



WEEK 12

FRIDAY 22 MAR 2019

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CAESARS IN EARLY MERGER TALKS WITH ELDORADO

THIS WEEK

- Operators struggle during Cheltenham Festival
- New Jersey February data
- Kazuo Okada hits YouTube
 - GGA Las Vegas 2019 self-nominations open
 - NIGA preview

GUEST COLUMNIST:

- Alex Czajkowski, CMO, RTG Asia



Caesars Entertainment and Eldorado Resorts are in the early stages of merger discussions.

According to reports, Caesars is providing confidential financial information to Eldorado as the operator carries out due diligence, although no offer has been made and there is no certainty a deal will be reached.

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THIS WEEK IN NUMBERS

€4m

Reduced revenue for Paf via its new “loss limit” scheme (\$4.6m), which caps the amount players can lose, to promote responsible gambling



\$43bn



Paid by financial services provider Fidelity National Information Services to acquire Worldpay

4



The exclusive partnership between fantasy sports operator Dream11 and the Indian Premier League runs for four years

1,800 ft²



The size of FanDuel's recently-opened sportsbook at Valley Forge Casino

\$8.5bn

The amount the American Gaming Association expects to be wagered on March Madness



Gambling Insider reached out to both operators for comment but did not receive a statement; nor did it receive a denial.

The story comes as no surprise following activist investor Carl Icahn's purchase of a 17.75% stake in Caesars. Icahn has urged the operator to pursue an M & A strategy and, having been granted three seats on the board with a view to a fourth, now wields considerable influence within the company.

The slight drawback for anyone hopeful of a deal is initial contact between the two firms was already reported in 2018, with no concrete outcome.

Further deals rumoured to have been explored were a Caesars merger with MGM Resorts International and Caesars rejecting a reverse merger offer from Golden Nugget.

But with Icahn now the firm's largest individual shareholder, there may be far more willingness on the company's part to reach a deal with Eldorado.

Eldorado recently reported a total net revenue fall of 1% to \$2.83bn for 2018, which fared slightly less favourably than Caesars' performance - a 3% rise to \$8.93bn. Combined though, that would still give a potentially merged company over \$11bn in annual revenue.

Eldorado's operating income did rise 1% to \$388.3m, while adjusted EBITDA grew 10% to \$695.6m. Emphasis was also placed on the positioning of the operator to benefit from the expansion of sports wagering through long-term agreements with William Hill and The Stars Group.

Sports betting agreements are something Caesars knows plenty about of course, with a raft of partnerships and sponsorship deals being signed since the repeal of the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act. Its recent multi-state deal with DraftKings is a prime example, so too its sponsorship of the NFL (for the casino category, not sports betting).

Another similarity between the operators is a changing of the guard at the top of their hierarchies. On 1 January, former Eldorado President and CFO Thomas Reeg began life as its new CEO, with predecessor Gary Carano becoming Executive Chairman.

As has been written about extensively in previous *GI Fridays*, Caesars is similarly set to appoint a new CEO. The issue the operator faces is not knowing who that CEO will be, with Mark Frissora due to leave the role in April and Affinity Gaming CEO Anthony Rodio being Icahn's preferred successor.

Icahn is in a position of power either way, as Frissora's replacement must be approved by his representatives on the board within a set timeframe. If not, Icahn will be granted a fourth seat on the board.

Despite previous uncertainty however, Icahn's increased influence at least indicates the general direction Caesars will take moving forward.

It looks as though some form of M & A will most certainly be agreed; with only a handful of players able to match Caesars for size and value though, it is simply a case of how well it can negotiate.

Is Eldorado the answer, or is Caesars testing the water simply to tempt out other potential matches?

A merger between the two would create a company worth approximately \$9bn; but can Caesars aim higher?



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2022

MGM China and
SJM Holdings have
had their
Macau casino licenses
extended to 2022



32



Several hotel sector representatives expressed concern over proposed legislation that could see 32 integrated resorts built in Brazil

£319.6m

The revenue JPJ Group made in 2018 (\$423.2m), up 10%.

