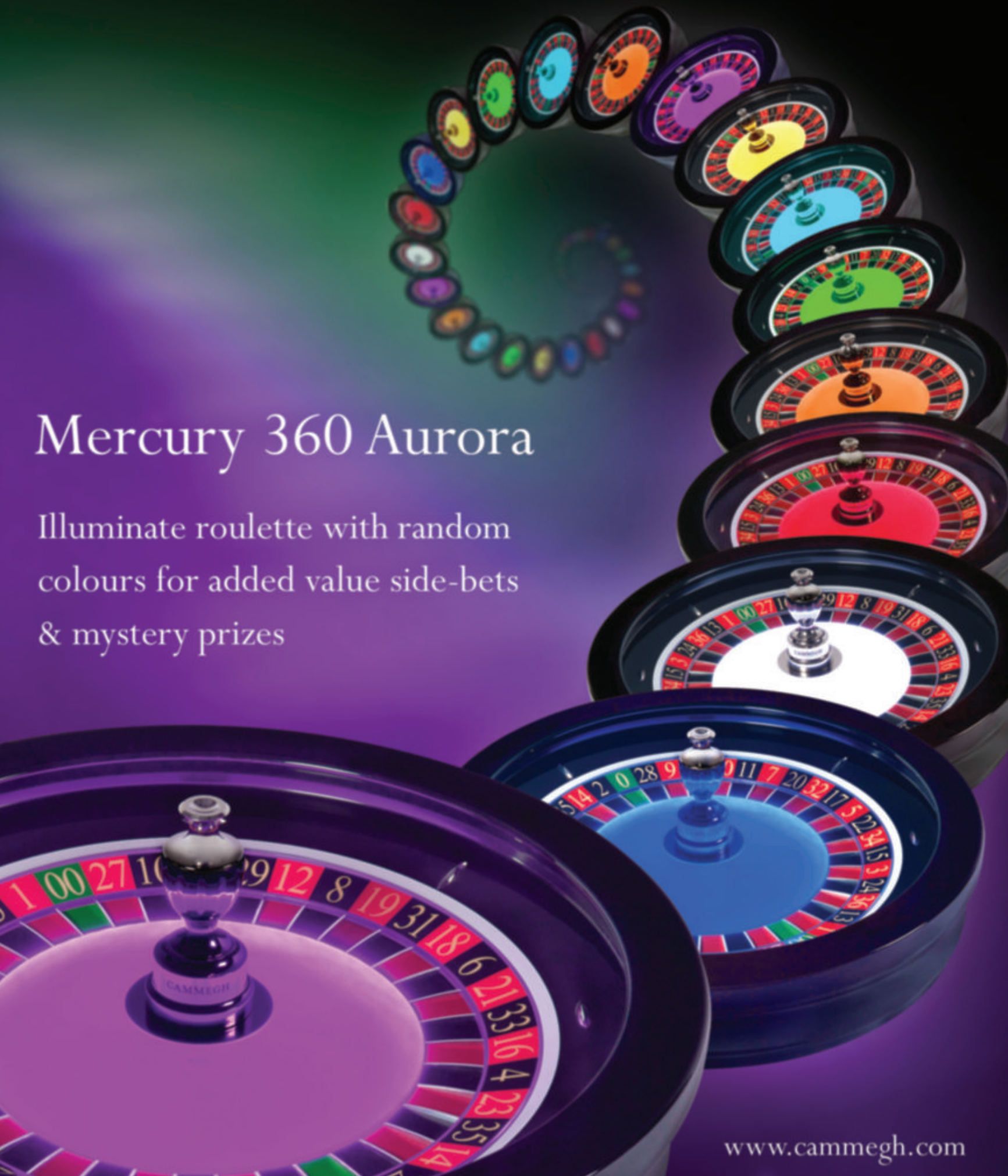
Most major gaming vendors offer multiplayer systems of one kind or another, although firms dedicated to this type of gaming are few and far between: it’s much more common for the same supplier to offer both conventional table game equipment and multiplayers.

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The Interview

Ricki Chavez Munoz meets **IGT's** new Regional Vice President of EMEA, **Sabby Gill**, and finds out his background, plans for the future, and what he brings to the gaming giant

There are not many gaming professionals in operations with an IT background, but with some useful pointers from the press release issued by International Game Technology (IGT), we made the journey to the global industry leader's Amsterdam offices to meet Sabby Gill, IGT Regional Vice President of Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA).

With a career in information technology, Gill who was head hunted from Hewlett-Packard where he was VP & GM of Partner and Mid-Size Enterprise

Business in HP Software within the EMEA region, has a brief to expand IGT's sales coverage and implement a global functional business partner strategy designed to leverage the full resources of IGT for growth in international markets.

As a mainstream casino operator with the essential knowledge in IT, I was about to enter a dialogue across disciplines, but fortunately with sales and marketing as common denominator. Sabby, as he is known, has that engaging first impression that makes you feel at ease, and he started with a verbal resume of his career, which needless to say, goes beyond HP.

Ricki Chavez Munoz: I expect that a career as WW Sales Operations Director at PeopleSoft, Inc., a company specialized in HR Management Systems, Financial Management Solutions, and other systems including customer relationship management software, is extremely helpful in your new IGT role?

Sabby Gill: "Yes it is, in addition to the other roles at CA, Oracle and most recently at HP. I must have

been in almost every customer facing position you can imagine and all of that experience is coming in handy in my first eight weeks here at IGT. We've neglected some of our key customers over the last few years and customer satisfaction has taken a bit of a hit, we've not deployed our resources effectively and have always gone for the big deals and not necessarily serviced some of the smaller regions the way that IGT should have. That's all going to change"

RCM: On the sales side in this industry and I expect other people might have told you this also; casino operators are fairly conservative and fond of keeping to casinospeak with casino minded providers. How are your plans to meet all types of gaming operators?

SG: "You don't end up being number one and 2.5 times bigger than your next competitor without knowing the intricacies of your customers. We've done OK in the past, but expect us to level change the way that we react and interface with the market. We've upgraded our account teams and the support infrastructure with additional tools and resources, we've taken the best from the industry and ensuring these are adopted effectively. The one area that I was extremely conscious of when upgrading the teams was ensuring that we had industry knowledge and expertise, you can't teach credibility. That comes with experience. That's what we've done by hiring from within the industry."

