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I think it's vital that you know your market inside out and you know what your players like. We can use data to get a picture of the players...

SHELLEY
HANNAH

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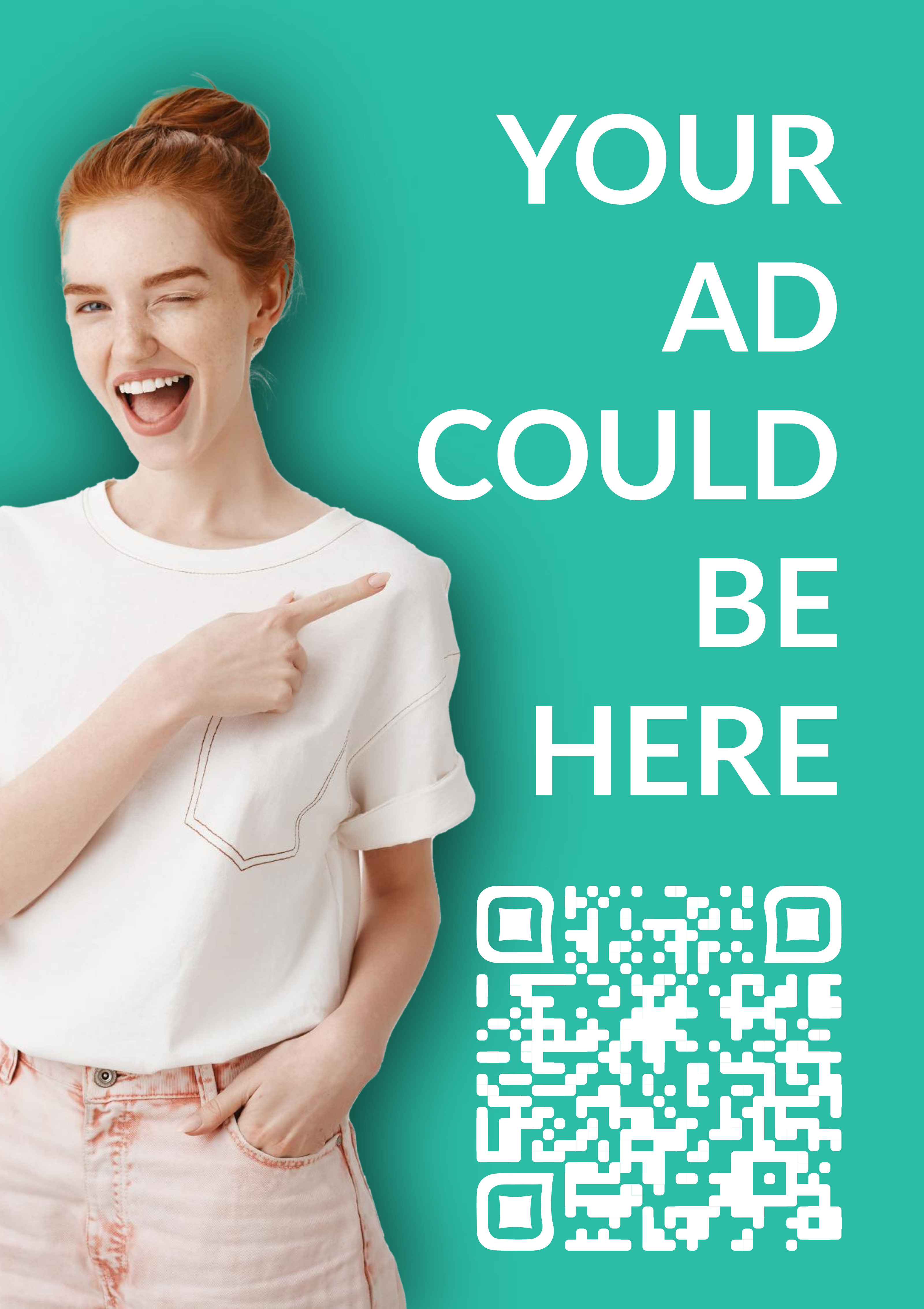
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Mark O'Hare: The sky's limit for The Unit and Red Knot

We speak to The Unit's Head of Business Development Mark O'Hare about the company's strategic alliance with PR and communications specialists Red Knot Communications, which was announced last year...

Can you let us know a little bit about what Red Knot does and why The Unit and Red Knot decided to enter into a strategic alliance?

We've worked with Red Knot since the summer of 2023, after a successful spell of Red Knot providing their PR and media services to us, particularly in the B2B domain. We knew thety had worked with some of the biggest names in media, and we were instantly impressed with the support they've given us and the press coverage they have been able to generate from press releases, interviews, thought leaderships and social media marketing.

Very quickly, though, we established a crossover between the two companies whereby we could exploit some natural synergies. By way of an instructive example, just take my own position role, which began as Head of Business Development for The Unit. More recently, though, I've performed a twin-track biz-dev role for both companies. At The Unit, software development is a core part of the business and we have a talented marketing team that does traditional marketing like SEO, PPC, social media etc. However, our clients often also asked us about PR services, which was something we didn't have the expertise in-house to provide. In the past, we would have simply handed that off to Red Knot. But now The Unit's Co-Founder Paddy Casey and Red Knot's Co-Founder Andy Clerkson (who had previously worked well in tandem at Grand Parade) thought I could manage sales for both and oversee how these complementary connections interlink, creating organic efficiencies from which to scale both businesses, rather than oscillating from one to the other in more disjointed fashion.

This is quite an interesting partnership, because the two companies come from very different areas, so what brings Red Knot as a media company in line with a software development company like The Unit and vice versa?

We have talked to clients in the past and interpretations of PR can be quite different, from the more traditional to the increasingly technical. For example, some just want PR to be back-linking and SEO, which was not necessarily Red Knot's initial

expertise. But the scope of its services has now evolved to include this, thanks to The Unit's input. As in any domain of discourse, you have to embrace the latest tools of innovation and tech if you want to distil clear messaging and engage with your target audience. Nowadays, some people's perspective of PR speaks to a more technical side which we have the experience in, so we can help each other by combining both.

How does your role differ from what you were doing for The Unit previously?

For The Unit, my day-to-day responsibilities varied from account management to working on sales leads or assisting in marketing projects, whereas Red Knot is more streamlined for me to focus on the sales process. Red Knot had a structure in place for lead management and outreach that we've been able to incorporate into The Unit's structure. The role can develop as I continue to learn about what works well for both companies and I'm learning a lot.

How have you found the challenge of splitting your time between both companies?

That's something that's played out differently to how we may have thought. It isn't as simple as having a set structure of focusing on The Unit in the mornings and on Red Knot in the afternoons, and I just have to be honest with myself and both companies about what I'm able to do. Some days I might work on a proposal for a The Unit client and then work on a different project for Red Knot. You have to work around time zones as well, because Red Knot's team are spread out across Europe and the US, whereas the team I work closest with at The Unit is based in Dundalk, Ireland. I'd been at The Unit for five years and knew how we operate. From my experience now with Red Knot, I'd say both cultures are very similar, so that certainly helps.

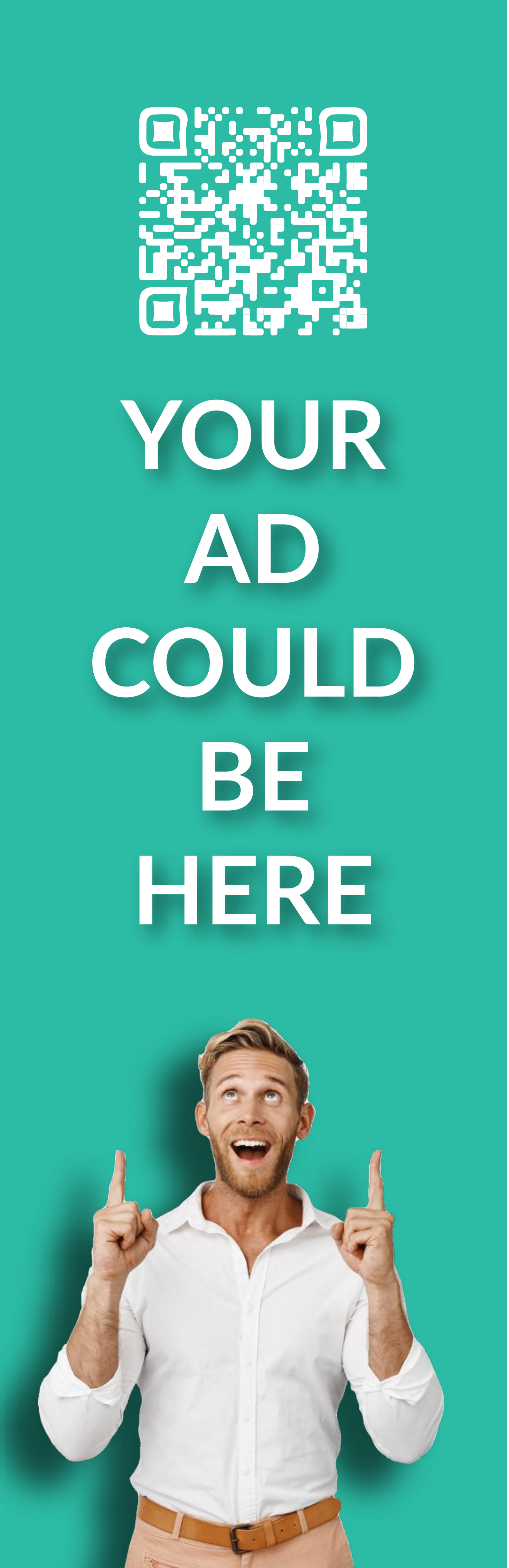
How likely is it this partnership could expand with more staff or services?

I think there is huge potential to expand the partnership. There will certainly be other colleagues representing both sides of the business in due course. That's not something we've put into place yet, but we've already entered mature conversations for the next phase, and ICE London (6-8 February) will see us unveil the next building block in this lockstep journey.

I personally feel the sky is the limit, because both companies are growing and can help each other in so many ways, as we seek to optimize our strengths and deliver exceptional services across the dynamic world of igaming and sports betting. I couldn't put a timeline or a figure on things, but our growth in the last 12 months has been fantastic and we wish to continue that. The opportunity is now as palpable as it is obvious. After all, our respective skill sets, target territories and client lists are totally complementary. This global partnership crystallises a hive mind of two successful companies, comprised of very experienced gaming industry professionals who can supercharge marketing for any B2C or B2B gaming or betting brand, anywhere in the world.

Mark O'Hare

Head of Business Development @ The Unit



How suppliers can maintain a presence in the US space

While a lot of talk about the US betting and gaming markets have been around operators and the highly competitive climate, behind the scenes, suppliers are also battling for a slice of the cake.