BOOKIES HIT HARD OVER CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL

Gambling Insider understands Sky Bet lost around £3m (\$3.9m) on the Supreme Novices' Hurdle, the first race of the Cheltenham Festival last week, which was won by Willie Mullins' Klassikal Dream at 6/1.

Sky Bet had been running a promotion throughout the Festival which allows customers to have a risk-free bet of up to £20 on the first race every day. If a customer's horse lost, their bet of up to £20 would be refunded as cash that can be withdrawn.

Elsewhere, William Hill suffered on day three of the Festival, losing around £2.2m, *Gambling Insider* understands.

Heavy favourite Paisley Park was considered one of the best bets of the meeting and was very well supported on the day, costing William Hill £500,000 in single bets alone.

The seven-year-old triumphed in the Stayers' Hurdle, which was

one of the main reasons punters came out on top on Thursday.

It is as yet unclear how other major operators fared on the Thursday.

However, with three favourites winning out of five races, it is likely to have been a difficult day across the board.

Despite this, Al Boum Photo prevailed in the Gold Cup at 12/1, while Anibale Fly came second at 22/1 and Bristol De Mai finished third at 18/1, resulting in bookies potentially clawing some of their losses back.

The Gold Cup was the most wagered-on race at the Festival, while the Supreme Novices' Hurdle was the twelfth-most backed race over the course of the week.

Stayers' Hurdle winner Paisley Park and Ryanair Chase winner Frodon provided the worst results of the meeting for Ladbrokes and Coral.

THE WEEK IN QUOTES

"I think the philosophy here is clear from the beginning. We are not following the Italian path, which is really a political decision from one party, which decided it does not like gambling."

Roland Louski, Head of Regulatory Affairs at the National Lottery of Belgium, speaks to Gambling Insider about advertising regulation

"If you go to one of these venues as a new player, someone who comes off the high street, it is unbelievably complicated. When you physically go to play bingo, it can be quite intimidating and the book can often be 15-plus pages. When you go online, it's the opposite."

Playtech Bingo Managing Director Angus Nisbet talks to Gambling Insider about land-based and online bingo

NJ GAMING REVENUE RISES; SPORTS BETTING HANDLE FALLS

Total gaming revenue in New Jersey rose 26% year-on-year to \$241.2m for February.

In the Division of Gaming Enforcement's latest figures, the regulator was able to report a 16% growth in casino win to \$196.7m and a 44% increase in internet gaming win to \$31.7m.

Sports wagering gross revenue was \$12.7m, a fall from January's total of \$18.8m, despite the Super Bowl taking place in early February.

Sports betting handle was \$320.4m, also a drop from January's total of \$385.2m. Of this handle, \$61.5m came from on-site retail wagering and \$258.9m from online betting.

Elsewhere, New Jersey casinos accepted wagers on the Oscars both online and on-site, total handle from which reached \$748,000; 24% of this turned into industry revenue (around \$180,000).

For the year to date, New Jersey's total gaming revenue has increased 25% to \$479.8m, with casino win

increasing 13% to \$374m and internet gaming win rising 49% to \$65.3m. Total sports wagering gross revenue for 2019 so far amounts to \$31.5m.

Meanwhile, in Pennsylvania, total gaming revenue was \$265.9m for February, including \$1.9m in sports wagering revenue.

Figures reported by the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board showed combined table game and slot machine revenue reached \$264m, a 0.4% increase year-on-year.

The biggest individual growth came from Mount Airy Casino Resort, which saw its revenue rise by 11% to \$14.5m. Parx Casino generated the largest amount of revenue (\$48.7m), although this was a 0.2% decrease.

Pennsylvania sports betting handle for the month was \$31.5m; this figure was \$500,000 down on January's total, while revenue fell 27% from January's \$2.6m.

