



# WEEK 6

## FRIDAY 7 FEB 2014

### THIS WEEK

- Mecca profits down
- Guest column: Mike Shea on South Africa
- Steve Wynn against online gaming
- Tweets of the week

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#### TOP STORY

## MP PUSHES FOR STAFF SAFETY ACTION

Chris Evans wants national charter to help protect betting shop workers



Labour MP Chris Evans

A Welsh MP has called for a code on betting shop employee safety amid fears about the vulnerability of staff working alone in high-street bookmakers. Proposing the creation of a Betting Safety Charter, former betting shop worker Chris Evans, the Labour MP for Islwyn, said he was “shocked” that the practise of ‘single manning’ was still in existence, stating that it can make betting shop workers “vulnerable to incidents or violence”.

Evans, who last month called for the end of single staffing, wants to see the introduction of a voluntary code covering the compulsory use of CCTV cameras, panic alarms and double door locking, revealing that bookmakers Ladbrokes were “very open” to the idea.

“I think we need a voluntary code to start off with,” he said. “If it’s working then let’s roll it out across the industry, if it’s not then we need to revisit this with legislation.”

Evans said he had spoken “extensively” to both Ladbrokes and William Hill, stating that the former are already hoping to introduce a code of practice relating to staff and

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE ►

**FROM FRONT PAGE ►**

customers by 1 March, while the latter have been trialling a system whereby any shop policy is dictated by how best to protect staff.

Hills have been trialling evening lone working in selected shops not deemed as high-risk, with CEO Ralph Topping recently revealing that the company were “looking at the potential for seven shops to be single manned during the evening as well as the morning”.

Topping added: “I think there’s a lot of hype about [single manning] and a lot of people don’t understand it. As a person who once ran the Cowdenbeath shop from nine in the morning until six at night on my tod, I can tell you it is not an emotional issue for most people working in a betting shop.”

In 2010 a voluntary code known as the Safe Bet Alliance, of which both William Hill and Ladbrokes are members, was created with a view to reducing the risk of robbery and other forms of violence in the workplace.

**KEY POINTS**

- MP Chris Evans proposes the introduction of a national charter on betting shop staff safety.
- Code would make CCTV, double door locking and panic alarms compulsory.
- Move follows concerns regarding safety of lone workers.

**BINGO**

**MECCA PROFITS DOWN 38%**

**Brand performs poorly in tough half year for Rank Group**

Rank Group have reported a 38% drop in operating profit for their Mecca brand for the first half of the 2013/14



financial year. The operators revealed a year-on-year decrease to £13.9m for the six months ended 31 December 2013, citing higher operating costs and lower revenues, the latter of which decreased by 2% to £143.5m.

However the addition of 19 acquired casinos saw revenues for the firm’s Grosvenor Casinos brand rise 34% to £194.2m, with operating profit improving 11% to £28.2m.

Overall group revenue for the period was up 16% year-on-year to £352.4m, with customer numbers, customer visits and spend per visit all rising. However group operating profit before exceptional items dropped 14% to £32.7m, while adjusted profit before tax was down 23% to £27.7m. Group EBITDA before exceptional items decreased 6% to £54.2m.

A “tight control of costs” was therefore one of the firm’s ‘key actions’ for delivering an improved performance in the second half, along with “improved value for money for customers” and “focused capital expenditure”.

**KEY POINTS**

- Rank Group’s Mecca brand records a 38% decrease in operating profit for H1 FY14.
- Overall group operating profit down 14%; adjusted profit before tax drops 23%.

**USA**

**STEVE WYNN SPEAKS OUT AGAINST ONLINE GAMING**

**Land-based mogul fears underage scandal**

Casino magnate Steve Wynn has followed in fellow tycoon Sheldon Adelson’s footsteps by revealing his opposition to online gaming. The Wynn Resorts CEO, whose land-based firm were recently granted a transactional waiver to enter the New Jersey internet gaming market, told political journalist Jon Ralston that he feared the effect an underage gambling scandal would have on the overall industry, asking: “Do you really think they can stop underage gambling?”

The 72 year-old also described online gaming as “not a good entrepreneurial opportunity” because he didn’t see the government “letting us keep the money.”



