

THIS WEEK

- Resorts Casino to launch online in New Jersey
- Caesars shifts PokerStars stance
- Columnist: Thomas Nielsen on the female market
- Tweets of the week

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TOP STORY

888 TAKEOVER TALKS END

William Hill no longer in discussions regarding possible acquisition



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BET WITH **888SPORT** ONLINE BOOKMAKERS

Negotiations over a takeover of 888 by fellow operator William Hill have come to an end, 888 Holdings has announced. A statement to the London Stock Exchange from 888 cited a lack of agreement on the value of the company with a "key stakeholder", thought to be co-founder Avi Shaked, as the reason for the talks ceasing.

The statement said: "Due to a significant difference of opinion on value with a key stakeholder, it has not been possible to reach agreement on the terms of a possible offer and the board of the company has agreed with William Hill to terminate discussions."

888 Holdings' share price dropped 16% in early trading on Monday when it became known that the potential £750m acquisition was no longer a possibility.

888 was founded in 1997 by the Shaked brothers Avi and Aaron along with the Ben-Yitzhak brothers Ron and Shay. Approximately 60% of 888 is owned by the two separate family trusts, with the Shaked family owning 48.6% and the Ben-Yitzhak brothers owning 10.5%.

It was reported last week that both parties had reached a preliminary agreement of 210p-a-share but that the

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William Hill is no longer in talks over an acquisition of 888

FROM FRONT PAGE ►

Shaked family was holding out for an offer of 300p-a-share. Initial news of the negotiations had forced 888's share price up 28% to 185.7p, before closing for the day at 171.5p.

At the time 888 said that "there can not be any certainty that any firm offer will be made nor as to the terms on which any firm offer might be forthcoming", while Hills did not make any comment on the situation at any stage.

Meanwhile, online operator BwinParty saw its share price drop by almost 20% on Friday, as traders picked up on news that corporate suitors had apparently ended talks over a company takeover.

The firm confirmed in November that it had been in "preliminary discussions" with a number of interested parties over "potential business combinations" that would lead to the creation of additional value for shareholders.

KEY POINTS

- William Hill is no longer in discussions with 888 over a takeover
- A key 888 stakeholder, believed to be Avi Shaked, could not agree on the value of the company
- Meanwhile BwinParty takeover talks also appear to have ended

US

RESORTS BECOMES LATEST NJ OPERATOR

Casino partners with SNG Interactive for new website

Resorts Casino Hotel is to launch an online gambling service in New Jersey in partnership with SNG Interactive, a joint venture between providers NYX Gaming Group and Sportech. ResortsCasino.com



will be powered by software provided by SNG Interactive, with both groups having been granted a transactional waiver by Garden State regulators. Expected to launch later this month, Resorts will become the sixth online gambling operator in the state.

Resorts CEO Mark Giannantonio said: "With SNG's flexible gaming solutions and exclusive game content, we're excited to introduce Europe's industry-leading casino slots and table games to the United States market for the best online user experience."

Meanwhile the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement has reported improved online gambling win for state operators in January. A total of \$11.6m was posted, up from \$8.6m in the same month last year, an increase of 34.5% when discounting Ultimate Gaming, which closed its New Jersey operations in September.

KEY POINTS

- Resorts Casino to launch online in New Jersey
- Platform to be provided by SNG Interactive

US

CAESARS CONFIRMS POKERSTARS SHIFT

Firm believes operator should be considered for legal US gaming

Operator Caesars has seemingly shifted its position regarding PokerStars' entry into the regulated US online gaming market. GamblingCompliance reports Jan Jones Blackhurst [pictured], EVP of governmental relations at Caesars, as describing Amaya-owned PokerStars as a "strong ally in the space". She said Caesars now believes that Amaya/PokerStars should be considered for legal online gaming in the US.

Caesars has previously been a vocal supporter of 'bad actor' clauses in US legislation, which usually seek to block market entry for operators who accepted US bets after the passing of UIGEA, criteria which would include PokerStars.