RCM: Craig Churchill, IGT's senior vice president of International Sales, has said that you have 'the ideal background for leading the growth of IGT in the EMEA markets,' and I can see that your enthusiasm is contagious, but how does it translate in terms of customer relations and service as a key ingredient in these rather cynical deal making days?

SG: "That's a great question. From the interaction I've had so far with customers, they are all experiencing similar issues, when you think about what we offer it is not to dissimilar to the industries I have worked in previously, there are solutions that need to show customers value and a high return on



their investment. Isn't that what sales is all about? This industry has relied on product and solution selling, customers require value selling. We need to show differentiation, and with all that IGT has to offer we are in an extremely good place to offer this more than any of our competitors, that's why I am so excited with the opportunity that I have in running this organization.

RCM: You know, whenever I speak to an IT guy, there is a feeling that the language they use filled with initials and acronyms kind of put you at a disadvantage, but right now I feel that we are both on similar levels of language use. This is good news for all casino guys who need to get more into IT but without the inhibitions that the discipline carries for the uninitiated.

“The enterprise software background and the disciplines and principles I've learned will be critical to my success here”

SG: “As I mentioned earlier, you can't teach credibility. The past experiences I bring to this role, make me credible to customers. When they hear the vision and strategy we have and the future direction that IGT EMEA is taking and how IGT as a company continues with its Customer First purpose and promise, they get excited and keen to learn more. The enterprise software background and the disciplines and principles I've learned will be critical to my success here and from what I have seen so far, very much welcome by both IGT and our customers.

RCM: A comment I heard from you at G2E 2012, during the signing of the Letter of Intent with Holland Casino for the development and implementation of IGT's new MOSAIC project, was related to player experience.

SG: “Yes, simply that IGT's casino management solution will help Holland Casinos increase customer loyalty, but not only that, the player experience will be enhanced with IGT's provision of unparalleled flexibility, relationship management functionality, and the tools necessary to optimally manage promotions and casino operations. – A bit of a mouthful – but being recognized as a partner and playing the role of a trusted business advisor to Holland Casino will absolutely allow us to deliver on their vision, and I am extremely excited the future outcomes the relationship will allow us both to experience.”

RCM: The main thrust of IGT's sales strategy in EMEA is installations, such as Italy's Casino de la Vallée, with a predominant mix of IGT's

MegaJackpots, Core For-Sale games and the industry leading sbX casino management system. Do you have any other large installs ongoing or in the near future?

SG: “One important installation is that of Evian. They installed sbX in April 2010 (with 53 new AVPs) and at the end of their fiscal year (October 31st, 2010) a first evaluation was made to ensure that they realized the benefits they expected:

- the growth of the casino on the whole exercise was 13.76% against +1.26% the prior year
- The entire floor benefited from the growth, the customers played other machines when all AVPs were occupied
- All main indicators increased (Gross Win, Theo Win, Drop and attendance)

Since the ROI rapidly increased (14 months), the board of directors voted for additional budget to be allocated and allowed Evian Casino to purchase an additional 18 new AVPs in FY11.

Today the casino growth on FY2011 is +16.58% (from November 2010 to August 2011), more than the national average across other casinos and similar solutions available. These good results are directly attributable to the decision to install sbX and to use its possibilities combined with the wide games library available on AVP cabinets and the marketing strategies put in place,

RCM: Finally, I noticed there were a lot of changes to your Amsterdam offices, with a new lobby in construction and changes to the gaming showroom.

SG: “When you have a brand like IGT with great solutions, I am a very firm believer that showing off what you have to the best of your ability is key and to do it well. We've just extended the lease here in Amsterdam for another five years and further commit to the EMEA IGT business, so upgrading the infrastructure and using the opportunity to include the new offerings in our show room was the right move. I want customers and prospects to come see us and get the full user experience with our solutions, we've got great references across Europe that assist us in doing this too, but they also want to upgrade to the latest and greatest which is what we incorporate here.”

Patti Hart, IGT CEO, has said that at the company is committed to “offering a streamlined, integrated, innovative systems solution, IGT will help provide a cutting-edge player experience”, and Sabby Gill shows that he has the will, determination and energy to carry this imposing strategy to step up IGT's regional market share and in his words “level change” and enhance the global industry leader's technological presence in casino floors in EMEA.

Australia: a mature market under threat

Macau Business reports on the state of play Down Under, where gaming machines rule the roost but the threat of 'pre-commitment' is causing operators and manufacturers sleepless nights

Australia and Macau are almost in the opposites ends of the spectrum as far as gaming models go. In Macau the mainland tourist VIP based model is responsible for well over 70 percent of the revenue. In Australia slots, or pokies as they are known "Down Under," represent around 60 percent of the gaming market.

The country boasts more 200,000 slot machines, which according to research conducted by TNT, represents 2.76 percent of the world wide installed base of gaming machines. The number of gaming venues in Australia is also nothing short of massive: over 5,700. If almost every bar or club in Macau features a karaoke lounge as part of its entertainment offer, almost every pub or community centre in Australia has been

attributed a license to operate slots, from the most upscale trendy bar in Sydney or Melbourne to the singular beer house of a lost town in the middle of the Outback. Call it a cultural phenomenon.

After slots, casino and race betting are the most relevant sources of gaming revenue in pretty much equal footing, followed by sports betting, lotteries and lastly keno and interactive gaming.

Racing is particularly strong in Australia with almost as much weight as casinos but having registered a 10 percent growth in 2008-2009 and raking in US\$19.4b. Casino revenue from 13 venues in the same period was slightly higher at US\$19.8b but registered only a 5 percent increase in the same period according to Ernst and Young research. Australia is a far cry from Macau in this area, with regulators still considering the liberalization of sports and

race waging and lotteries.

Another grand difference with Macau is the regulatory framework with Australia being a highly regulated and mature jurisdiction with general federal legislation combined with different territory-based legislation to which operators have to abide by.

PriceWaterhouseCoopers research had Australia as the second largest gaming market in Asia Pacific back in 2009, but that was before Singapore came into play. An uncertain economic outlook and intense competition, especially in the regional VIP markets, have earned Australia the slowest growth rate in the Asia-Pacific in the eyes of the researchers. PWC expects the Australian gaming market to reach US \$3.1 billion by 2014 at a 3.2 percent growth, while expecting Singapore to climb to \$8.3 billion and Macau trailblazing to a

Rising Star

Sydney's new Star lights up Australia's gaming and entertainment offer

The US\$870 million transformation of Star City into The Star does not fail to impress. Once fully complete, The Star complex will boast more than 20 restaurants, bars and cafes, the new luxury boutique hotel The Darling, a 16 room spa, upscale retail collection, a 4000 capacity entertainment centre and world class gaming areas.