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“We are disappointed the ASA Council has taken a different view – which we believe is inconsistent with other recent decisions in this field and creates a high level of uncertainty when considering marketing compliance”

A Sky Betting & Gaming spokesperson reacts to the Advertising Standards Authority’s decision to ban its advert

THIS WEEK'S WINNERS AND LOSERS

WINNERS

Roar Digital – The joint venture between MGM Resorts International and GVC Holdings secured a multi-year partnership with MLS this week

NetEnt – The supplier was issued with a Pennsylvania license

888 – The operator launched the first phase of its new poker platform, Poker 8

Canadian sports betting – Ontario Finance Minister Vic Fedeli wants to legalise single event sports wagering in the country

An illegal gambling syndicate – was shut down by Malaysian police allegedly run by a Chinese man with eight accomplices and three employees

LOSERS

OKADA LAUNCHES YOUTUBE CAMPAIGN FOR REINSTATEMENT

Former Universal Entertainment Chairman Kazuo Okada has launched a unique social media campaign in an attempt to have him reinstated at the company.

Last year, Okada was ousted from his role at Universal Entertainment after being accused of misappropriating \$20m.

However, the executive – he and his family have a net worth of \$2bn, according to Forbes – is determined to return to the firm, setting up a YouTube and Twitter account to aid his attempt.

In a recently uploaded video, he promised to gift a viewer HK\$7m (\$892,000) under certain conditions which are yet to be revealed. This was promised to be “part one” of a series.

The video was set to the theme music of the Terminator film franchise, with Okada declaring “I will be back.”

Okada will only honour the payout though if he is reinstated at Universal Entertainment.

The Okada saga has been ongoing for some time, with a Philippine court ordering the former Universal Entertainment Chairman’s arrest in January. The Philippine Department of Justice found cause to indict Okada for three counts of “swindling,” following his acquisition of \$3.2m in salary and consultancy fees “through mistake or fraud.”

Okada dismissed the accusations however, and filed a motion for reconsideration, with his bail fixed at 348,000 Philippine pesos (\$6,627).

This latest move has given a new meaning to digital marketing, although it’s unclear what Arnold Schwarzenegger would make of this particular Terminator impression. Whether or not Okada has mastered the famous character, his bid for reinstatement is more reminiscent of Robert Patrick’s villain in Terminator 2: it just won’t go away.

GGA LAS VEGAS 2019 SELF-NOMINATIONS NOW OPEN

The road to G2E starts here, as the window for self-nominations for the Global Gaming Awards Las Vegas 2019 is officially open.

Now in their sixth year, the Global Gaming Awards Las Vegas recognise and reward the industry’s strongest performers across the previous 12 months.

Companies can give themselves the best chance of being involved in the ceremony by submitting their self-nominations in any one of a total of 12 categories.

The deadline for companies to put themselves forward for an Award is the close of play on Friday 24 May. [Click here](#) to fill in the short self-nomination form and tell us why your company should join the world’s best at this year’s ceremony.

The final Shortlist will be made up of self-nominations and recommendations from the

Nominations Panel and *Gambling Insider* editorial team.

All winners will be revealed at a prestigious luncheon ceremony at the Sands Expo Convention Center on Monday 14 October, as part of the G2E show.

Suppliers SG Digital and Aristocrat were the big winners at last year’s ceremony, taking home two prizes each – but a highly-competitive field boasted a wealth of prestigious nominees.

The Global Gaming Awards have quickly become the most trusted Awards in the industry and have gained respect among industry heavyweights, making this a must-attend event to kick off G2E.

BetConstruct is the Lead Partner of the Global Gaming Awards Las Vegas 2019, which are powered by *Gambling Insider* in association with G2E. The voting process is independently adjudicated by KPMG Isle of Man.

NORTHEAST REVENUE UPDATE

Gaming revenue for Connecticut, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania were a mixed bag for February, which had an equal number of Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays versus last year.

MGM Springfield's revenue went up 9.15% compared to January. The property generated \$14.527m in slot revenue and \$6.974m in table revenue.