From powering betting and casino offerings to providing games content, reg tech, and RG solutions, the US is a region with high potential for suppliers willing to invest time and resources.

We spoke with Compliable's Chief Revenue Officer, Greg Ponesse, to discover more about how suppliers can establish a presence and achieve their goals in the US.

A lot of the recent focus on North America has been around operators and the tough competitive landscape, but how are suppliers faring?

Overall, suppliers are doing quite well. This is partly driven by the simple fact that all operators rely heavily on suppliers in one way or another to run their businesses. On the platform and content side, the big players such as Light & Wonder, Everi, Aristocrat and Playtech, are especially vital as their casino offerings keep operators progressing. In a way, they become the production engine for operators and help entice customers to the gambling sites.

Smaller content suppliers may have a tougher time to fight off the competition from well-established land-based US giants, but as the markets mature, we are likely to see an increase of newer studios in the casino lobbies.

Outside of the content sphere, there is plenty of excitement around suppliers of reg tech, responsible gambling solutions, geolocation platforms and KYC tools etc, which are crucial for operators to further grow their businesses, so I expect to see more growth in that area too.

How do the licensing requirements differ for suppliers in the US compared with operators?

Both must navigate a complex and often-changing regulatory landscape but operators usually require a more comprehensive type of license due to their direct interaction with consumers and handling of player funds, meaning more rigorous and stricter investigations and background checks. This can include scrutiny of financial history, research into key employees, and inspections around anti-money laundering practices and responsible gaming.

Providers of goods and services to the industry need different types of licenses, and often fewer ones, with less stringent

Greg Ponesse

Chief Revenue Officer @Compliable

regulatory requirements regarding operational procedures. They must however adhere to standards ensuring the integrity and security of their products and can face a more focused set of rules related to specific technical standards and testing requirements.

From a cost perspective, an operator's market entry fee is typically markedly higher than a supplier's, including steeper licensing fees and taxes.

Are there any challenges that suppliers need to be aware of before entering the space, especially coming from Europe? Any common mistakes?

The first thing to determine is what type of license is required, and we often see suppliers apply for the wrong license or licenses they don't necessarily need. This slows down the process and can end up being costly, so getting some guidance around this is recommended.

There are major regulatory differences in the US compared to Europe, with laws varying by state, so suppliers must be ready to navigate this unique landscape. Common mistakes include underestimating the complexity and cost of compliance and licensing, not adapting products to specific consumer tastes, meeting the legal requirements of different US states, overlooking the importance of local partnerships and networks, failing to have a robust plan for payment processing that complies with US regulations, and ignoring the potential for intellectual property disputes.

The overall licensing procedure is lengthy and complicated so European providers need to be prepared for detailed background checks and long waiting periods. To avoid any difficulties, companies must be fully committed and ready to adapt and comply with all the rules and regulations in the US.

Will the investment be worth the rewards for suppliers entering the US or is the local competition too hard?

From a traditional game perspective, the US has some well-established suppliers with a long history in the land-based sector and they are doing extremely well. There are however European suppliers who are also popular in the US market. In order to be successful, it is all about competitive differentiation as that is what operators are looking for. Evolution is a great example of this. As a fairly late market entry, they have still managed to stand out and is now dominating the live casino space with an unparalleled offering.

Many European suppliers have been in the market for a long time, so they have the knowledge and experience that can give them a competitive edge as they enter the US. It does take a lot of resources and investment but if you have a truly innovative product, you can make a mark.

How can Compliable help suppliers in the space?

We provide speed and accuracy and enable companies to keep up to date on what licenses are required. Our scalable platform allows employees to securely enter their information just once, with the data then being auto-populated across multiple forms and applications, making it simple to apply for different jurisdictions at the same time. Compliable keeps users aware of the licensing journey and offer FAQs and 24/7 help throughout.

We accelerate the licensing process for both operators and suppliers, giving them a competitive advantage in an industry where the first movers retain larger market share. Speed is just as important for suppliers who must keep up with the expansion of their operator partners, and we can offer that necessary support.

Altenar: How will Brazil and Mexico fare in 2024?

The winds of change are sweeping across LatAm, with the creation of a regulatory framework now in motion. Over the coming months, legislators will attempt to build a structure that works for all. Altenar's Americas Regional Director, Hugo Llanos, offers his expert insights on why Brazil holds the 'most promise', and how its more established neighbours have offered valued lessons ahead of what could be the provider's biggest year to date.

The hottest news for Brazilian operators is the regulation of sports betting being approved in December. You have previously stated Brazil holds 'the most promise for businesses' – how does this development drive Altenar forward in its growth for the coming year?

Regulation in Brazil presents a positive opportunity for everyone in the industry, as with regulation comes greater trust from players and hopefully, increased channelisation. They can be confident in the knowledge they are entertaining themselves in a modern, fun and safer environment.

We are opening an office in LatAm looking at improving our business support, with the aim of being closer to our partners in the region.

There are opportunities abound for those willing to grasp them and Brazil's regulation has given the green light for innovation and creativity. This now means that Altenar can press ahead with its work to develop the best tools and features designed specifically for the Brazilian market.

Mexico is a booming market, with an estimated 40% of Mexicans betting on sports in some form in 2023.What opportunities lie ahead of Altenar's expansion in the country for the coming year?

Mexico has always been an intriguing sports betting market and for us, it is a close second to Brazil. It is a substantial market with a growing economy, which saw a quarter of bettors wager on sport for the first time in 2022. This, for us, represents huge growth.

In 2024, we expect further opportunities and innovation to fuel our success in Mexico. Brazil is of course the newcomer, but it would be foolish to take our eyes off the ball in other territories, like Mexico, Peru and Chile.

How do you differ your offering in LatAm regions, compared to European territories? What are the key differences in LatAm players' needs?

The key differences between LatAm and European markets are in the user experience, not the product itself. The way a sports betting website is presented to a customer in LatAm is different to how it would appear to European players due to differences in taste. A player in LatAm may like some promotions over others, for example, or certain sports in Mexico, such as American sports, are more popular than in Europe. It is essential to make the experience intuitive and as seamless as possible for players who are accessing the content from their home countries.

What do you anticipate being Altenar's legacy in LatAm by this time next year?

We are working hard to ensure we listen and collaborate with our customers, and to engage in discussions to make sure the product we offer meets their needs. We listen, help formulate their ideas and then help them achieve their objectives. For us, it is about making that distinction between partner and provider – we will never just offer a product without supporting customers to get the most out of it. By this time next year, I hope we will see the market in Brazil live, with a robust regulatory framework, and a number of additional partnerships.

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A closer look at SPRIBE's knockout deal with the UFC and star fighter Alex Pereira

Giorgi Tsutskiridze

SPRIBE is the studio behind Aviator, the number one crash game in the world. Off the back of the game's incredible success – it's played by more than 10 million people each month – the developer has been able to sign a fight-card topping partnership with the UFC as it looks to introduce the game to players in North America for the first time.

As part of the deal, SPRIBE gains access to the UFC's athletes and has just announced a marketing campaign with current Light Heavyweight Champion, Alex Pereira. We sat down with Giorgi Tsutskiridze, CCO at SPRIBE to learn more.

You've just announced a major partnership with UFC Champion and Brazilian MMA legend, Alex Pereira. Tell us more about this deal.

We are super excited to have welcomed Alex as a brand ambassador for Aviator, our flagship title and the number one crash game in the world with more than 10 million players per month. Alex is one of the most storied fighters in the MMA and one of only nine to hold titles across two weight divisions – he's currently Light Heavyweight Champion and is the former Middleweight Champion. He is high profile and has a loyal fanbase that we believe will enjoy the knock-out experience that Aviator has to offer. To help drive awareness of Aviator among his fans and those who follow the UFC, Alex will be taking part in a series of creative campaigns over the coming months.

How did the deal with Alex happen? Do you have an existing relationship with the UFC?

We do. Back in October last year we announced a partnership between SPRIBE and the UFC. The multi-year agreement sees the Aviator logo and branding appear during the UFC's Fight Nights and Pay Per View events inside the Octagon. It also includes a brand ambassador fund that allows us to access UFC athletes such as Alex to promote Aviator in various ways. This is the first of its kind deal between a game studio and a top-tier sports organisation and we have some really exciting plans to maximise the potential this collaboration provides for all parties.

The UFC has a global fanbase, but it is especially popular in North America. Does the deal with the UFC and Alex suggest SPRIBE is going after this market?

North America has been on our radar for some time now. We are going to great lengths to bring Aviator to as many players as possible in regulated markets around the world. We have a strong presence in Europe, Asia and Africa, and over the coming 12 months will focus efforts on North and South America. The partnership with the UFC will catapult Aviator into the mainstream, in the US and the other global markets on our radar so that when we do go live in each, we already have significant awareness. As you say, the UFC is a global sport, so we also see it as helping boost Aviator's profile across the world.

We are seeing more and more casino companies sponsor sports events, teams and organisations. What's the opportunity here?

Sports audiences are incredibly broad and there is a lot of cross-over from sports and sports betting to online casino play. This is certainly the case with Aviator as its roots are in mobile and video gaming, making it appeal to a much wider player demographic than traditional casino and slot games. Aviator has a high percentage of Millennial and Generation Z players, and these are the people watching fight sports such as the UFC and indeed other sports such as Formula One, football, snooker and so on. Sports attract huge global audiences, so there's a big opportunity to get your brand or in our case, game, in front of millions of potential players in a way that is authentic.

Aviator has become something of a phenomenon since it made its debut in 2018. What's been key to its success?

Aviator was the first casino game to be based on the popular crash game format found in video and mobile gaming. It was starting to be embraced by the crypto-gambling community, a space the team at SPRIBE has been closely watching. We decided to take a risk and build a casino game based on this format, tweaking the gameplay so that it delivered a seamless experience on mobile and could be rolled out by casino operators in regulated markets around the world. We also brought in elements that would make it stand out in casino lobbies, such as it being multiplayer and players being able to chat with each other throughout their playing session.

Ultimately, Aviator is a simple game but this is what makes it so fun and thrilling, and why more than 10 million players a month take flight and put their nerve to the test against the increasing win multiplier.

Exclusive Q&A with Andrejs Proskurins, Head of User Acquisition at R2D Partners

Andrejs Proskurins, Head of User Acquisition at R2D Partners, spoke to us, about what we can expect from the growing R2D Partners affiliate program that LEON Bet launched in November 2023.

Tell us more about R2D Partners and the company's key vision and mission?