The first two phases launched late 2011

including the rebranding of the oldie Star City into the contemporary The Star and the opening of The Darling.

The Darling complements the existing Astral Towers and Residences and brings the total number of rooms and suites across The Star to more than 650.

Larry Mullin, CEO of Echo Entertainment Group, which owns and operates The Star, says the redevelopment represents one of the biggest tourism and entertainment investments in Australia today: "This \$870 million investment will position us as a powerful force in entertainment and gaming."

When it debuted in late October The Darling Hotel and Spa was the first five star hotel to open in the Sydney Central Business District since the 2000 Olympics.

Two-part in its design, the hotel has a distinctive inverted glass tower resting on a sandstone podium. The Darling's exterior is a nod to the rich history of sandstone used

around Sydney, reintroducing Pyrmont to the CBD and encouraging pedestrians to pass by the hotel via an enormous atrium that runs the length of the hotel.

The suspended 3.5m² vibrant red Swallow which greets guests at the entrance to The Darling is formed by over 400 individual facets and is carrying two diamonds in the shape of a double cherry.

With its integrated bars, lounge areas and a custom made billiard table, the hotel lobby has been designed as a gathering point for Sydney residents and hotel guests alike, bringing the concept of 'lobby socialising' to Sydney.

Positioned in the premium tier of the market, the new boutique lifestyle hotel aspires to offer an enhanced level of service — from the individual check-in desks at reception to a host in the lobby accommodating every individual need of the discrete VIP patron.

With its prime position near Sydney harbour

whopping \$41.5 billion.

The current Australia model is still mostly based on a domestic grind market focused on the overwhelming number of gaming machines, casino games and racing but that's changing, slowly but surely. Nonetheless and amidst heavy political turmoil, looming concession renegotiations, and a grey economic outlook at best, the Australian gambling market is shifting into the high margins, profitable VIP market by boasting venue expansions and recruiting top end executives from VIP savvy Macau.

Operators

As it stands and according to local casino operators Australia's VIP is a niche market, making up only five percent of the global industry. But that hasn't stopped Australasian operators from trying to increase their share by injecting significant amounts of capital to renovate their properties and recruiting high-level executives who previously worked closely with the VIP market in Macau, from the casino VIP gaming floor operations to higher echelons of management: Greg Hawkins, previously at City of Dreams is now CEO of Crown Melbourne; Nigel Morrison, previously from Galaxy Entertainment Group is now CEO of Sky City, with properties in Australia and New Zealand.

"Macau is a very successful market and we've all learned a lot from it," Morrison tells Macau Business. He says he's not trying to replicate the model in his Australia and New Zealand venues, but instead "bringing some of that knowledge" into his operations, along with some executives he brought with him from his days in Macau.

The most recent and significant lunge into

the VIP market in Australia is from Tabcorp de-merged operator Echo Entertainment, which has been separately operating the revamped The Star in Sydney, Jupiters casino on the Gold Coast, the Treasury casino in Brisbane and Jupiters at Townsville since June.

The company has put forth a total of US \$860 million in the refurbishment, expansion and re-branding of its flagship venue The Star in hopes the investment will narrow the gap of the VIP market breakdown. This is dominated by long-standing Australian VIP operator Crown, led by James Packer who has a 33.4% stake in Macau concessionaire Melco-Crown Entertainment.

Echo, which has only recently climbed back on the VIP market after numerous attempts, says it has already grown its VIP market share to close to 30 percent this year, cutting in to Crown's share, which represents the lion's share of the Australian VIP market. Last year when it still operated under Tabcorp the VIP share was only 10 percent but now the operator's medium term objective is to have an equal share of the VIP market with Crown.

Echo Entertainment CEO Larry Mullin told Macau Business that the high growth rate in their VIP gaming operations – roughly 34 percent this year – is explained by the "low base it's coming from both in the local and international markets,"



but he's confident that the company "could do more," especially given it's flagship venue is located in the country's international tourism hub, Sydney. Once completed The Star will have bragging rights to one of largest investments in the tourism and entertainment industry in the country (see boxout).

On the other side of the fence from Tabcorp and Echo, Crown is everything but sitting idly but cashing in on a \$2.2 billion capital expenditure program. Expansion wise Crown is spending US\$371 million on its Burswood Casino in Perth. Besides acquiring nearby Holiday Inn hotel the budget for the revamp includes close to US\$7 million for the construction of a new Infinity Suite, which in turn will provide additional support to existing and new VIP gaming areas. Crown expects the new VIP offering to be ready ahead of Chinese New Year. About 33 percent of

and boasting panoramic views of the city skyline, Harbour Bridge and out to the Blue Mountains, the hotel offers a variety of rooms and suites. Positioned in the premium apex of the tower on the top floors of hotel are five Penthouse Suites dedicated to the ultimate in luxury. The two bedroom suites, uniquely designed by renowned LA designer, Lawrence Lee, feature floor-to-ceiling Sydney harbour views, bespoke furniture, fireplaces, media rooms, butler service and a private VIP arrival. One step down are the eight Adored Suites with a high end residential feel inspired by European drawing rooms. With a footprint of 115m², entry is via a private foyer which opens onto a spacious living room with stunning views and flows through to an intimate dining area. Doors lead to a king-size bedroom with walk-in wardrobe, a fully appointed marble bathroom and a separate powder room for guests.

The Darling will also be home to a custom designed 25m infinity pool area. Scented with

white tea and eucalyptus, the outdoor pool will be an indulgent escape complete with a deck, cabanas and bar facilities for up to 100 guests.

VIP is king

Out of the total US\$879 million invested in the refurbishment plan US\$160 million was channelled specifically to the domestic and international VIP business, upgrading and expanding its customer facilities at the property.

The Star now provides its VIP customers world class luxury accommodation in its new five-star hotel and extra refurbishments were made to previously existing VIP hotel suites. In addition, the existing private gaming room offering was expanded to further improve customer facilities and meet increasing demand.

Echo also purchased two private aircraft capable of flying non-stop from key markets in Asia to service The Star in Sydney and Jupiters casino on the Gold Coast.

Mice is next

The next step for Echo is a 3,000-seat events centre with sweeping views over Sydney Harbour and the city skyline to host A-list performers from around the world in an intimate setting as well as domestic and international conferences, exhibitions and functions.