Slot hold rebounded to 8.58% after declining in every month since the casino opened.

Pennsylvania eked out 0.44% growth, as both slots and tables rose less than 1%.

Last year's results, particularly in northeast Pennsylvania, were hurt by the opening of Empire Resorts' Resorts World Catskills in New York.

Mount Airy led total growth after benefitting from a huge jump in table game revenue of 32.93%.

MASSACHUSETTS

MARKET/PROPERTY	REVENUE (M)	(%) CHANGE
Mohegan Sun	\$43.525	-7.23
Foxwoods	\$34.200	-7.84
State total	\$77.725	-7.50

CONNECTICUT

MARKET/PROPERTY	REVENUE (M)	(%) CHANGE
Plainridge Park (PENN)	\$12.594	-9.23
MGM Springfield (MGM)	\$21.501	N/A
Total	\$34.095	+1.55

PENNSYLVANIA

MARKET/PROPERTY	REVENUE (M)	(%) CHANGE
PHILADELPHIA:		
SugarHouse (Rush Street)	\$26.163	+5.48
Valley Forge (BYD)	\$10.854	+4.04
Parx (Greenwood)	\$48.737	-0.19
Harrah's (CZR)	\$20.455	-6.93
Philadelphia total	\$106.210	+0.15
NORTHEAST PA:		
Mt. Airy	\$14.545	+11.34
Sands Bethlehem (LVS)	\$42.964	-0.13
Mohegan Sun	\$18.642	-4.43
Northeast PA total	\$76.151	+0.74
PITTSBURGH:		
Rivers (Rush Street)	\$30.018	+4.81
The Meadows (PENN)	\$20.198	-0.88
Pittsburgh total	\$50.216	+2.44
ELSEWHERE:		
Hollywood (PENN)	\$19.311	+0.21
Presque Isle (CHDN)	\$9.839	-4.18
Lady Luck Nemacolin (ERI)	\$2.249	-14.18
State total	\$263.975	+0.44

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NIGA 2019: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

This year's NIGA is set to be the biggest show yet, and here are all the key details



San Diego is known for its beaches, parks and warm climate. Those who work in the gambling industry can enjoy all of this, as well as the Indian Gaming Tradeshow & Convention, which opens its doors on 1 April.

NIGA, a non-profit organisation of sovereign tribal nations, provides you with the opportunity to grow your brand, meet with the industry's biggest names and also hear from gaming experts across four action-packed days. The event organisers are promoting the show as the longest-running gaming tradeshow in history.

NIGA is entering its 35th year and is one of the most recognisable annual meetings for the Indian gaming industry. Tribal gaming has always been and continues to be a key part of the casino gaming market. It is now worth over \$32bn to the US gaming industry, spanning 28 states, according to the American Gaming Association, including a number of resort destination casinos.

There are few, if any, better places than

this year's NIGA to learn all you need to know about tribal gaming.

Last year's show was held in Las Vegas, and this year, more than 6,000 tribal leaders and gaming professionals will be in attendance, making it the largest event to date. Over 300 businesses will exhibit in California, including; Scientific Games, Aristocrat Technologies, Interblock Gaming, Konami Gaming and Incredible Technologies. A total of 27 new exhibitors have signed up and will be in San Diego.

Ernie L. Stevens Junior, NIGA Chairman and National Spokesperson, said: "After a very successful event in Las Vegas, we are excited to continue the momentum and bring Indian county back to San Diego for the 2019 tradeshow and convention. This year's event will have even more networking, education, new products and services. We thank the California tribal nations for hosting us in their great state."

THE VENUE

San Diego's Convention Center will host

the four-day event, which is known for its panoramic views of San Diego Bay and five-star service. Situated within a mile of more than 10,000 first-class hotel rooms and less than ten minutes from the airport, the Convention Center is easy to travel to and from.

Not only should your commute be hassle free, but you should be within walking distance of restaurants, retail stores and world-class entertainment.