Steve Wynn

**Tweets of the week**

**“Female players are significantly more brand loyal according to NJ #igaming player survey. #ICEgaming”**  
*Clarion Gaming’s @EwaBakun*

**“The thing I took away from the NJ igaming poll is online gaming is having a positive effect on the bottom line of casinos. #ICEgaming”**  
*Pechanga.net editor @VictorRocha1*

**“@VictorRocha1 Glad to hear it; important for this msg to be understood by industry & those on fence about regulation.”**  
*Eilers Research MD Adam Krejcik*  
*[@akrejcik] responds to Rocha’s tweet*

**NEWS IN BRIEF**

**ROUNDUP: WINNER, BALLY, LADBROKES**

The rest of the week's key stories on *GamblingInsider.com* and the web

- **Winner.com** have launched a new, fully-EU-licensed binary options platform, **Winner Option**.
- **Microgaming** have unveiled their new 'Avalon II: The Quest For The Grail' slot game at ICE Totally Gaming.
- Providers **Bally Technologies** have signed a systems agreement with operators **Boyd Gaming**.
- **Ladbrokes** have introduced the live-dealer products of providers **Playtech** into their online portfolio.
- **Yggdrasil Gaming** have signed a deal to provide content for **Mr Green**.

**GUEST COLUMNIST**

**"SOUTH AFRICA MUST EMBRACE THE MOVE TO ONLINE BETTING"**



by **Mike Shea**  
sports trader

"With South Africa's online gambling laws set to be revised to legalise online casino products for the first time, some of the industry's biggest international companies will be taking a renewed look at the market.

However, the appetite among punters for sports betting, which is permitted online and on mobile devices, shows why the opportunities are already plentiful – even if it has been a sharp learning curve for domestic and overseas operators alike to make the most of them.

For the big-name multinationals the issue has been understanding the local audience and providing a product fit for it – accompanied by marketing that takes the correct tone and talks the right language – as we have seen from some high-profile failures in South Africa in recent years.

It is essential to offer local markets – with local prices and local payment gateways in order to place bets in the local currency.

The more forward-thinking domestic bookmakers are making the most of the opportunity to steal a march on the competition, as we have seen with the like of Bet.co.za, Justbet.co.za and Playabets.com, to name a few examples. Each one is offering a top-quality product that is aimed squarely at the local market. But it has taken a period of adaptation to get things right and some of the older generation bookmakers have found it especially difficult.

For traders used to the betting shop environment the move from taking cash from walk-in punters to 24/7 pricing has required a big adjustment. Online you don't have a say in who takes the prices so it's essential to perform detailed player analysis and keep monitoring your book. You don't have time to react to shrewd punters and the slightest inaccuracies will be preyed upon and exploited in seconds.

Given the round-the-clock nature it is impossible to run an entirely manual operation, especially when it comes to providing in-play. There is still a need for old-school trading skills but they need to be balanced by modern day technology, which means taking advantage of sophisticated sportsbook platforms and accurate-to-the-second pricing feeds.

Players also have had to be educated – and the emphasis here falls on the bookmakers. The betting community has had to get used to understanding limits and accounts, as well as the wider choice of wagering opportunities on offer to them, but many are enjoying the flexibility they now have, so much so that we are seeing an uplift in the popularity of foreign sports – especially from the US.

Viewing figures for American football, ice hockey, baseball and basketball are increasing and bookmakers are having to diversify to accommodate. For example, the recently-launched Playabets.com has markets on Aussie rules, bandy, surfing and water polo – not events the average South African punter would always expect to be able to get on in their local betting shop.

As we have seen in the UK, traditional bookmakers who fail to embrace online are going to be left behind and with the prospect of a new dawn for e-gaming in South Africa there has never been a more important time to make the move."

*Mike Shea is head of trading for the Enterprise Managed Solutions offering at BetTech Gaming, the global provider of turnkey gaming solutions. Shea was previously horse-racing trading supervisor at Sportingbet and held roles at Hollywoodbets.net and World Betting Exchange*

**Want to be a guest columnist in GI Friday? Write to: editor@gamblinginsider.com**

**OUT NOW: Look out for the new Jan/Feb issue of *Gambling Insider's* print magazine, including Tom Watson on FOBTs, a major focus on mergers and acquisitions in the gambling industry, and a review of New Jersey's early days of legal online gaming**





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