Designed by Sceno Plus, who have also created The Colosseum at Caesars Palace and The Joint at Hard Rock Hotel in Las Vegas, the 2,400 square metre column-free space will be the largest event space of any hotel in Sydney.

The complex will give Sydney an edge over other facilities in New South Wales and Australia, Larry Mullin argues: "The Events Centre will make The Star a complete entertainment destination with multiple reasons to visit. We already have the 2,000-seat Lyric Theatre for musicals and major theatre productions and now we will have a specialised venue for major performances."

the operator's total revenue of US\$ 2.4 billion came from visitors.

Sky City, the New Zealand-based company, which operates in Northern and South Australia Territories, is bouncing back and also investing heavily in the VIP market. In Darwin, the company is developing a five-star Lagoon Resort, opening July 2012. It will feature a massive heated lagoon and sandy beaches, spa and restaurant, plus four US\$2000-a-night villas next to two VIP gaming pavilions. And, to facilitate occupancy, Sky City is in negotiations with the Northern Territory state government to guarantee regular direct international flights to Asian markets. In South Australia Sky City is negotiating a US\$195.1 million expansion to its Adelaide property. Back home the company spent US\$ 38 million refurbishing its flagship

property Sky City at Auckland Tower ahead of the Rugby World Cup. The new Horizon Suite gaming lounges are very similar to what a VIP player is accustomed in Macau. And even if the 12 million in revenue reaped from the event were bellow expectations, CEO Nigel Morrison argues the investment has paid off by successfully attracting more Asian VIP players and improving the bottom line. Morrison expects a seven percent annual profit climb by the end of the year.

Pre commitment

If Macau and Singapore make up for Australia's biggest competition for international revenue, pre-commitment is the single biggest challenge the industry now faces in the domestic front.

In a nutshell pre-commitment is a proposed bill by the coalition government which would have any and every patron register and set himself a spending limit before getting within playing range of a gaming machine, in any venue, at any given time. Given that the bulk of the Australian gambling market, regardless of venue, revolves around gaming machines, any change will likely have profound implications.

Should mandatory pre-commitment pass into legislation every potential patron will be required to register to obtain a licence to gamble in the form of a card and his details stored on a national database for reference and cross checking.

As it stands, the implementation of pre commitment is the political banner of a minority Tasmanian legislator who is holding the coalition

Australasia Gaming Exhibition

Spinning down under

The reels are spinning every other way and up for the 2012 AGE with new dates and a new image. Banking on the success of last year's event, 80 percent of the show area is already sold.

The pre-commitment issue (read more in main report) the Australian gambling industry faces, was a faint shadow among the 15,000 square feet of neon-lit exhibition space of the 22nd edition of AGE, hosted at the Sydney Exhibition and Convention Centre this Autumn.

Visitors were spoiled for choice as the event saw the participation of 183 exhibitors displaying the latest gaming machines, equipment and hospitality products and services for the hotel, club and casino markets.

With over 700 new gaming machines and products on show gaming executives looking for the latest in gaming products and innovations were greeted by the vast range of new products available and approved for the region's hospitality market.

AGE is organized by Australia based Gaming Technologies Association (GTA) comprising the industry's main suppliers: Ainsworth, Aristocrat, Aruze, Bally, IGT, Konami, Shuffle Master, and WMS.

Ross Ferrar, GTA chief executive told Macau Business the event registered "strong numbers" from both the domestic and international executives from Asia, the Americas and Europe. Exhibitor space registered "a healthy eight percent growth," Ferrar added. Visitors told organisers that new product would be a key strategic differentiator for the industry moving forward and that the AGE delivered.

Banking on this year's success the 23rd edition of the event, still months ahead in August 2012, is already a success. Ross Ferrar told Macau Business that "80 percent of the available area has already been sold."

Breaking with tradition of kicking off the event on a Sunday, the 2012 edition of AGE will be held midweek for the first time, from August 21-23. This is to lend some extra professionalism to the show, organisers say. In a market where clubs, and community centres play as an import a role as a gaming parlour, the yearly gaming event brings in an eclectic crowd.

Also refreshed is the event's image for 2012 featuring a new corporate identity depicting the all-familiar spinning slot reel.

A major different between AGE and other international gaming shows is that AGE promotes virtually every support aspect of the gaming industry and not just gaming machines and related products *per se*. From rug flooring options to speciality blends of gourmet coffee to be served at each different gaming venue and a barista skill competition, most everything else in the hospitality side of

the gaming business was on show.

Notably one the best booth awards distributed on the first day of this year's show went to Tai Ping Carpets from Taiwan which were looking see their product permeate some of the 5,700 gaming available venues in Australia. With Asian themes growing its influence in the market "AGE was the ideal event for them," Ferrar argues.

Among the trendiest gaming products featured at the show was IGT's new Sex and the City slot. Despite having been designed to lure female players, the crowds drawn by the slot were definitely mixed.

Also turning heads was Aruze's Paradise Fishing. Besides the typical reel play, patrons use joysticks to catch the big fish 'swimming' along three massive screens depicting the bottom of the ocean in a multi-player environment.

Another exhibitor who stood out was Bally which operates differently to its rivals; while other major slot manufacturers use Australia as their base of operations to service Macau, the American brand is using Macau as their regional headquarters to expand into Australia, where it recently opened a game development studio and hopes to raise its profile and market share.



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government at ransom – if it doesn't pass the legislator will quit the coalition sending the country into a spin and early elections.

While heralded as the government's solution to problem gambling, the industry argues it will not help and it will definitely hurt and doesn't address problem gambling.

"Pre commitment is more of a political issue and less an industry issue, the CEO of the Australia Gaming Technologies Association (GTA), Ross Ferrar, argues. "We support volunteer pre-commitment" says "but mandatory pre-commitment would simply wipe out the industry." GTA comprises the industry's main gaming machine suppliers. Ross Ferrar reckons it would take millions of dollars and "around 25 years" for the technology to be implemented throughout the country's massive machine numbers and playing venues, which feature many machines running somewhat less than state-of-the-art technology. Ferrar argues that if enacted, the legislation will inhibit the majority of casual players and many a regular

player to place a bet on a machine if required to register with a national database for problem gambling. Mandatory pre commitment "treats everyone as a problem gambler," Ross adds. Many of the venues, such as community clubs and pubs, which are dependent of the slots revenue to operate "would be forced to close and send thousands into unemployment. The large casino operators Echo and Crown are also against mandatory pre commitment, which in their view would have "devastating" consequences to the industry in both gaming and the supporting non-gaming operations.