R2D Partners is an innovative multi-brand affiliate program for betting and casino enthusiasts. We currently proudly promote two brands – LEON, who just celebrated its 15-year anniversary, and Twin, founded in 2017. Although the R2D brand is new, through these renowned brands, we have created a legacy that has captivated and earned the unwavering loyalty of thousands of players and partners alike. We are now a trusted brand in the affiliate space with a track-record of over 10,000 successful partnerships.

Since launch, we have continued to learn, evolve, and improve processes and our goal is to add more brands to our stable and to further grow the list of partners, establishing ourselves as a leading and respectable affiliate program in the betting and gaming space.

What are the main benefits of working with R2D Partners?

There are plenty of benefits! Among other things, we work with well-established and highly recognised brand in the industry with more to come. We offer deals on CPA and RevShare models with individual rates and high conversation and retention levels. We accept SEO, PPC, UAC, FB, and other traffic from over 15 countries and provide detailed and transparent statistics.

For us, it's important to build strong relationships with affiliates, and we adhere to a set of core values that we use as our part of our strategy to secure this. We ensure timely payments and honour the agreed-upon terms without any adjustments. A key goal of ours is to treat each affiliate as an individual, recognising their unique needs and contributions, while keeping ourselves flexible and capable of adapting to their needs.

What markets are you currently focused on?

We are still in the early days, having only launched on the 15th of November, but we have experienced notable growth in many key regions across Europe, Latin American, CIS regions, and Asia-Pacific. In short, we're want to be global, and we aim to add new partners from across the world as we continue our journey.

How can affiliates make a mark in the industry and grab a slice of the cake in a competitive marketplace?

The primary opportunity for affiliates lies in thinking outside the box while testing, testing, and testing again. Around 90% of affiliates choose to stick with a conventional approach to affiliate marketing, and, while it's obviously a way to proceed as it can be effective, there will be a ceiling as they don't stand out from the crowd through innovation.

We want to consistently support affiliates with creative ideas, providing them with favourable deals and occasional testing budgets.

Honesty and transparency are also of the utmost importance. Affiliates who are people-led, that have values and are fantastic to deal with, will lead to a much more positive outcome, over those who might have great results but aren't as open to a collaborative approach.

Are you using any particular technology, such as AI, to further your offering?

We have been leveraging AI for instantaneous traffic quality prediction, fraud prevention, and to help foster creativity and in my opinion, these primary aspects will soon become commonplace in affiliate marketing.

We also use machine learning (ML) for traffic quality prediction. Tools like Midjourney and other AI image generators play a significant role in our landing page preparation, yielding impressive results. Ultimately, AI and ML solutions will become commonplace, and by gaining first-mover advantage, we can further excel in the space.

What can we expect from R2D in 2024?

We are experiencing substantial growth already, maintaining a steady quarterly increase of between 15% to 20% so we are set for a successful year ahead. Our primary challenge now lies in sustaining and enhancing this growth while also becoming more cost-efficient in terms of outgoings. Thanks to our CRM and VIP management department, we continue to improve our capabilities in this regard.

We are excited to utilise our team's passion and knowledge of the industry to further build on our product offering, and work towards our ambitious goal to grow our network further.

Exclusive ICE 2024 Q&A with Andreas Koeberl, CEO BetGames

ICE London is almost upon us again for the final time in its traditional home, can you give us a synopsis of what will you be bringing to delegates?

Indeed, it is shaping up to be a special ICE for the final London edition of the big show. We are focusing on our ongoing mission to convert recreational punters into casino or games players and that drive is shaping our expanding product range, both in the new projects we're developing and evolving what has been working extremely well for us for years.

That's how we differentiate ourselves as a supplier and our offer to new potential partners. Hence, our focus for ICE 2024 will be on showcasing how we do that and how we help operators nurture players organically. We've got a host of upcoming projects that we can't wait to unveil along with our expertise in creating bespoke products and projects for some of the industry's biggest brands.

You've had a bright start to 2024 with your Crash game Skyward. How has it continued to perform after its strong start?

We are very happy so far. Skyward is just one part of the wider product offering that I've already alluded to. We're all about offering easily accessible, rapid play, unique gaming experiences that offer players the opportunity to win big from small stakes whenever they want and wherever they are.

It's a very different industry in 2024 to even just a few years ago and we're hyper-aware of moving with trends and preferences to make sure we're relevant with the content we put out into the market – That's where Skyward came from and you'll see that ethos in everything else we're planning to launch throughout the year.

It looks like you're doubling down on Skyward's success with a shift into traditional Live Casino and your upcoming roulette game to swell the BetGames content provision. What has prompted that move and how will you apply the trademark BetGames polish to an established genre?

It all comes down to what I said initially – we help operators nurture recreational punters into casino players. To do that, the content mix needs to change as well and reflect the trends in our core markets. If you want to nurture players, you need to support what we call "nurturing pathways", which is a clearly defined set of curated games and features you put in front of certain player profiles.

With our portfolio constantly growing and evolving, you'll see those pathways throughout all our products and the future projects we choose will do so too. We'll be making sure that our version of roulette will enjoy the same crisp, intuitive UI and benefit from our trademark high standards in production and presentation across our proprietary product and any tailored version we may create for partners.

Last year BetGames was awarded additional UKGC licences how has this helped global growth so far? What opportunities has it presented?

That was necessary to enable us to launch our gameshows and TWAIN. We gained two additional license extensions to do that. In 2024, we have plans to push more aggressively into the market as we will continue to improve the product/market fit drastically. It significantly broadens our scope to provide greater diversity in our offering to UK operators. The UK, despite being well established and highly competitive, still represents a fantastic opportunity for those who can get their product just right and we're confident we'll be doing just that as we launch new content going forward.

The long-awaited Brazillian market is finally opening up – you've already made moves to take advantage with strategic partnerships – how is your approach to the huge market going to materialise?

Brazil is a great opportunity for us. Like so many others, it is, and will continue to be a crowded market – simply look at the three-digit number of operators who want to apply for this expensive license. It is a demanding region to succeed in as it requires quite some effort in localising content, but we are growing confidently and expect to see our numbers at least triple in 2024 over there. This growth will be driven by a set of localised content we are about to launch in the coming months that we're very excited about and strengthens our standing as a go-to provider for bespoke products.

The ANJ publishes its 2024/2026 strategic plan aimed at drastically reducing the proportion of excessive gamblers

The first cycle of regulation under the aegis of the French Gambling Authority (ANJ) ended in 2023 with the observation that the gambling market was booming, with revenues of more than €13 billion, representing an increase of more than 50% since the opening of the market in 2011. Over the years, gambling has become a mainstream consumer product for people of all ages and from all walks of life: more than half of all French people now gamble, spending more than €55 billion each year. Gambling is at the heart of our societies, and this phenomenon can be observed in every European country.

However, gambling is not a product like any other, and it is the risks inherent in this activity that have justified the government's implementation of a restrictive regulatory policy, which translates into a legal objective of limiting and supervising the supply and consumption of gambling. In 2019, the public authorities wanted to strengthen player protection and the ANJ was created with this objective in mind.

Although gambling operators have made significant progress in this area over the past three years, problem gambling still plays too large a role in the gambling market. In 2019, the Gambling Observatory estimated the number of at-risk gamblers at 1.4 million, including almost 400,000 at pathological level. In total, problem gambling accounts for more than 38% of the sector's turnover and excessive gambling alone for 21%. These figures, which are due to be updated shortly, illustrate the reality of a social problem, particularly for young people, with collateral damage in the gambler's in the gambler's immediate environment: excessive debt, family problems, difficulties at school, etc.

In this context, the ANJ has been working with all stakeholders to define the new regulatory guidelines for the period 2024-2026. These place the protection of minors and the reduction of excessive gambling and the social damage it causes at the centre of the regulator's activities, like a common thread that inspires all its actions.

The ANJ's new roadmap is based on three fundamental pillars:

The first of these pillars, which reflects the public health implications of regulation, aims to drastically reduce the proportion and number of excessive gamblers in the gambling market. This key objective for the ANJ will require major efforts on the part of operators. It cannot be achieved without a coherent and balanced regulatory policy aimed at consolidating the French gambling market model.

At the same time, this requires the ANJ to continue its efforts to preserve the transparency and integrity of the sector, with the fight against illegal gambling at the forefront (second pillar), and to strengthen the economic dimension of regulation in order to gain a better understanding of market balances and provide solutions to the changes it is facing today (third pillar).
Finally, the strategic plan is based on three foundations that are the conditions for the success of its ambition: to make scientific knowledge of the market and gambling practices the compass of regulation; to embody, at national and European level, regulation based on dialogue and cooperation to drive the repositioning of the market; and finally, to position the ANJ as a laboratory for bold, effective and exemplary public action.

This is a critical time for the French gambling market: it can both destabilise and strengthen the French model. This strategic plan should help to strengthen the French regulatory model as an acceptable compromise between openness and protection.

Isabelle FALQUE-PIERROTIN, President of the ANJ, said: "After three years in office, we now believe that the regulation of gambling must take a turn that involves the market gradually moving towards a less intensive model. This voluntary target to reduce the number of excessive gamblers and to strengthen the protection of minors will be monitored over a period of 3 years and adjusted in line with monitoring indicators and prevalence studies. It can only be achieved if all the players join forces alongside the regulator to move the goalposts: gambling operators, public authorities, institutions, associations, etc. "

Starting a slot franchise: what does it take?

As the iGaming landscape continues to evolve, numerous suppliers are capitalising on their past successes by launching their own slot franchises. Despite the immense potential, initiating a franchise requires adept navigation through a range of challenges in order to reap the benefits. In this roundtable discussion, we gather insights from Relax Gaming, Blueprint Gaming, Thunderkick and RubyPlay, four prominent suppliers with franchises under their belt. From regulatory hurdles to technological innovations, we dive into the aspects that both challenge and enrich the path to establishing a new franchise.

With technology advancing at a rapid pace, how crucial is it for franchises to stay on top of the latest trends in slot development?

Mike Collins, Game Product Owner at Thunderkick: It's extremely crucial – if you aren't adapting with the times, you'll attract less players and that's the bottom line. Currently, whilst creating our titles, we work with a portrait-first and mobile-first ethos. With more customers than ever before using their phones to take a spin, it's extremely important for every provider to consider how to make their games accessible to as many people as possible.

We also pay close attention to the evolution of available platforms and operating systems – compatibility and accessibility go hand-in-hand, and our titles will always use the most cutting-edge and modern technology available to ensure they play as intended.

Dr. Eyal Loz, Chief Product Officer at RubyPlay: There are no real incentives for developers to risk a well proven, money-making game franchise by changing key elements of the core experience. What we are seeing instead are add-on features, targeted at giving existing players new ways to engage with what they already familiar with. This is via elements such as side Mini Games, Prize Drops, Buy Features, Ante-Bet and so on.