San Diego's Trolley, the town's public transport system, also makes it easy to get from A to B throughout your stay. A survey conducted from last year's show in Las Vegas revealed 95% of attendees would recommend the show to colleagues, who travel far and wide to attend the annual event. As many as 80% said networking was their top priority, while 58% wanted to see the unveiling of new products.

There are numerous events going on throughout the week, starting with the traditional opening ceremony. If you are happy to dip into your pocket,

the chairman's golf tournament tees off on 1 April at \$3,000 entry per team at Sycuan Resort, followed by a charity slot tournament with a \$1,000 entry free.

The winner of the slot tournament will have the opportunity to donate up to \$12,000 towards scholarships at tribal colleges or programmes. Second place will be able to donate \$8,000, while third can donate \$4,000.

If you want to steer away from the competitive edge, the fifth annual Native Strong Comedy Slam can be enjoyed at the Hard Rock Hotel, which will feature three Native American comics, who will be available to meet and greet.

An open bar is also an option, if you really want to kick back and enjoy the show. Before all of this unravels, the 2019 Indian Gaming Tradeshow & Convention opens with a healthy fitness activity at 7am.

A "One Mile Walk For Wellness" will begin around San Diego's Marina and all who can are encouraged to get involved with the walk, with commemorative t-shirts being dished out to the first 50 early birds. The opening day closes with

the Chairman's welcome reception at the Convention Center, featuring special presentations and entertainment for all registered attendees. An evening of cocktails, dancing and celebration follows, which could be the perfect opportunity to network and interact with fellow exhibitors.

CONFERENCES

Away from the social activities of the convention, there are over 90 training sessions and conferences which will appeal to you and your business. There will be an abundance of opportunities to connect face-to-face with tribal leaders and council members, Indian gaming commissioners, executives, managers and many more.

These conferences will offer relevant, informative and valuable advice to help give your company the tools and resources to thrive within the industry. Featured sessions will be on operations, sports betting and women in gaming. Some of the highlights from the first two days focus on: tackling IT challenges, VIP customer retention, emerging gaming,

social gaming, enterprise development topics, tribal litigation and numerous talks held by experts to help develop a deep understanding of Indian gaming.

Gary Green, host of TV series Casino Rescue, will be discussing "how to make a brand truly great" on the final day. Within the session, the three main topics on the agenda will be operating efficiencies, customer profiles and marketing systems.

This year's programme will also offer professional advice on the needs, demands and issues of small-to-medium-sized casinos. Experts will look at the best perspectives, strategies and tactics to potentially help solve these issues.

Conference Chair, Victor Rocha of Victor-Strategies and Pechanga.net, said: "This year's programme provides a great range of topics and is designed to give every member of an operation new skills and strategies to take back to their casino to improve profitability and address changing legislation and trends.

"We thank each of our speakers for dedicating their time and expertise to join us in San Diego."

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COMING ROUND FULL CIRCLE

AGS tells us about the supplier's long-standing connection with tribal gaming

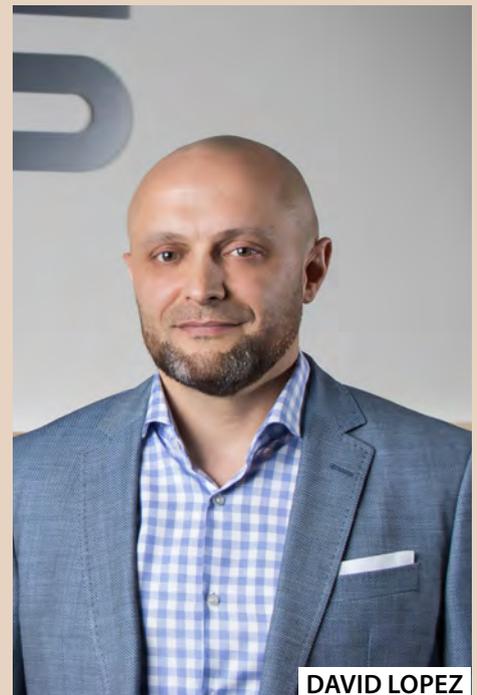
Of all the gaming equipment suppliers exhibiting at the NIGA Indian Gaming Tradeshow in San Diego this year, AGS is likely to be the exhibitor with the deepest roots in tribal gaming.