Mandatory pre commitment sounds far fetched, even in a strongly regulated market in Australia, but Macau Business learned from a high level gaming executive at a local operator that at one time the Gaming Inspection Bureau brought it to the table and discussed with the local operators. The sheer implications of the scheme, including if it should either be directed to locals only, visitors or both, sent it back to the drawing board.

The Australian gaming market would be favourable to voluntary pre-commitment but within reason especially in terms of the implementation time line which would have a drastic impact on machines and system refurbishment costs.

"The general outlook for the industry is that we are united and we are looking forward to a stable, confident future after the pre-commitment legislation is defeated," Ross Ferrar tells Macau Business.

Draft legislation will be published in March, which Ross Ferrar believes will be defeated in Parliament. Until then, all of the industry focus will be on pre-commitment issues.

With so much capital being injected into property revamps to make way for larger, better VIP services for international players as well as improving the domestic offering, researchers give Australia a positive outlook. Growth won't command the same rates as Macau or Singapore – but then, Australia is an established and mature market, and a stable and profitable one at that.

Interview with Larry Mullin, Echo Entertainment CEO

Larry Mullin has reasons to be a happy man. He steered Echo Entertainment through the demerger from Tabcorp, launched the rebranded The Star establishing a foothold in the VIP market, and is getting ready to break ground into revamps in Queensland. If he delivers, the company will have the right to go anywhere it's wanted...

A few months after the demerger from umbrella gaming operator Tabcorp and just 30 days into the Star property's re-launch, Larry Mullin was already seeing results. The Star posted a 10.5 percent yearly gaming revenue increase in October with VIP also tracking strongly. "It's early days but the indications are the project is going to be well received," Larry Mullin tells Macau Business.

While the Australian VIP market is growing at 12.5 percent for the past five years Echo is growing three times as fast, up 34 per cent over the previous year. Mullin explains the numbers by saying the company is "coming off a low base." The fact is the operator has just recently got back into the VIP business after a long string of attempts to break into the lucrative market, some of which ended up giving the old Star City a shady reputation. Mullin hopes the newly revamped property will change all that.

Having already carved roughly a 30 percent

share of the Australian VIP market from just over 15 percent, Larry is confident Echo Entertainment will be able to reach an equal split from rival Crown which has long since been catering to VIP market and controls the lion's share of the market. Larry admits that VIP-wise, "the benchmark has always been Melbourne" from where James Packer operates the operators' flagship property, but that might just change.

Domestic, and VIP

The biggest hindrance to the growth of the Australian VIP market is arguably the success of the Macau and Singapore markets attracting a short supply of big punters. "We compete with everybody for free time and money," Larry says, putting things into perspective: "Australia is a niche market to Macau in many ways that Las Vegas is today." But Vegas is a 14 hour flight from Asia versus a nine hour flight to Sydney and the Gold Coast, or shorter still in one of Echo's two private jets. And out of the Asian and Mainland Chinese players that travel to Macau and Singapore, Echo Entertainment is banking "on the subset who also like to see other things but they want to be treated and gamble in the same manner as to what they are accustomed to – and that's what we want to be able to offer." Why people go to one place versus another "is the reputation that it demands based on how they deliver their service to the costumer," Larry adds. The rationale makes up for part of the reason of the expansions in Sydney and soon in the Gold Coast: "When you're building out at this rate why would you not build to accommodate

the biggest customer in the market?"

But will that be enough, Macau Business asks? "If we were spending billions of dollars on just that customer and dependent on that then I would say you have an argument," Larry retorts. However that's not the only basket Echo is placing its eggs. "We compete on certain costumers for the same business but we also compete with everyone in Sydney with free time to do other things and if we have something here that its unique and interesting then we'll probably going to be pretty successful in attracting a very large market here."

Echo's Star caters particularly to a very large Asian population within walking and driving distance to the property and its CEO believes that the non-gaming and gaming on offer "is something unique that we can make a nice return on our investment." Mullin says his rising Star doesn't feature an Asian theme, but concedes that patrons "will find hints, interesting places to frequent that are very representative" of whom the customers in the market are.

"The great thing about our business is that it's predominantly a locals business and yet if you treated it as such you'll never get the overseas customer to want to come." Larry underlines that breaking down the numbers and looking at what percentages of business comes from which segment against what the company is investing and how much it needs to attract to make it reasonably profitable. "It's not too much of a stretch. We're in the tourism business and we needed to fit these properties out to attract the right kind of tourists."

A character with a top hat, goggles, and a skull t-shirt is playing a guitar on a casino floor. The character has long dark hair and is wearing a black leather jacket. The background is a brightly lit casino floor with various gaming machines and signs, including one for 'Burger-Queen'. The character is holding a guitar with 'RO' on the headstock. The floor has several colorful gaming machines with buttons and levers.

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NEWS

THE LATEST HAPPENINGS IN THE WORLD OF ONLINE GAMING

Microgaming supply Ladbrokes in Spain and Denmark

Microgaming has announced an agreement with Ladbrokes to provide its casino and poker software in the Danish and Spanish markets. Ladbrokes' Spanish

facing site, LBApuestas, and its Danish operation will both be going live with Microgaming software following the licensing process in both markets. It's expected the first operations will go live in

January 2012 and both sites will have access to the huge suite of premium casino titles provided through Microgaming's Flash and download casino clients. Ladbrokes will also be taking Microgaming's poker software in these territories.

Adam Greenblatt, Director of Corporate and Strategic Development for Ladbrokes, said: "We have a strong relationship with Microgaming and our players have always reacted well to their products. We are pleased to be working with them as we target new licences in Spain and Denmark, markets familiar to Ladbrokes already."



Bingo bites back

A former gambling industry worker who unlawfully obtained and sold personal data relating to over 65,000 online bingo players has been found guilty of committing three offences under section 55 of the Data Protection Act.



Marc Ben-Ezra was given a three-year conditional discharge and ordered to pay £1,700 to Cashcade Limited as well as £830.80 costs. Information Commissioner, Christopher Graham, said: "This case shows that the unlawful trade in personal information is unfortunately still a thriving and lucrative

activity. Mr Ben-Ezra sold people's personal details on an industrial scale, making in the region of £25,000 at the expense of the tens of thousands of bingo players whose privacy he compromised. I am grateful to Cashcade Limited and Gala Coral for their work in exposing this unlawful practice. However, we still don't have a punishment that fits the crime." The ICO continues to push for the government to activate the 2008 legislation that would allow courts to consider other penalties like community service orders or the threat of prison.