The opposite is true when suppliers try to establish new franchises. Players are keen to try new things, but are more likely to churn if what they find is too similar to something that they already know. This is where the opportunity to bring in new technologies exist, but alas, innovation is very risky and expensive. In RubyPlay's Immortal Ways series, we combined the well-known '10,000 ways to win' concept players love with an innovative Hold and Spin mechanic, that was easy for players to understand. Players' feedback was that they felt the game is familiar, but was also totally new at the same time. They were comfortable to try and then commit to it. At the end of the day, both players and the industry are very resistant to change and adaptation of new development.

Shelley Hannah, Chief Product Officer at Relax Gaming: It's extremely crucial. I think gone are the days where player behaviour is predictable for the next five years. Nowadays, players have a lot more choice in the market and are more likely to explore different games at once.

We have to evolve our games and listen to player feedback both from a perspective of slot design, innovation and technology. As a franchise, it's critical that we stay on top of the latest trends in order to remain a market leader.

The franchise can't just be another skin or a slightly different variation of the first, second, third etc. It needs to bring much more than that to the table for the players of today.

Jo Purvis, Director of Marketing and Relationships at Blueprint Gaming: It is key to the success of any game, one slated for a franchise or otherwise. The core requirements of creating a successful game remain the same regardless. It's a secret sauce that all suppliers strive to perfect – balancing the ever-challenging task of producing a regular supply of games to compete in a congested and super-competitive marketplace while ensuring that the quality remains consistently high.t

Where franchises differ slightly is in retaining the magic of a successful original while offering enough new features and mechanics to justify the existence of the next iteration. Consumer taste across most mainstream media, be it movies, TV or games has for some time displayed a keen interest in sequels, spin-offs and more of their favourite brands, characters and universes. So while leveraging this is a huge boost, with it comes the challenge of meeting already high expectations.

Given the saturation of the market, how can new franchises distinguish themselves in terms of content and themes?

MC: Simply put, innovation is what will put providers ahead in such a crowded market. Consider the game's name, theme, narrative and mechanics – if it's all been done before, your new franchise is unlikely to make much of a splash. It admittedly can take some time to think of a totally original idea, however investing that time into creating something unique will pay off.

Elevating the gameplay experience will undoubtedly have an impact on the performance of your franchise, too. You want to immerse players in the games' overarching story through the use of graphics, sounds and animations – going back to my previous answer, the evolution of technology in recent years has made it easier for developers to really go above and beyond what was once expected of online slots.

EL: Themes are a key way where suppliers can innovate, and keep high returns and overall business risk low. Within existing strong franchises, suppliers can explore new themes, new UIs and new innovative side features, while staying confident the product line will continue to perform. Savvy suppliers can keep their franchises fresh and relevant for many years if they manage them correctly.

With brand new game franchises, the best advice is that success usually rhymes with what players already know and love. Radical new ideas are less likely to make it through.

In Immortal Ways Diamonds we combined a classic theme with our innovative new franchise's game mechanic. Since the series was released, we experimented with a large variety of themes each with slight changes to the volatility, math and flow of the games. We can say that one size does not fit all, and different themes perform differently with players in different jurisdictions.

SH: I think every studio has a DNA in how they create games which makes them stand out. I think it's important to strike a balance between finding what already works for players and how you can put a fresh twist on it.

Bringing new concepts to market may sound like a risk to some, but we put faith in our extremely talented team around the world to drive differentiation which is at the heart of everything we do when we bring games to market.

Whether we want to explore a different slot theme or introduce groundbreaking technology or features, you need to have the talent and trust in your team to make it happen. Once you believe in what you do, it can take you anywhere.

JP: Differentiation is a vital tenet of game production too. Many studios are global now and with that growing number of world regions to sell to, there are equally diverse player preferences to cater to. An Egyptian theme, while popular, doesn't guarantee a popular game. Knowing your craft and being able to hit the right notes in the maths model, the features across the base and bonus games and the overarching mechanics must align with animation, audio and design and getting all of these right consistently isn't for the faint of heart.

With Blueprint Games, we're able to lean on the years of heritage we have in taking the original success of a solidly built and curated game and applying these lessons to new titles. Having the right balance of experience and new, fresh ideas is crucial, as is a finger on the pulse of what players are engaging with in slots and beyond. It's a complicated and deeply nuanced process.

How do you see the current regulations in key markets impacting the establishment and growth of new slot franchises?

Navigating the regulatory landscape in key markets is crucial for the establishment and growth of new slot franchises. Regulations can present both challenges and opportunities for game providers – although compliance ensures a fair and secure experience, fostering trust among players, these regulations can also limit providers' creative freedom.

Successful slot franchises strike that important balance by aligning with regulatory frameworks whilst simultaneously finding innovative ways to engage players. As always, staying attuned to emerging trends helps maintain a competitive edge within the ever-evolving industry.

EL: Historically, franchise games developed in highly regulated markets outperform other franchise games developed in less regulated market. That is, product designed with an unregulated market mindset struggles to adapt to complex regulatory restrictions. Therefore, I believe that regulation should be viewed as an advantage for the more creative designers.

In addition to that, franchise games that were developed to comply with strict regulated market restrictions can easily be supplemented with complimentary side features that can boost performance and player retention even further in less regulated environments. It's always simpler for the business to relax designs than to restrict them.

In RubyPlay's Immortal Ways series, we followed strict design principles, such that all games in the series will comply with the strictest regulatory requirements. Additional features we are developing such as Buy Feature for the Immortal Ways games will only be offered where regulation allows.

SH: This is something which impacts the whole industry, but as a new franchise it is paramount that you are up-to-date with the latest regulations and any potential changes that can impact any aspect of the game. It's a challenge to come up with slots that not only fit the player's needs but also rigidly follow many variations of rules in regulated markets.

Relax Gaming pulls out all the stops to ensure we meet the regulations and create a safe environment for players. Any franchise should have this at the core of its values.

There are more and more regulations being implemented across the gaming landscape. Building a successful franchise needs the most robust underlying technology which makes product adaptation easier when new regulations are introduced.

JP: There is obvious speculation on regulatory activity all the time, given the regular consultations the official bodies engage in and this obviously impacts game development. What we are seeing in many markets is that the current regulations don't prevent or impact the growth of new slot franchises, they just set some specific rules that need to be rightly adhered to.

Studios see the benefits of consistency across jurisdictions and this helps them standardise and gain product development efficiencies. This results in not investing time in unique products for the demands of specific markets or building products that are overly complex. The opposite is that games need to be configured for the specific allowances or restrictions of different jurisdictions, which requires additional resources.

That being said, innovation comes out of many regulatory changes and franchises can always be adapted to develop and potentially grow with new product innovation.

Additionally, where certain regulations apply, we adapt and certify different versions of our industry-standard Jackpot King System to meet the specific needs, tailoring to market/operator size to be able to provide a compliant and engaging jackpot product.

Player loyalty is paramount in this industry. What engagement and retention strategies do you think are most effective for slot franchises in a crowded marketplace?

MC: Taking the mechanics from previous iterations within the franchise that really resonated with players is a clear-cut way to ensure retention for future releases. Don't fix what isn't broken – simply set your sights on improving upon earlier releases, and don't stray too far from the original!

With that being said, it doesn't hurt to add something new with each title in the franchise. Not only will you be keeping the gameplay experience fresh, but you'll also drum up excitement for players who want to discover a fresh spin on a game they cherish.

EL: The holy grail for suppliers is developing an evergreen franchise, at which point, a dedicated product line should be established to create innovative experiences within that franchise. Innovative designs that don't lose sight of the core player experience in the existing franchise games.

We never know what will hit a cord with players, but when a mechanic is found, one should build it into a series, respecting the parameters that made is successful in the first place. The average loyal player loves things feeling fresh, but also familiar and safe. When players lose their footing, they will churn.

That is why more and more designers are focusing on complimentary side features that can maintain the evergreen potential of existing franchise games, and are very effective in boosting long-term player loyalty.

RubyPlay's Immortal Ways series is no different. A range of accompanying features are now in development, such as introducing the ability to purchase a feature, and other innovative changes to the gameplay without impacting the core gameplay that works so well.

SH: cccThis can be done in numerous ways, including mailers and promotional campaigns. This all helps play a part in a players subconsciousness when it comes to choosing who to play with.

As we touched on earlier, we take our player feedback seriously too. If a player can see steps are being taken to enrich their experience, then they are more likely to engage and built a trusting relationship.

JP: Knowing your customer is vital. Being able to pitch the right games to the right markets and their players can be the difference between well-received titles and those that fail. Then being able to build on those and make the most out of what works is something that Blueprint has had great success with. We've achieved that level of market optimisation in the UK with slot series such as Luck of the Irish, which has just seen its third iteration, whereas other IPs like our Kong games have earned their reputation in international markets.

We don't consider features market-specific but emphasize slot themes, mechanics and brands that resonate with particular jurisdictions.

Sponsors Spotlight: Keeping in Touch with Innovation in iGaming: Meet SYNOT Games at Prague Gaming & TECH Summit 2024

Ahead of the highly-anticipated Prague Gaming & TECH Summit, organizer HIPTHER is thrilled to introduce and put the spotlight on the companies and people that help make the magic happen: our conference sponsors! These innovative, accomplished professionals and teams make magic happen everyday, and they will be joining us at the Prague Gaming & TECH Summit 2024 taking place on 26-27 March, to share insights, network and collaborate with you! Get to know them, connect, and meet them in Prague!

In this Sponsors Spotlight Interview, the #hipthers introduce SYNOT Games, Lanyards Sponsor of the Prague Gaming & TECH Summit, and catch up with SYNOT's Head of Account Management, Jan Sipovsky, on iGaming innovation and the secret to industry success.

Dear Jan, thank you for joining us for this interview, we are delighted to host you! Can you please introduce yourself, providing our readers with a glimpse into your personal background and your role at SYNOT Games?

Hello dear readers. It has been nearly 20 years since I packed my bags and moved to the UK, where I started as a young enthusiast studying and later working in a field of management. Throughout my career I have moved through several industries, eventually anchoring in gambling. First as a part of the team preparing and organizing the launch of the Hippodrome Casino in London, which left a positive mark on me and this was a moment when I realized this is something I want to do until the end of my life. As the years passed and my experience expanded in various fields of gaming, I was approached by my colleagues from SYNOT Games with a humble request to share my know-how and join their team; and here I am, looking after over 140 unique games from our production, 200 clients, 1500 casinos and leading and mentoring team of 16 beautiful people from various countries which is continuously growing and expanding.