Founded in 2005, the company – then called American Gaming Systems – focused its early years as a small Class II supplier on strong markets in Oklahoma and other tribal jurisdictions. For years, AGS operated primarily as a Class II distributor with a small but powerful content library.

Things really started to move forward for us in late 2013, when we were acquired by private equity firm Apollo Global Management. Apollo's first move was to place veteran gaming executive David Lopez at the helm as President



ANDREW BURKE



DAVID LOPEZ

and CEO, charged with transforming the company from a Class II supplier into a full-service gaming supplier. Lopez, who had led Global Cash Access (now Everi) as its CEO and before that, served at Shuffle Master as COO, spent the next four years executing the transformation.

To become a full-service gaming supplier, Lopez fortified AGS through a series of acquisitions – Colossal Gaming and Cadillac Jack substantially increased AGS' library of Class III and Class II titles.

He then hired longtime Shuffle Master veteran John Hemberger, now AGS Senior Vice President – Table Products, to form a table products division. Within a few short months, AGS had acquired and developed its first proprietary table game titles.

Along the way, Lopez added experience to his executive team, including Shuffle Master veterans Kimo Akiona, Julia Boguslawski and Hemberger. Sigmund Lee, AGS Chief Technology Officer, was

the CTO at Cadillac Jack; General Counsel Vic Gallo and Executive Vice President Matt Reback came from Konami Gaming; Robert Perry from Aristocrat; and Drew Pawlak from BMM.

Andrew Burke, who leads AGS' Slot Products division, officially joined the company in 2010, but had been involved much earlier through private equity oversight.

In February, the company completed the acquisition of

Integrity Gaming, circling back to its strong roots in Oklahoma and Texas tribal country to add approximately 2,700 games to its installed base.

At NIGA 2019, AGS will showcase its slot games, table products and social and real-money online casino products, with a focus on the Class II and Class III portfolio of slot cabinets. So for AGS, a company that has been synonymous with Class II and tribal gaming for years, NIGA is like coming full circle – back to our roots.

“Founded in 2005, the company – then called American Gaming Systems – focused its early years as a small Class II supplier with strong markets in Oklahoma and other tribal jurisdictions”

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**KEYNOTE
SPEAKER**

YIANNIS KRANITIS

Industry Manager, Google



FINDING A HELPFUL ALLY

Ahead of NIGA, Scientific Games explains how its partnership with the Oneida Indian Nation will boost its sports betting operations in New York

How long has Scientific Games been working with tribal operators and how have your relationships with tribal operators developed in that time?

Scientific Games has enjoyed strong relationships with tribal operators for as long as they have been in the casino business and our relationships continue to evolve. We partner with many tribal operators in the development of new casino gaming products and look to them for their insightful feedback on how to best provide products that will enhance their operations and entice their casino patrons to keep coming back.

On the digital side, we're always keeping a keen eye out for new partnerships and opportunities for expansion in the growing US sports and online markets, as exemplified by our deal with the Oneida Indian Nation in New York to provide sports betting technology.

You announced your partnership with Oneida in January, covering three New York casinos - Turning Stone Resort, Yellow Brick Road and Point Place. What was the thinking behind partnering with these three casinos specifically?

Oneida has three amazing New York properties, so they made it an easy win all around.

Our partners at Oneida value their players immensely, as any operator should, and we want

to be a valuable and helpful ally to them by providing the world's best sportsbook technology. With a shared focus on bringing sports betting to the next level through innovative systems and a wide variety of services, including managed trading, we're positioning one another for continued growth and success in New York.