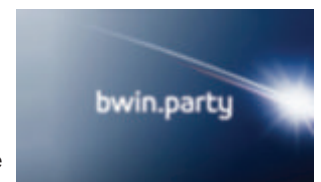
MGM and bwin.party join forces for America

MGM Resorts International has announced an online poker agreement with bwin.party digital entertainment that brings together one of the most highly respected land-based gaming operators in the U.S. with the world's largest publicly-traded online gaming company.



Although online poker is currently prohibited in America, Congress is considering proposals that could legalize it within a framework of federal regulation. Should such legislation be enacted, bwin.party (recognized global leader in online poker, principally through its PartyPoker brand) and MGM Resorts would offer an online platform that employs leading technologies and processes.

"As leaders in the industry, we are confident in our ability to deliver a safe gaming experience of the highest regulatory integrity with brands consumers have grown to know and trust over many decades," said Jim Ryan, Co-CEO of bwin.party.



... in related news, Boyd Gaming Corporation has entered into an agreement with bwin.party which - should Congress legalize online poker in the United States - would see Boyd acquire a 10% stake in a new company that would offer online poker to U.S.-based players under bwin.party's brands, including PartyPoker.

Separately, Boyd Gaming has entered into a 15-year agreement to use bwin.party's technology platform and associated services to offer online poker to U.S. players under a brand developed by Boyd Gaming, assuming Congress passes enabling legislation.

Keith Smith, President and Chief Executive Officer of Boyd Gaming, said: "We see online poker as a compelling future growth opportunity for our Company, and this agreement would position Boyd Gaming to quickly become a leader in the online poker market in the United States."

eCOGRA Approved by Spanish Gambling Authority

Following its recent accreditation as a full testing agency by the Italian regulator AAMS, the independent player protection and standards body eCOGRA has achieved similar status with the new Spanish gambling regulator,



and is now approved to test and certify both i-gaming software and information systems security for the Spanish market.

eCOGRA Chief Executive Officer, Andrew Beveridge, said: "It appears that a harmonised EU regulatory environment is unlikely to be achieved in the near future, and operators, software suppliers and testing agencies are currently faced with a formidable challenge in meeting the different jurisdictions' compliance requirements. In this environment eCOGRA is very conscious of the need to fulfil our clients' expectations and the associated audit risks, and

we are continually developing our auditing approach to ensure that operator and software supplier clients realise the benefits."

Founded in 2003, eCOGRA tests, reviews and monitors the operational activities of almost 200 tier one online gambling venues operated by some of the largest companies in the industry. Its audit and IT professional staff is experienced in the testing and certification of platforms, games, online casino, bingo, mobile and poker networks and sports books to best practice standards that meet international regulatory requirements, including the safe storage database demands enshrined in the new Spanish regulations.

Pokerstars attempts largest ever tournament

On December 4th PokerStars.com will attempt to hold the world's largest poker tournament and break the Guinness World Record of 149,196 players set in 2009. As part of the PokerStars' 10th Anniversary Celebration, the company will attempt to bring more than 150,000 players together to play in a \$1 buy-in No Limit Hold'em tourney with a guaranteed prize pool of \$250,000. The first prize is a guaranteed \$50,000, which is an unusually high return for a \$1 buy-in tournament.



"It's exciting to be part of a World Record," said Team PokerStars Pro Bertrand 'ElkY' Grospellier, who already holds a personal

Guinness World Record for Most Online Poker Tables Played in One Hour (62, with a profit of \$23.60).

32Red grows with CTXM

32Red has bolstered its gaming line-up with fixed odds games from CTXM, adding to their portfolio of games from top manufacturers such as Microgaming and JPM. CTXM fixed-odds games using cutting-edge, unique designs to emulate real sports games. CTXM's Pachinko-style games in particular are very popular.

Udy Yosha, CEO of CTXM, said: "We are proud and pleased that our games are now available on one of the most respected online casinos. 32Red has a strong track record as a reliable online casino operator, and we are more than glad to be part of it!"



Genting launches slot World Tour

Gentingcasino.com has announced the launch of the 'Genting World Tour', a slots promotion with thousands in free

bets and cash prizes up for grabs. The overall tour winner also gets to go on the trip of a lifetime to one of the famous Genting Resorts



World destinations in either Singapore or New York.

Every participating player will turn their slot wagering on qualifying games into leader board points on weekly and overall leader boards with a chance to win

rewards including VIP packages to Genting Casinos UK clubs, tickets to Premiership football matches, and – for the overall winner – a trip to a Genting's International Resorts World hotspot destination. The runner-up receives a VIP weekend in London with dinner at world famous The Palm Beach Casino as well as £500 in gaming chips to play with.



The Isle of Man – a new era part IV!

The Isle of Man Government has now announced that it is seeking expressions of interest from individuals and organisations keen to work with the Government to establish the first five star hotel and casino complex on the Island.

The Government has also prepared supporting information regarding the opportunity and that this information is now available upon request, in both hard and soft copies, to interested parties.

A high quality hotel and casino complex incorporating conference and leisure facilities presents an exceptional opportunity to build and operate a casino resort hotel in Europe and provides an exciting opportunity for both the Island, and for those involved in financing, developing and operating casino hotel leisure resorts.

As recent amendments to the Isle of Man Casino legislation now make it possible for an Isle of Man landbased casino operator to provide a live audio and video feed of its gaming to online gaming operations this could not only provide additional gaming income for the casino but also provide a cost effective marketing opportunity to publicise the ancillary businesses operated under the casino licence.

Companies/individuals interested in investigating this rare opportunity in more depth should contact Vont who can assist in the process.

Jon Sykes
CEO
Vont Limited
Email: jsykes@vont.co.im
Web: www.vont.co.im

Microgaming launch Android Air

Microgaming, the world's largest provider of online gaming software, has launched Android Air, an Adobe Air-based application available for use with tablets and smartphones running on Android. The platform comes with a starting game package of eight leading Microgaming casino games, with plans to deliver at least 20 or more games between now and the end of the year. New games will be automatically added via a process which is connection state aware, so players can choose to do these updates via WiFi rather than 3G.