Now, let's dive into SYNOT Games. Can you share with us an overview of the company's operations and offerings? Additionally, are there any recent achievements or milestones that SYNOT Games is particularly proud of?

SYNOT Games is a young, dynamically growing company with a lot of drive. I always tell people that it is the most amazing business you can be in, considering none of your working days are the same – every day is unique and very special. From year to year our team expands significantly. At the moment there are four internal game developing teams dedicated to the development of the slot games for our online division, a team of professional sales representatives, account managers, compliance officers and many other developing teams taking care of our internal CRM systems and data warehouses.

From last year we added a team of table game developers, a team of retention tool developers and we are continuously working on new strategies and products to expand our portfolio and to be as competitive as needed. We have a team of dedicated account managers taking care of various jurisdictions and markets, which is split in two divisions, one in Malta and one based in Slovakia.

SYNOT Games has more than 30 years of experience in gaming, constantly keeping in touch with innovation; according to your experience in the company, and from your position as Head of Account Management, what is the "secret sauce" for SYNOT's continuous success in the competitive iGaming industry?

We strongly concentrate on creating strategies before targeting any particular market, through thorough analyses and planning. Our vision is to be a significant, strong and valuable partner to our stakeholder in all regulated markets around the world. I do not know if there is any "secret sauce" to the success of our business, but one thing I can tell you for sure, proactive approach to business is a must, and surrounding yourself with people who have drive and willingness to learn is second must. Once you have all the tools, willingness and people who believe in your vision, it is like spreading butter on a piece of bread. Therefore my only advice would be: "Grow your people and your people will grow your business."

In the company's latest news, we read about SYNOT Games' partnership with Euro Queen in the Czech Republic. What does this partnership entail, and what are the company's goals and strategic plans for the Czech gaming market? How do these align with the current industry trends and regulatory landscape?

We value every partnership. Each and every client is being treated with the same respect. When it comes to our business partners, we all bring different expertise to the table and we all participate in our mutual success. It is very important that each and every partnership is treated with utmost respect and professionalism. We always bring to the game a valuable analytical approach and we create a unique strategy based on our clients vision and preference. It is not any different with the Euro Geen.

In terms of the Czech Market, it is not less or more important than any other market we supply our games to. Even though it is the Czech market where the story of SYNOT started, throughout the past 30 years we managed to leave a visible mark also in many other markets, not only in the Czech Republic, but Europe with ambitions and amazing plans to submit applications for the licenses in all US regulated states and Ontario.

When it comes to the Czech regulation and challenges these days, I must admit it is not very new to us, as we tackle more than 40 jurisdictions with various regulatory changes and adjustments, which brings weekly if not daily new requirements. All we must do is to be highly organized and proactive.

On the other hand, correct and insightful regulation is vital for any government's vision to tackle black, illegal and dodgy businesses within the gaming industry, and also to secure steady and regular income for the state. Regulation shouldnt be done with a vision of eliminating gambling entirely and should be done together with operators in order to prevent players from playing elsewhere in unregulated markets, thus securing absence of income.

Considering SYNOT Games' role as a Sponsor of the upcoming Prague Gaming & TECH Summit and your participation, what is your message to the iGaming companies and professionals attending the summit? How can SYNOT contribute to their success in the Czech market and beyond?

SYNOT brings to each and every of our partner's valuable expertise of the market, creates the strategy and follows the vision. We believe these are the main building blocks of any successful business. My message to all participants at the Prague Gaming & Tech Summit is simple and maybe clique: "where there is a will, there is a way."

Have a wonderful summit experience all.

Jan

PRAGUE
GAMING & TECH SUMMIT

SYNOT
GAMES FOR TRUE PLAYERS

JAN SIPOVSKY
HEAD OF ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT

NCPG Applauds Blumenthal and Salinas for Introducing Groundbreaking GRIT Act to Address Gambling Addiction

NCPG
National Council on Problem Gambling

A significant milestone in the fight against gambling addiction, as U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut and U.S. Representative Andrea Salinas of Oregon introduced the Gambling addiction Recovery, Investment, and Treatment (GRIT) Act. This groundbreaking legislation addresses a critical gap in our nation's approach to addiction by establishing the first-ever federal funding stream dedicated to preventing, treating, and researching gambling addiction in the US.

Gambling addiction is a significant public health concern, affecting approximately 7 million American adults, and resulting in severe social and economic consequences. The annual social cost of problem gambling is estimated at $7 billion, reflecting gambling-related criminal justice and healthcare spending as well as job loss and bankruptcy. NCPG research indicates that the risk for gambling addiction rose by 30 percent between 2018 and 2021 alone, yet there are currently no federal funds dedicated to gambling addiction treatment or research. This gap underscores the pressing need for comprehensive measures to address and mitigate the impact of gambling addiction.

Susan Sheridan Tucker, President of the NCPG Board of Directors, said: "The GRIT Act reflects a pivotal step towards long-overdue support for those grappling with gambling addiction. We commend Senator Blumenthal and Representative Salinas for their dedication to addressing the burgeoning public health crisis of gambling addiction. The National Council on Problem Gambling stands in full support of this legislation, recognizing its potential to make a lasting difference in the lives of individuals and families across the nation."

Key provisions of the GRIT Act include:

- Allocating 50% of the current federal sports excise tax revenue for gambling addiction treatment and research administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Health and Human Services distribution of 75% to states for prevention and treatment through the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant program and direct the remaining 25% to the National Institute of Drug Abuse for research grants into gambling addiction.
- Authorizing spending for 10 years and mandating a report to Congress on the program's effectiveness within three years of passage.

The impact of the GRIT Act provides direct and vital support to state health agencies and nonprofits addressing gambling problems. It also creates investment in best practices and comprehensive research at the national level.

Importantly, the GRIT Act does not raise taxes or create additional bureaucracy. It leverages existing federal excise tax revenue and operates within the existing Health and Human Services framework.

Keith Whyte, Executive Director of the NCPG, said: "The introduction of the GRIT Act is a testament to our shared commitment to mitigating gambling-related harm and addressing the challenges of gambling addiction. This landmark legislation sets the stage to significantly bolster gambling addiction prevention, research, and treatment resources and make a positive lasting impact on individuals and communities nationwide."

IBIA and the Norwegian Industry Association for Online Gaming agree an MoU promoting a licensing and betting integrity framework in Norway

The International Betting Integrity Association (IBIA) and the Norwegian Industry Association for Online Gaming / Norsk Bransjeforening for Onlinespill (NBO) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) establishing a framework for cooperation to promote a safe and effective local licensing and regulatory regime in Norway, along with specific betting integrity provisions.

With Finland committed to ending its monopoly system for gambling in favour of a licensing model by 2026, Norway's continuation of a monopoly system runs contrary to the prevailing approach adopted across Europe, notably in nearby countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Germany.

H2 Gambling Capital, the leading data and intelligence company for the global gambling industry, forecasts that nearly half (43%) of Norway's online betting GGR will be conducted offshore in 2024.

Carl Fredrik Stenstrøm, General Secretary of the NBO, said: "Increasingly strong signals indicate that the Norwegian monopoly is not the most effective solution for consumer protection or industry integrity. Betting is a fully digital and international service that cannot be confined to local peculiarities. To establish the best possible framework, the gambling offering must be viewed comprehensively and regulated accordingly.

"The partnership between NBO and IBIA ensures a concerted effort to address responsible practices and supporting initiatives aimed at minimizing the impact of gambling-related harm."

Khalid Ali, CEO of IBIA, said: "IBIA welcomes the establishment of an MoU with the NBO. We will seek to support the NBO's challenge of the continuation of a monopoly style approach to betting in Norway. The lack of licensing for responsible regulated betting operators in Norway hinders market oversight, consumer protection and the implementation of effective sports betting integrity provisions."

IBIA is a globally recognized non-profit organization that seeks to protect the integrity of the betting and sporting sectors. Its membership includes over 50 companies and 125 leading sports betting brands with over $137bn in betting turner per annum, making IBIA the world's leading operator-run integrity monitoring body.

IBIA's Q3 2023 integrity report detailed 50 alerts reported in the quarter; the association's Q4 and annual report for 2023 will be published in the coming weeks. The association reported 268 alerts to the authorities in 2022, with successful sporting or criminal sanctions against 15 teams, officials or players where IBIA had reported suspicious activity on their matches.

NORSK BRANSJEFORENING FOR ONLINESPILL

IBIA
international betting integrity association

Got something interesting to say ?
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Peter & Sons

Yann Bautista

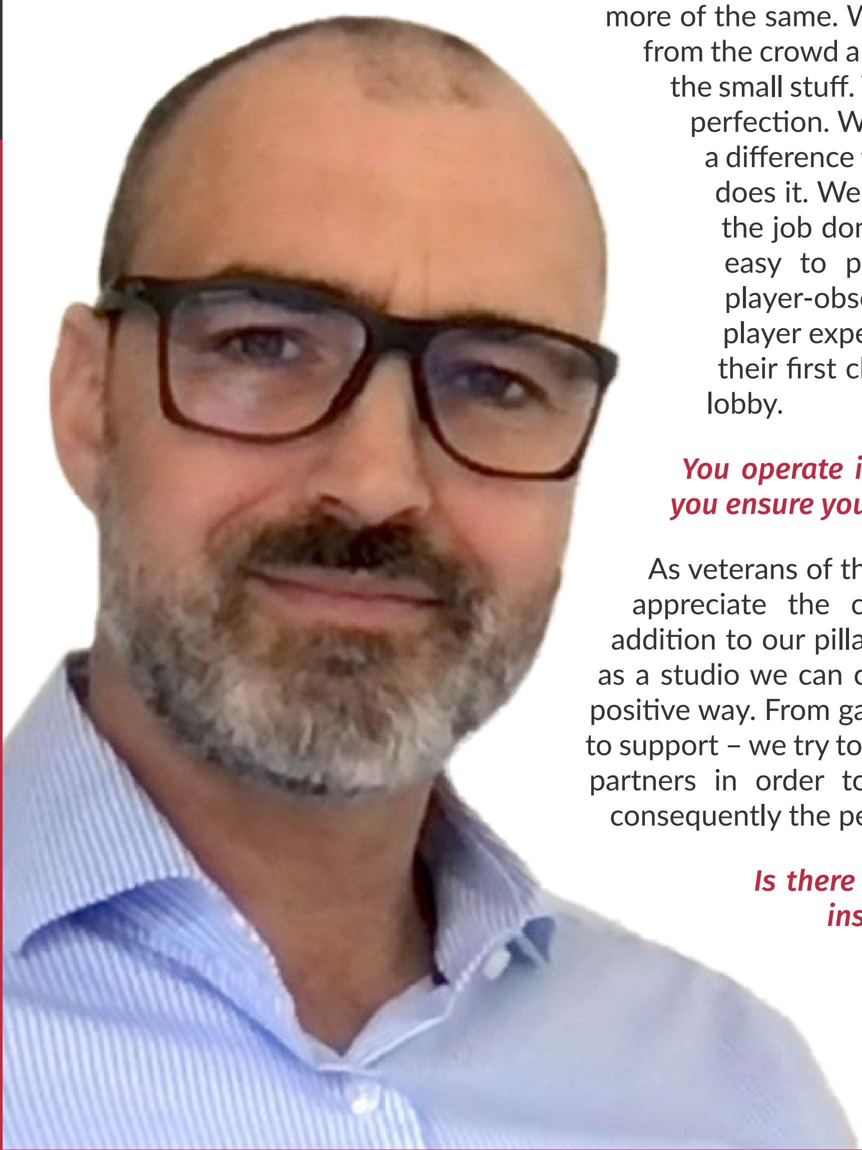
Peter & Sons is on its own path of slot creativity

What's the back story to Peter & Sons? Who is behind the studio and where did the name come from?