KEY POINT

- Caesars believes PokerStars should be considered for legal US gambling



Tweets of the week

"Given the 888 board were broadly amenable to Wm Hill's offer, Avi Shaked's opposition seems odd. Sounds like he doesn't want to sell at all" The Times business reporter Dominic Walsh [\[@walshdominic\]](#)

"In fact, p2p skill-based gambling has been offered at various AC casinos - casinos nationwide, really - for decades. It's called poker" Chris Grove of Online Poker Report [\[@OPReport\]](#) responds to Borgata offering physical skill-based gambling

"Murren, on MGM 4Q call says Rock in Rio on Strip will open in May; 'There may also be a certain fight in May' Pacquiao-Mayweather?" Las Vegas Review-Journal's Howard Stutz [\[@howardstutz\]](#)

GUEST COLUMNIST

"GAMING'S LOST AUDIENCE"



by **Thomas Nielsen**
Head of game
licensing – Magnet
Gaming

"Slot machine operators and suppliers are very good at attracting men to their products. By focusing on voluptuous women or volatile maths models the male audience is well served, but the potential goldmine that is female slots players has largely been ignored or alienated from the market.

It doesn't have to be this way. In Denmark, the ratio of male to female players is split down the middle, due in no small part to the establishment of social games before the advent of their real-money equivalents. So how can operators in other territories attempt to redress this imbalance?

One way is to change how you look at slots. Of course, both men and women see winning money as part of the attraction, but just as important is the entertainment derived from playing. For many, it's a fun way to spend an evening that creates a brand loyalty similar to that of a TV series or soap opera. These players are happy to spend a few pounds to be entertained, but have not logged on to make their fortune.

That's why we focus on supplying games that take smaller bets, making players' money last a lot longer. We believe there is a huge underserved

market for casual gamblers that would be attracted to this approach. Lots of people who do not necessarily see themselves as gamblers, including women, would happily spend money to play great slots.

They regularly engage with the lottery or bingo, but are not being converted to slots in sufficient numbers. And it may be that they feel threatened by the current trend for male-oriented games. This is a huge market that is already experienced in real-money games, it's just that they don't know it.

There has been a lot of discussion about 'what women want' from games in the console space. Many who approached the subject lacked subtlety, designing games focused around puppies, babies and the colour pink, and quickly discovered that wasn't the secret ingredient.

Instead, the results were surprising and encouraging: it seems that men and women's tastes in games are really not that far apart. Differences do apply but the overall message is that both men and women like to play fun games that do not alienate them. It's equally important, therefore, not to skew games towards a male audience or add features that cater exclusively for women. Instead, suppliers should create games that are fun, accessible, look great and are not divisive.

The social element of slots cannot be overlooked either. Once players start to enjoy coming back to the games they feel good about, they'll tell their friends, and soon you will have a community of devoted and dedicated players. Danish site spilnu.dk, one of the country's biggest portals for online slots, has provided the template for

this with many players logging in to chat with their friends primarily, and to play second. That's inclusive social gambling at its strongest, and there is tremendous potential in other markets around the world, particularly those with a social base that are now opening up to real-money gambling.

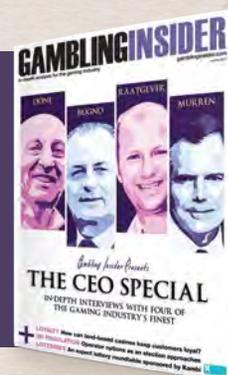
We have seen a lot of success from attracting casual players with various social games. It is the game that draws people in, and then we have been able to monetise the product by introducing them to real-money games over time. Everyone wins – the player still gets to play the titles they prefer (and now with a chance of winning money too) and the business works because a percentage of that audience will convert to real-money slots.

Our fellow Scandinavians Vera&John and, in particular, Garbo have recognised the need to appeal to female players with a renewed approach that focuses on social, low-stakes gambling and community building. But suppliers have been slow on the uptake so far. It's a path that could make the future of the slots industry very different and much more lucrative for all those involved."

Thomas Nielsen is head of game licensing at Magnet Gaming. He has over ten years' worth of experience in developing omni-channel games in his native Denmark

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

OUT NOW: Look out for the January/February issue of *Gambling Insider's* print magazine, featuring a CEO Special as we interview four of the biggest figures in gaming: Jim Murren of MGM Resorts, GTech's Walter Bugno, Fred Done of Betfred, and Microgaming's Roger Raatgever



NOMINATIONS OPEN!



The nominations window for the Global Gaming Awards 2015 has officially opened!

Nominations are being welcomed across all 12 categories – which cover both the land-based and digital gaming industries – for achievements during the past 12 months.

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