Games are available via a slick, user-friendly lobby,



with fully revamped banking and registration modules also available. The underlying architecture has also been updated and connection now links directly with the gaming server, allowing

the utilisation of Microgaming's comprehensive suite of acquisition and retention tools such as Bonus Balance, Player Grouping, Player Communication Manager and VPB an online Virtual Pitboss that allows instant trigger based messaging and promotions.

Neill Whyte, Head of Product Channels for Microgaming, commented: "The explosion of mobile gaming over the last 12 months, driven largely by the increased adoption of smartphones in developing countries, represents a huge opportunity for providers. Microgaming has the strongest portfolio of gaming assets in the industry, which we can leverage to fully exploit the opportunity that the rapid growth in Android-based smartphones represents."

GTECH G2 partners with Bid Shopping



Leading interactive gaming software and services provider, GTECH G2, has announced a partnership with Bid Shopping - one of the UK's largest TV and online shopping destinations - to showcase the newly launched bidbingo.co.uk.

The site will feature GTECH G2's wide selection of bingo games and embedded side games, while the live presenters and chat features will allow players to create their own online community.

Bid Shopping offers more live television than any other shopping channel in the UK, broadcasting seven days a week to millions of digital homes via Virgin TV, Freeview, Sky and the web. An aggressive marketing campaign is set to launch bidbingo.co.uk including TV advertising across all three TV

shopping channels, email marketing to their client database, Direct Mail to members, leaflets in delivery parcels and promotional offers through their customer call centre.

William Scott, Vice President of GTECH G2, said: "We see this as a great opportunity to reach more players due to the similar target audience profile between bingo players and bid shopping."

...in related news, GTECH G2 has been nominated for two awards at the prestigious International Gaming Awards 2012, due to be held at the Sheraton Park Lane, London on January 23rd. GTECH G2 has been nominated for iGaming Software Supplier Of The Year and Technology Supplier Of The Year.

Betfair hits 4,000,000th customer milestone

Betfair, the world's biggest betting community, has announced that it now has over four million registered customers. The company, which revolutionised the betting industry with the launch of its Exchange in 2000, has seen enhancements to the company's product portfolio and a continuing emergence in markets outside of the UK drive customer growth through the four million milestone.

Betfair's innovation in the mobile space, which has seen it release first-to-market applications for the iPhone, iPad and Android, has also played a significant role in attracting new customers. The company recently reported that it had seen revenue

growth in mobile increase by over 70% in the first quarter of this financial year. The number of bets placed through mobile also doubled when compared to the same period in the previous year. The company also reported at its full year results in June that the prior year had been a record period for site activity with the number of bets matched increasing 20% to 916 million.

Betfair's Group Operations Director, Ian Chuter, said: "Reaching this milestone is testament to the continuing appeal of our product, which in a short space of time has revolutionised an industry and turned on its head the expectations of sports bettors."

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If looks could thrill...

In a world of photo-realistic video game graphics, can online gaming risk falling behind presentation-wise? **Betsoft Gaming** certainly doesn't think so, as **Matt Broughton** discovers.

If an online slot developer's web site is effectively its 'attractor mode' then Betsoft wins before the competition begins! Apart from the sheer number and diversity of titles on offer (shall I be Mr Vegas today, get involved with loveable rodents Ned and his friends, or live the dream as a Rockstar?) the presentation is instantly miles ahead of its competition. NONE of this is an accident...

Betsoft Gaming was founded in 2005 by a small team of industry veterans with a combined experience of over 25 years in the industry. From day one the team devoted themselves to one thing and one thing only: developing the most innovative and graphically impressive slots games for the i-gaming industry.

"By the beginning of 2007, we'd already begun to make forays into advanced 3D graphics, looking for ways to push the envelope of online slots technology," explains Betsoft's Product Manager, Anthony Locke, "By the end of that same year, we had already hit upon new technologies and processes which would eventually culminate in our amazing Slots3 product line."

The Slots3 product line was introduced in early 2008, and was the first such product to bring this high quality style of slots to the i-gaming market. The reaction was immediate and very positive, as Locke explains: "Players were drawn to our games because there was nothing else like them on the market. All the competing products were still relying on primitive 2D vector style graphics, with minimal animations and little to no audio. Once we saw the great thirst for such a revolutionary product, we decided to



focus our efforts on bringing the best possible games to the industry."

Betsoft's design teams had been growing increasingly frustrated with the limitations of the existing technologies that were in use at the time. Being aware of the tremendous strides in audio and graphics technology, they identified a massive untapped niche in the market for 3D video slots made to the exacting standards of animated feature films or console video games. The latest advances in technology, including the latest version of Adobe's Flash Player, showed them that it was possible to go beyond 2D graphics and simple animations. "There was really no question," says Locke, "according to our research, true cinematic 3D slots

were in high demand, and we, as the pioneers of this technology, were perfectly poised to provide the supply."

LOOKING GOOD

Locke strongly believes that presentation has become





more important to gamers across the board: "From the moment the player logs in to an operator's system we aim to provide the best presentation possible, from the promo banners and button graphics to the intro cinematic - which we work very closely with our partners to provide - and the actual user-interface for the game. A tight, cohesive and pleasing presentation is critical to a game's success. We take this to the extreme in our Slots3 product; every control and button is designed to look like a part of the environment our game depicts." Betsoft also believes consistency is key and that the user should be able to figure out how to operate the game within the first five seconds of it loading. "Our games are so intuitive; the players immediately grasp how they work without having to read help texts or contacting support."

Another feature of Betsoft Gaming's titles is the proprietary EXPANDICON technology. "Slots icons are no longer confined to their places on the reels," explains Locke, "Instead, they burst forth in thrilling 3D to expand upon wins, increasing the entertainment factor for the player. This is something you simply do not see with other games."

Another hallmark of the Slots3 collection is strong, clearly defined themes. "A large part of our development cycle is devoted to researching and then creating rich themes for each game to further increase the quality of experience. We select themes that vary in dynamics so as to appeal to all demographics."