The Peter & Sons story begins in 2019 when six people with tons of experience in mobile casino and game development came together to launch a studio with a difference. A few of us had previously worked together in a similar venture part of a major online casino operator. We knew we had what it took to create thrilling games that would stand out in game lobbies, and we knew that we worked well together. With that, Peter & Sons was born. As for the name, we wanted something that would inspire tradition, a label that conjured the image of a century-old family business transitioning from retail slot machines to online casino games.

How have you developed your company, its culture and indeed the Peter & Sons brand?

From the get-go, we identified five pillars that each project, hire and decision would be based on. The first is creativity to the core – creativity is not just what we do, it's how we do it. This means trying new things, pushing boundaries for players and ensuring that our games keep moving the industry forward. The second pillar is anti-boring. Life is too short to be just another games company doing more of the same. We are here to walk our own path, stand out from the crowd and leave our mark. The third pillar is to sweat the small stuff. We leave no stone unturned in our pursuit of perfection. We are laser-focused on the details that make a difference to players and our partners. Pillar four is easy does it. We are super easy to work with and always get the job done. Our games are easy to spot in the lobby, easy to play and easy to enjoy. The last pillar is player-obsessed. We are committed to improving the player experience of our games because we want to be their first choice each time they enter the casino game lobby.



You operate in a highly competitive market so how do you ensure your games stand out?

As veterans of this remarkable industry, we are aware of and appreciate the competitive landscape we operate in. In addition to our pillars, we also took the decision that wherever as a studio we can control and affect, we will do it in the most positive way. From game production, to commercial engagement, to support – we try to go the extra mile in all touch points with our partners in order to increase the value of our services and consequently the performance of the partners.

Is there a Peter & Sons hallmark that players can instantly recognise when experiencing one of your games?

We have come to learn that both players and operators can instantly spot a Peter & Sons game due to our unique style. Our logo really stands out, too, and sticks in players' minds. We actually use our logo in some pretty cool ways and try to implement it in each title, sort of like an easter egg in a movie. The Peter & Sons goat can be found in each title, whether that's on the loading screen, as an in-game character, on symbols or even on win coins. Some call it subliminal messaging, we call it savvy marketing.

It also helps that we have a very successful title in our portfolio. Barbarossa has become something of a flagship title and attracts a lot of attention from players and the wider industry. Unlike the usual churn curve of a slot, Barbarossa is showing elements of being a hit with a stable cohort of players that keep returning month in month out. We are working on a follow-up, Barbarossa 2, that will take the player experience to the next level and with even more big win potential.

How are you differentiating through game mechanics? Is this the most important area for a studio to differentiate?

For us, the magic is found in combining existing mechanics with new concepts and visuals to create a new player experience. For example, on our next run of games, we will be including special features around blocks – gameplay we initially introduced in Frozen Age – and more advanced mechanics around multipliers, as we did in Peter Hunter. We also have some classic slots in the works with consolidated mechanics including our twist on the fishing format. Mechanics are important, but if you look at the top-grossing games from the leading providers, they are mostly adaptations of existing mechanics.

How do you ensure your games appeal to a broad player audience?

We are all passionate about slot games and while our tastes differ, we know what matters most to players. This guides our mission as a studio, which is as simple as it is clear. And that is to curate a diverse portfolio that caters to the unique preferences of different players across different markets. We are unwavering in our dedication to achieving excellence in every aspect of game production. We don't settle for the ordinary and instead meticulously study existing games in search of areas of improvement while drawing inspiration from our favourites. Reskins are a no-go for us. We take a quality-over-quantity approach and take great pride in delivering distinct experiences with each game we create.

This means we are always innovating to craft games that are not only fresh and captivating, but that are also infused with smart features. More than just mechanics, our emphasis is on seamlessly integrating these features into thematic elements within the game. The graphical presentation of these mechanical features is carefully curated to elevate the overall game experience, taking players on an amazing adventure with each spin of the reels.

Can you tell us more about SkillOnNet's investment in Peter & Sons? How did this come about and how is it benefiting both parties?

Peter & Sons has basically become the content arm of SkillOnNet, which frankly brings some incredible perks for a relatively young studio. The first major upside is that we enjoy the resources that a tier one group such as SkillOnNet has at its disposal. This covers everything from accounting to legal and compliance. This support allows us to focus on what we do best, and that is producing brilliant games.

More importantly, we can leverage the dozens of local licences that SkillOnNet holds to deploy our content in regulated markets across the globe. At this point in our journey, this is a position we never expected to be in. Young studios struggle to obtain one or two licences in the early days, but we are already in a position to distribute in some of the biggest global markets including the UK, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Ontario, Italy, Portugal, Germany and Greece, not to mention those that are in the pipeline including New Jersey, Peru, Brazil and more. This allows us to cater to tier-one operators via a single integration into multiple markets.

2023 was a big year for you. Can you share one or two major highlights?

The year started with the SkillOnNet investment and ended with Peter & Sons move on to the next chapter of its success story. This progression saw us move from distributing only via the Yggdrasil Master Program and the Relax Silver Bullet to getting our own platform and RGS. This in turn allows us to create brilliant partnerships and integrations with some of the best aggregators and operators in the space including Relax, Hub88, IGT and Playtech. We have also launched a new website https://peterandsonsgames.com, grown the team and secured certifications and licences. This has put an incredibly solid foundation in place for 2024 and beyond.

How will you carry the momentum you have built over the coming 12 months?

Last year we were focused on building the foundation on which we can grow and not only achieve but exceed our goals. We are now expanding our commercial team significantly. Using the licences and certifications we hold, we expect to grow our independent distribution in all major markets with all tier-one operators in each. We have already built huge momentum behind our games and, as a studio, we are well known. This is a very fortunate position to be in but one we intend to take full advantage of.

“Prove it”: how bad recruitment squanders good culture

How important is your culture to your talent strategy, really?

Super important. Culture is an easy catch-all term for the way it feels to work in your business. It’s about some mix of authenticity, transparency, autonomy, growth and development, emotional support, social satisfaction, working environment, and a host more things, because there’s no one-size-fits all. Assuming you tick the basic boxes of a decent salary and a well thought out role, culture is what will really attract someone to your company over somewhere else.

So a good culture is the key to attracting the best staff?

Absolutely, but attracting them isn’t enough. Think of it like B2C marketing: your culture is your product and talented staff are your consumers. Everyone in this industry intuitively understands that attracting people to check out your product is just the start of the journey. Then you have to convert them and you have to retain them. If you don’t invest in those processes, your product, your culture, it’s not doing you any good because the consumer never really experiences it.

Where do employers commonly get that process wrong?

With a good culture, attraction is the relatively easy part. If your current staff speak well of you as an employer and you do a decent job of employer branding, you’ll get over the first hurdle. People will send their CVs in, and they’ll come to interviews. For a headhunter like me, it gives me something to lead with when I drop into a great passive candidate’s inbox or get them on the phone. And boy do I sell; employers often don’t know how much free marketing they get from a headhunter pitching them to dozens of candidates for every open role!

No, where a lot of firms go wrong is on the conversion part of the journey. That’s where I spend the vast majority of my time as a headhunter. There has to be a connection between the culture you’re selling, and the recruitment process the candidate actually experiences. Everyone knows words are cheap, so the in-demand candidates are looking for real authenticity when they get to the mutual qualification process. It’s like they’re saying, “I hear you have a great culture, so prove it.”

What are the biggest red flags for candidates in that position?

Speed is the biggest one. Does it take you 10 days to decide after an interview? They just mentally crossed out the “fast paced environment” line from your job description. Is the hiring manager apologising because they need input from managers X, Y, and Z? There goes your promise about “autonomy and self-direction”. Do you have four interviews, three forms, and a standardised test? They don’t believe your “dynamic and people-oriented” claim anymore.

Sometimes the opposite is true, too. It is less common, but super-rapid processes with little obvious oversight or structure can also leave a candidate feeling like the business is chaotic, the role is poorly defined, or that there isn't really competition for the role. Candidates like to feel they've earned their progress, after all.

What does the ideal recruitment process look like?

Your interview process is a candidate's first personal experience of your culture, so it has to be authentic to what your business is like and there's no single answer. That said, there are some benchmarks that I see working well across the industry.

It is important to outline the process and expected timelines at the beginning. This requires a clear internal process where all of those involved, from the HR manager to the hiring manager, are aligned on what is happening when. This process doesn't need to be standardised across the organisation as different departments recruit differently, but there must be cohesion between those involved in the process.

A two-interview process works well. The first gives both sides the opportunity to discuss the role, the candidate's skill set and ambitions, and what the company has to offer. A second interview around 3 or 4 working days later allows everyone to digest, reflect, and come back with useful questions for a deeper conversation. It is important this is a two-way process: the candidate is qualifying the opportunity as much as you are qualifying them.

Timely interview feedback is essential, for successful and unsuccessful candidates. If you have the mindset that what you are doing here is not just filling a seat, but letting people experience your culture, then the unsuccessful candidates are just as important as the successful ones. Yes, you have to interview a lot of people so feedback can be time consuming, but by the same token, what do you want those dozens, hundreds, or thousands of people to be saying about your company in a small industry in the years to come?

What's the reward of getting all that right?

What's the cost of getting it wrong? That's usually easier to quantify. How much does it cost to keep a sales seat with an unfulfilled target open for four months while you find someone? What happens to the roadmap when you're a developer short? What is the impact on your team morale if you get someone with the wrong skill mix? What will it do to your market share when the top candidate choses your main competitor? Everyone can fill a seat, eventually, the challenge is filling it quickly with the right person.

Kevin Perks

What difference does a headhunter make?

External perspective on your processes. A view across the industry of recruitment best practices. Confidentiality and an arm's length when approaching staff at competitors or in sensitive positions.

In my mind, though, the most overlooked benefit is having someone that is wholly results based. At Van Kaizen we don't take a base salary, we earn solely on commission. No placement, no income, really focuses the mind and drives me and my colleagues to find the very best people out there.

And how do I do that? By selling your culture, person to person, over the phone, to dozens of candidates for every shortlist I build. Over the years, that is hundreds of people getting their first tailored experience of your culture.

Just make sure when the shortlist lands, your processes prove I was selling the truth.

MGA: Repealed Guidance Note on the Impact of the UK's Exit from the European Union

The Malta Gaming Authority has repealed the "Guidance Note on the Impact of the United Kingdom's Exit from the European Union". The Guidance Note had been published before the finalisation and publication of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, with the aim of informing Authorised Persons about the potential impacts of Brexit and to provide guidance during a period of uncertainty. Therefore, the Guidance Note is reflective of the Authority's position preceding the publication and coming into force of the Agreement.

The publication of the Agreement was pivotal in providing legal clarity as to how the EU-UK relationship will continue post-Brexit and delineated the terms that either Party is bound by in the development of trade and investment between them. The Authority is obliged to adhere to the Agreement's terms, which supersede any positions held before it entered into force.

In light of this, the Authority repealed the Guidance Note, as part of its sustained commitment to ensure its legal and regulatory framework is clear, accurate and up-to-date. Furthermore, through the Notice of Repeal, the Authority has also taken the opportunity to provide additional clarity on the matters outlined within the Guidance Note.

MGA

California Gambling Control Commission Unveils Strategic Plan for 2024 to 2027

The California Gambling Control Commission (CGCC) has officially released its strategic plan for the period of 2024 to 2027, marking a significant step towards modernizing its operations and enhancing stakeholder relations.

The plan was announced by Stacey Luna Baxter, Executive Director for the CGCC, highlighting its focus on modernization, communication, continuous internal education and the development of educational resources for stakeholders.

The strategic plan serves as a guiding roadmap through 2027, detailing key strategic goals aimed at fostering positive engagement with stakeholders, modeling fiscal responsibility and enhancing operational efficiency. Additionally, the plan underscores the importance of cultivating a culture of continuous learning and collaboration.

One of the notable aspects of the plan is its inclusive approach, where every employee of the CGCC will contribute directly to its anticipated successes over the next four years. The CGCC prides itself on its team of dedicated, knowledgeable and experienced staff committed to executing the strategic goals and objectives. This collective effort is expected to be the driving force behind the successful implementation of the strategic plan.

In line with the goal of enhancing stakeholder engagement, the CGCC invites stakeholders to review the plan and provide their feedback. This initiative is part of the CGCC's effort to ensure that its resources are transparent, informative and beneficial to the public. Stakeholders are encouraged to share their thoughts and questions by emailing the CGCC at Comments @ CGCC .ca .gov.

Baxter expressed immense pride in the strategic plan and the efforts put into its development. She looks forward to working collaboratively with stakeholders to achieve the set goals, which align with the CGCC's mission of ensuring integrity and justice in the controlled gambling industry through effective regulations and the fair application of the law. This strategic move represents a significant commitment to advancing the gambling regulatory landscape in California over the coming years.

Exclusive Q&A with Luke Sammut / Booming Games

Can you tell us a little more about your role at Booming Games?

In my role as the Director of Finance & Accounting at Booming Games, I oversee our finance team and the financial strategy of the group. Our department's responsibilities range from day-to-day accounting operations to more complex tasks such as financial planning and analysis.

Joining Booming Games in its early stages was both a challenge and an exciting opportunity to build the finance function from scratch. Each step in establishing internal processes, implementing new finance tools and software, and so much more, helped in making the department a valuable business partner within the company. Seeing all these pieces come together has been very rewarding.

Over the years, it has become more and more important for my role to ensure that the department is well-equipped to support the business in scaling up its operations, developing long-term financial planning and most importantly ensuring financial stability. All very important for the business to be able to make well-informed decisions. My role and that of our department has grown to extend beyond the traditional finance functions but to be a strong pillar of our organisation.

What career path did you take to get into the industry and your current role?

I started my journey in the iGaming industry after a three-year stint as an auditor at PwC Malta, where I was fortunate enough to be surrounded by some of the best minds in the profession. Working in such a high standard and demanding environment was a very important part of my career in building a strong technical expertise in the field.

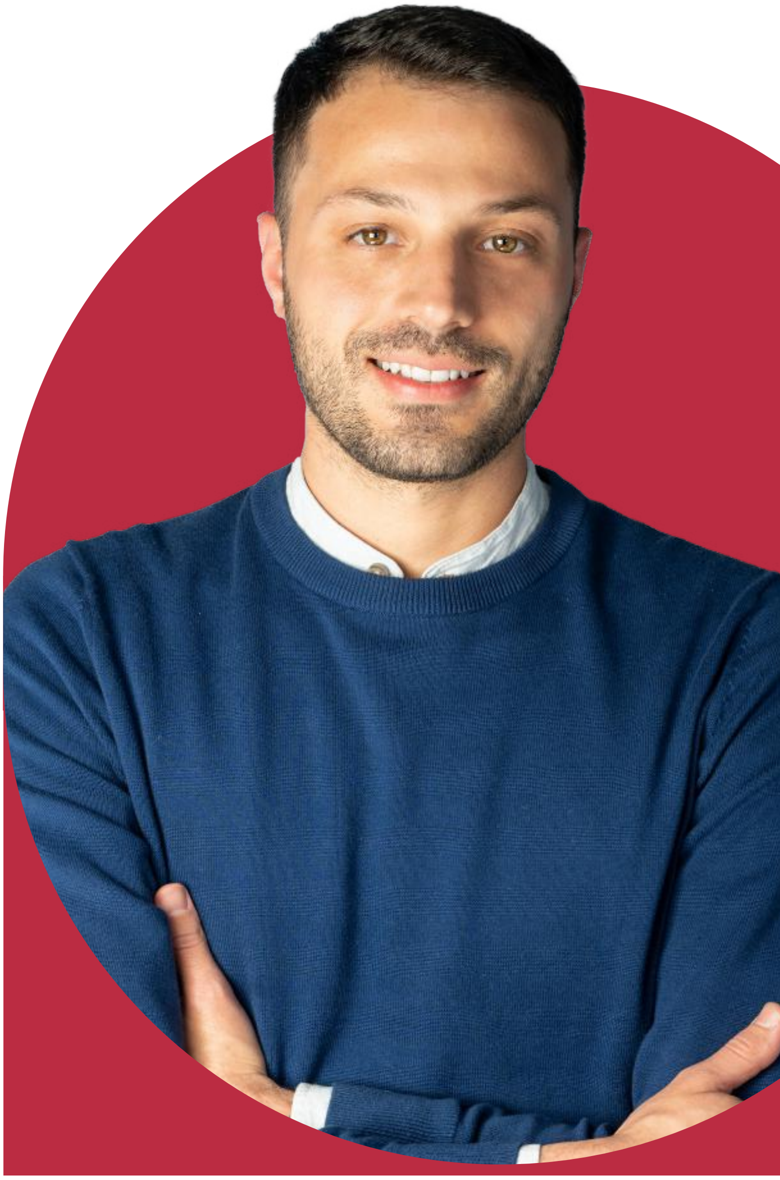
Moving to Booming Games in 2017 as a Senior Accountant was a significant transition motivated by the sector's dynamic environment as well as the opportunity to be part of a growing company. Every stage in advancing to my current position has been a path marked with significant personal and company achievements, making it an incredible journey!

What is the most challenging part about your role?

Dealing with challenges is a continuous aspect of my role. Central to these challenges is the need for continuous learning to keep up to date with professional standards and the industry.

Another aspect is balancing between being process-oriented and having robust controls whilst remaining agile. Equipping our team with the right tools at the right time is important to achieve this. At Booming Games, we're committed to embrace technology, and we constantly strive to be aligned with the latest advancements in our field.

Building a strong and dedicated team is probably the biggest challenge. Overcoming this has been crucial for our success. It is not simply about increasing headcount but making sure that our people grow on a personal level by providing



opportunities for professional development and good leadership. This not only increases our department's capabilities, but with their support it becomes much easier to navigate through the complexities of our role. I am proud to say that within Booming Games, our team transformed the perception of finance being primarily administrative to being a key business partner.

What is the most rewarding part? What does success look like for you?

Seeing Booming Games reach new heights and knowing that my role played an important part in that journey is particularly satisfying. But the most rewarding part is the success in building a team of hard-working and exceptionally talented individuals with a very strong sense of teamwork and collaboration. Observing their development and growth over time is motivating.

As for my view on success, it includes two main elements. Firstly, it involves the company achieving its objectives and milestones. Secondly, and equally important, is fostering a great company culture and values which sets an environment where team members feel valued, challenged, and engaged. True success is achieving these two aspects simultaneously.

What would you say to someone looking to get into the industry? What are the pros/cons?

The iGaming industry is characterised by a forward-thinking nature, constantly evolving through innovation and creativity. Personally, I find this super exciting as it keeps the day-to-day job interesting. However, I do understand that this can be challenging for those who prefer a more constant environment.

To those looking to join the industry, it's definitely a very rewarding journey, with plenty of opportunities

Recently you have won an iGaming Idol Award. How does it feel to be considered the best of the best in this industry?

Receiving the iGaming Idol Award was a very proud moment. Each challenge and every milestone reached throughout this journey has contributed to this award. It's a reminder that hard work does get recognised, and it motivates me to keep on pushing boundaries. Once again, a big thanks to Booming Games, our excellent team, and the judges. I'm eager to see what the future holds!

R. Franco Digital: Shaking up the iGaming industry

Following another year of unwavering success, we spoke to Javier Sacristán Franco, International Business Director of R. Franco Digital, about the innovative new release Pick & Shoot, gamification trends, standout moments of 2023 as well as what's next for the leading Spanish supplier.

Your latest release, Pick & Shoot, brings a revolutionary new experience to iGaming. Why did you decide to release such a title and what elements within the game do you think will appeal to players?

Pick & Shoot sees us venture away from the conventional slot gameboard and provide a unique player experience. Providing differentiation always entails a higher risk upon release to the market, but if the key to success is found, these types of games can generate significant benefits. Additionally, the process of creating and developing dynamic titles is always positive for our technical teams, fostering a culture of creativity and thinking out of the box.