Regarding the development cycle, how does a Slots3 title compare to traditional slots in time and effort? "As you might imagine, creating a traditional slot is a pretty simple affair," says Locke. "You generally only need one or two artists to create the entire game, and a simple 2D slot can be made, quite easily, in one-to-two weeks by a team of less than five people. A great deal more goes into making a Slots3 game; 3D graphics require modelling, texturing, lighting, rigging, animation, rendering, colour correction and then final implementation into the game application itself. None of our games are exactly the same - there's no recycling of assets or models. Luckily for Betsoft, we employ only the best



"We'll continue to raise the bar in regards to what's possible, improving and redefining the concept of 3D Slots."





of the best in every field, with most of our team boasting long years of experience in the AAA video gaming and feature film industries. “

SUCCESSFUL SLOTS

Betsoft have been releasing a new Slots3 title every month, and plan to ramp this up to two per month as a minimum.

“This is where we set ourselves apart from every other operator,” says Locke. “We have the most experience in this market as we’re the ones who brought the first true 3D slots to the market. We have the most games, we have the best people in the industry behind it, and no one else can say that. Nothing else comes close.”

So just what is Betsoft’s secret to success beyond the technology; what makes a great slot? “If you asked ten different people this question you’d get ten completely different answers,” suggests Locke. “In our opinion it’s a combination of all the elements that went into making the game. In short, the result is greater than the sum of its parts. For example, consider one of our perennial favourites: Mr. Vegas. This has been one of our top performers since its release last year. By any metric, it’s a very successful slot. What made it so successful? Was it the amazing graphics, the entertaining and innovative theme, the incredible theme song? It was all of these things, but more than that, it was how they all gelled together in such a flawless, seamless way which gave the players a memorable and entertaining experience. Our games are not just slot games, but a unique, complete cinematic experience from top to bottom.”

Locke believes that Slots3 will be the template for



what slots gaming will become. “We have no doubt that our groundbreaking endeavours will continue to lead the industry. We’re always looking to the horizon for the next technological breakthrough that will open up new markets and new ways to bring our exceptional gaming products to the masses. We’re well aware of imitations of our products showing up throughout the industry, imitations that fall short of our work, but this only serves to solidify our place at the forefront of 3D slots and i-gaming development. We are the originators, the leading innovators in the 3D slots market. We were the first to market, and we were the first to leverage the advanced technologies that had become available, but we’re never content to rest on our laurels. We’ll continue to raise the bar in regards to what’s possible, improving and redefining the concept of 3D slots.”



Beyond slots, BetsoftGaming have a number of plans and initiatives in place for the emerging mobile gaming markets, and are also in the process of expanding into other new and exciting markets, such as online poker. “We’ve developed an amazing system called Poker 3,” explains Locke, “which takes our graphical expertise from the Slots3 product line, and leverages it with an amazing True Cinematic 3D poker client. Poker networks aren’t exactly known for their amazing graphics, and we aim to change that. While still in beta, this new poker client has already been given extremely positive feedback from our preview builds. This will definitely be something to watch in the future.”

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Help yourself

Effective online help systems and careful attention to the details of the consumer experience are a driver of revenue for e-gaming operators, not just a cost, writes **Barnaby Page**

The ever-growing amount of information available online, and the mushrooming number of ways to access it, has not only had an impact on the way we engage with consumers: it is also reshaping their expectations of customer service.

And this has great significance for online gaming operators, particularly those who hope to secure the patronage of players relatively unaccustomed to gambling. If we don't make it easy for them to learn how to use our products – both in understanding the actual games, and in handling “housekeeping” tasks like registration, deposits and withdrawals – they will very likely go elsewhere.

This is underlined by new research among more than 1500 European consumers, conducted for Britain's Artificial Solutions, a supplier of virtual assistant technology. (You know – the online help systems that provide answers to questions typed in ordinary English, usually represented by a youngish-lady icon with a Stepfordesque smile and a worrying resemblance to Anna, the alien queen from *V.*)

Unsurprisingly, given its sponsor, the research is bullish on virtual assistants. Four out of five consumers would be willing to use one if it got them answers faster; nearly a third, indeed, had already used such a system, and most found it helpful.

But whether you employ one of these or not, the evidence that Web-based help is a real driver of business rather than just a nice-to-have is inescapable. It's the first port of call for the confused consumer: a full 96 per cent said that they would try to find answers online before resorting to other means such as email or phone help lines. (That's no doubt because most people surveyed considered the wait for a call pick-up or an email reply to be too long.)

And it does affect their perception of the business, which in turn means it is a factor in whether they become – or remain – customers. Three quarters of the consumers surveyed said that interactive, online help providing an immediate response to their query would have a strong effect on their decision to use that company. If help wasn't that easy to obtain, a quarter of consumers would definitely abandon you for a competitor, while a further 63 per cent would at least consider it. Those are sobering numbers.

“Over 90 per cent of people in the survey said they wanted to access information immediately. Unfortunately for businesses, well over half the people found the Website's search facilities and FAQs sadly lacking,” said Andy Peart, Chief Marketing Officer of Artificial Solutions.

Five per cent of companies confessed that they do not monitor their Websites at all

Wrong, wrong, wrong

Another piece of recent European research also points up the importance of getting it right, whether on a transactional Website (like an e-gaming one) or your corporate site.

This survey was conducted for Magus, a firm specialising in “automated compliance monitoring for multi-editor Websites”, which is what it sounds like. It found that an astonishing 87 per cent of the 200 large companies it studied acknowledge errors on their sites, including inconsistent branding, poor usability, and accessibility problems.

Branding errors were the biggest area of failure, cited by more than half, closely followed by spelling mistakes. Around 40 per cent admitted to usability and accessibility problems.

“The survey also indicates that Web editors see a sharp correlation between poor online customer experiences and company income,” said Magus.

Why does this kind of snafu still happen, in an era when the Web is such a central part of most businesses? Well, a third of respondents said they don't have a clear strategy for Website governance, and more than two thirds agreed their approach to quality assurance online isn't up to scratch. Five per cent even confessed that they do not monitor their Web sites at all.

“The implications of this survey are clear,” said Simon Lande, CEO of Magus. “Manual quality assurance processes and disconnected toolsets [for example, separate spell-checkers and link-checkers, rather than an integrated tool] are simply inadequate to the demands of today's distributed multi-editor environments, and are putting companies' reputation and revenue at risk. Companies with global Web operations need to complement their content management systems with a process of enterprise-level quality and compliance monitoring and analysis. Until this lesson is learned they will continue to put significant amounts of revenue and profit at risk.”

Again, there is of course an element of “he would say that, wouldn't he” here. But take these comments in tandem with the Artificial Solutions research, and the report that we featured in October's news pages relating how frustrating customer experiences are driving consumers away from mobile commerce, and the lesson is clear: you do need to sweat the details.



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