Combining mechanics similar to that found in roulette with exciting multiplier values, Pick & Shoot includes a strategic element that captivates players. With three steps involving selecting the bet amount, choosing a multiplier value and finally picking the Attack Boxes, players actively participate in the game's progression. Pick & Shoot is revolutionary in that it gives players a sense of ownership and control over their gameplay and brings next-level engagement to the iGaming realm.

With gamification becoming increasingly prominent in casino content, what new trends and features are emerging on the market as ones to watch in 2024?

Gamification is an increasingly prevalent component in iGaming as well as other industries. It is a powerful tool that provides tangible rewards, having a positive impact on acquisition, loyalty, a sense of belonging, progression, and retention. Highlighted in our latest release, Pick & Shoot, the use of skill-based elements mirroring a video game experience will definitely be a trend to watch in the future. As we further explore this idea, we believe there is still immense untapped potential to enhance the player experience. Our 2024 roadmap will showcase this and demonstrate our innovative approach to in-game gamification.

How are younger generations responding to iGaming and how can suppliers ensure continuity by capturing this previously untapped demographic?

At the moment, a significant amount of content is being generated targeting younger generations. While this may seem disproportionate, its longevity will depend on the quality of experiences we offer them.

We have engaged in significant market research, looking at preferences both inside and outside the world of online casinos. We have also had in-depth discussions with psychology professionals to better understand the mindset of younger generations. With this, we can create tailor-made content that truly captivates players and leaves lasting impressions that extend beyond mere engagement metrics.

Can we expect similar releases from R. Franco Digital in the new year and what other innovative experiences are in store for players and operators?

The R. Franco Digital Game Team always sets aside time and resources to develop experiences that are both disruptive and exciting. This year we've released several games that break away from the norm. Looking at our recent release Tacoweeen as an example, the Day of the Dead-themed game has numerous in-game modifiers that go far beyond the traditional Free Spins route and instead invite players to trail through a map in one bonus round or select food from a feast in another. It has proven a real hit with players.

Looking ahead, we'll be continuing this trend in 2024, with games that accommodate both fans of traditional slot games as well as more adventurous players by supplying a range of new experiences that showcase our team's unconventional approach to the iGaming landscape. While we can't give too much away just yet, watch this space as we have a lot of surprises in store for our players and partners!

Finally, reflecting on the year, what have been the standout moments for R. Franco Digital and how has this shaped your 2024 strategy?

The previous year has been one of significant momentum. A standout for us has been launching four new platforms across three new regulated markets in a single month, which is a new record achieved! As our IRIS 4.0 Platform continues to gain traction, 2023 has been a period where we have been able to cement our status as a leading management system and software provider.

As well as this, we have also expanded in several key regulated markets including our recent tie-up with Solverde.pt in Portugal. Being one of the most exciting up-and-coming markets in Europe, Portugal remains a key area of expansion for R. Franco Digital. The partnership with one of the market's leading operators is a true testament to our dedication to our dedication to geographical expansion, and we'll be using it as a catalyst to boost our reach even further. With the integration of new technologies into our game development process, we are gearing up for a big year ahead, filled with continued commercial growth and games that drive the industry forward.

IBIA Publishes 2023 Integrity Report

2023 saw a fall in suspicious alerts globally and an increase in successful sanctions for sports betting violations

The International Betting Integrity Association (IBIA), the leading global voice on integrity for the licensed sports betting industry, has published its 2023 sports betting integrity report.

The report highlights that the total number of suspicious sports betting alerts reported in 2023 fell to 184, which represents a decrease of 101, or 35%, on the revised 2022 figure of 285 alerts. The global alerts for 2023 are significantly below the average of 244 annual alerts for the period 2019 to 2022.

The report also highlights that IBIA's suspicious betting activity data helped to prove that 74 matches were corrupted and found that there was an increase in the number of clubs, players and officials successfully sanctioned for violating sports betting rules.

When considering the number of alerts reported, it is important to recognise that IBIA's ability to detect and deter suspicious betting activity has increased significantly in recent years; it now accounts for over US$137 billion of global betting turnover per annum, making IBIA the world's leading operator-run integrity monitoring body.

These results confirm the importance of the legal requirement for regulated sports betting operators to join an international sports integrity monitoring body, increasingly imposed in well-regulated markets. That requirement was recently introduced in Brazil, which the 2023 report shows had the third highest number of suspicious betting alerts (11), behind the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic.

"The fall in last year's global alert numbers is encouraging," the Chief Executive Officer for the IBIA, Khalid Ali, said. "It confirms that our world-leading monitoring and alert network is making a very important contribution to deterring criminals from seeking to defraud our members and that increased collaboration between the IBIA, sports and regulators is a winning combination. Despite this progress, we must remain vigilant and recognize that the greatest threat to sports integrity comes from unregulated operators, most notably in Asia."

IBIA uses suspicious betting activity data from its unique global monitoring network to help sports, regulators, policymakers and law enforcement to investigate and prosecute criminals. In 2023, IBIA alerts contributed to the investigations and subsequent successful sanctioning of 21 clubs, players and officials, an increase on the 15 sanctioned in 2022. Of the 21 sanctioned in 2023, there were eight tennis players, seven umpires and four snooker players.

In several of the cases, data from IBIA and its members helped contribute to significant sanctions, such as life bans, being issued. This collective action attests to the powerful impact of IBIA's data and cross-sector partnership working.

Comparison: Top sports

Football was the sport with the most alerts:

63

reported in 2023

In terms of individual sports, football was the sport with the majority of alerts with 63, with the number remaining relatively consistent over time, with 67 and 66 alerts reported in 2022 and 2021, respectively.

Tennis was the second most reported sport with 54 alerts. This represents a 49% decrease on the 2022 total of 106. On average, tennis alerts have been decreasing over the past years and for the first time the number of tennis alerts is below football.

Tennis was the second most reported sport:

54

alerts reported in 2023

“The ongoing decrease in tennis alerts along with notable reductions in table tennis and eSports is very encouraging,” Ali said. “IBIA will continue to work closely with the International Tennis Integrity Agency and other important partners in the sports sector to exchange information on suspicious betting and to support the prosecution of wrongdoing. The progress made in tennis over a number of years now demonstrates that successfully identifying and sanctioning match-fixing sends a powerful message to athletes and officials about the risks of engaging in match-fixing.”

The association publishes quarterly reports covering the integrity alerts reported through its monitoring and alert platform, which can be viewed here. IBIA can be contacted at Info @IBIA.bet.

Sportsbook Members

Associate Members

New Horizons in NY Betting: Expanding Sports Wagering in 2024

Are there any insights or quotes from Sen. Addabbo on how he plans to address potential concerns or opposition to expanding sports betting options?

Regarding sports betting, Sen. Addabbo wants bettors in New York to be able to wager on things that are legal in some other jurisdictions, namely individual sports awards (like NFL most valuable player awards) and things like non-team proposition bets (how long the National Anthem will last prior to kickoff at the Super Bowl, what color shoes the Super Bowl halftime performer will wear, etc). The legislative session began early this month at the state Capitol in Albany and is set to end in June. The senator has between now and then to win support for legislation to make these changes. The legislation will have to be approved in Senate and Assembly committees and then be approved by the full Senate and Assembly (called the House of Representatives in some states) before going to Gov. Kathy Hochul for her signature. At any step in this process the legislation could die — in the committees or on the Senate or Assembly floors. If it got all the way to the governor, she could either sign it into law or veto it.

Regarding the projected increase in tax revenue from iGaming, does Sen. Addabbo mention any specific plans for how this additional revenue will be utilized within the state?

As for iGaming, the tax revenue the state would collect if iGaming is approved (about $1 billion a year, according to Addabbo) would go to various state programs. Addabbo also wants a portion to go toward programs to help those with gambling addictions. As with any lawmaker introducing a bill involving the budget, the senator will work to convince opponents of the state's needs, including a state budget deficit in the 2024 fiscal year of more than $4.3 billion. As he told me, "Everyone has to say, 'Let's stop losing $1 billion a year.'" The same would be true of his strategy on getting the sports betting changes through the Legislature. As he told me, the sports betting changes are expected to bring in additional state revenue. As you know, revenue that goes into a state's general fund, if not earmarked for programs like gambling addiction awareness, is first presented in the governor's spending plan at the beginning of the legislative session and then adjusted and/or amended in the legislative money committees before going back to the governor.

Sen. Joseph P. Addabbo Jr.

Lastly, has Sen. Addabbo provided any timeline or roadmap for the implementation of these changes, especially concerning iGaming?

The proposed timeline to implement sports betting changes or iGaming legalization will be spelled out in the bills. I will continue to monitor that and can keep you updated. The sports betting changes should not take long to implement, once they meet regulatory approval. However, since iGaming would be a new program in New York (it is legal in only six states now) state gaming regulators would have to investigate and approve the iGaming operators before anyone can began playing traditional casino games online — some of which have live dealers, by the way. In Connecticut, which borders New York, the state's legal iGaming program has more than 500 online casino games available to players, including craps, blackjack, roulette, etc.

This interview would have not been possible without the help of Gambling.com

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EUROMAT Unveils Payment Report Showcasing Industry Innovations in Alternative Payment Systems

The Payments Taskforce of the European Gaming and Amusement Federation (EUROMAT), representing the interests of the amusement and low-stakes gaming machine industry, released a new report showcasing the range of innovative payment solutions in use across Europe in the amusement sector. The report features case studies from The Netherlands, the UK, and Spain, demonstrating how the industry balancing innovation with legal obligations in the field of payments.

The most recent study conducted by the European Central Bank reveals that, in 2022, consumers opted for cash in slightly over half of point-of-sale (POS) transactions, a significant decrease from the substantial 79% observed in 2016. EUROMAT is concerned that regulation in many parts of Europe is not keeping pace with market reality with rules either prohibiting payment by means other than cash or making it practically difficult to roll out.

Reflecting on the final version of the Payment Report, the Payments Taskforce Chairman, Greg Wood of BACTA, remarked: “There is already a lot of emerging practice across Europe which are adding value for players and venues. However, we’d like more cooperation from regulators to work with us to see what more can be done to ensure that we can offer players the best experience. This means keeping pace with the rest of the leisure world and give customers the variety of options that they would expect anywhere else.”

EUROMAT President Jason Frost added: “We are a cash-based business and we should always be able to offer this option to players but we have to move with the times and like any other legitimate business, we should be able to offer customers the convenience of other payment methods. We are in danger of becoming the only venues on the high street that can only accept cash at a time when the public are carrying less of it.”

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