How lucrative do you think the New York sports betting market will be for Scientific Games? What can you tell us about your sports betting revenue projections for the state?

The American Gaming Association (AGA) estimates New York could break the top three, in terms of state sports betting revenue, so we're optimistic.

The maths checks out too. As one of the most populous US states, New York can serve as an excellent testing ground, giving operators and suppliers alike a place to test their platforms to the limit with more players,

more sports and more bets. In other words, a big market can yield big opportunity.

While we can't share any specific projections, we're really excited to see New York come into its own as a sports betting market.

What does Scientific Games plan to showcase at NIGA?

This year at NIGA, Scientific Games will showcase its commitment to creating an amazing player experience across all gaming verticals; from the casino floor to mobile, to sports betting, through the development of the gaming industry's most innovative products, content and technology.

We will showcase our Class II slot titles, some of which are debuting exclusively in this market, including two new Lock It Link games - Run With the Pack Unleashed and Wild Escape Unleashed - as well as Super Copper Dropper, a new version of the Class II game.

“The American Gaming Association estimates New York could break the top three, in terms of sports betting revenue, so we're optimistic”

NIGA PRE-SHOW Q & A

MIKE DREITZER PRESIDENT, GAMING ARTS



What are you looking forward to most about NIGA?

We are looking forward to participating again this year in NIGA's annual tradeshow. Gaming Arts continues to be a strong supporter of the National Indian Gaming Association and all of its members. It gives us a magnificent opportunity to visit tribal casino operators throughout the country. Most importantly, it gives us an opportunity to show them our products and demonstrate how we can add value to their floors.

Every show has its own unique flavour. What makes NIGA stand out on the gaming calendar?

NIGA has always been a special show. It's a wonderful and humbling opportunity to come out and support the Association and its members. They have a great history and a great agenda in supporting tribal gaming and tribal causes throughout the country.

When you can come and be part of that, it's a very special time, particularly when you can add value and be able to contribute to the amazing success of tribal gaming each year. We are once again excited to be in attendance.

Are there any particular events or conferences you are looking forward to?

The opening ceremony is always very special every year. Chairman Stevens says a few words, introduces certain dignitaries and then has a ceremony related to tribal heritage in some way. It is a very moving reminder of why we are all there to support tribal self-reliance and tribal gaming.

This year, how much focus do you think there will be on sports betting?

From what I can tell, there will be a lot of interest in that. That's not an area where we have a product offering at this time, so it's not a focus for us. We know it presents a huge opportunity for tribal gaming, so I'm sure it will be well discussed and well considered throughout the event.

What products will Gaming Arts be presenting on the show floor?

We're very excited with our product line-up for NIGA 2019. Among other products, we have our slot line featuring a couple of key titles including Piñatas Olé and Big Top, which are part of our Pop N' Pays series. These are being launched in the field this month. We'll also be showing our Dice Seeker series, and our Da Fa Ba series of video reel games, each of which we will be launching later this year.

In addition, we have a Casino Wizard game, which is a casino-style multi-game. Next, we have our Ultimate Bingo line, which is a unique, one-of-a-kind, Class III bingo game that adds a different kind of excitement to gaming floors. This is all complemented by our full line-up of bingo, keno and promotional products which will be fully on display as well.

If you had to single out one aim or achievement for NIGA this year, what would it be?

Well, at this stage, we are relative newcomers to the slot business, having been in it for a short period of time. So we just want to gain exposure. We want to make people aware that, in addition to our core bingo and keno product lines, we have a pretty significant slot line with depth to it. So it's really about exposure and getting people to see what we've got, interacting with customers.

Generally speaking, we're very fortunate and humbled to be part of NIGA. Gaming Arts is a company on the move and we're very honoured to be a part of the show, being able to show our development in such a unique and prestigious setting. It doesn't hurt that, of course, the weather in San Diego is always fantastic! It should be a great event and we look forward to getting more interest in our product and using this as a building block for our future.

“The opening ceremony is always very special every year. It is a very moving reminder of why we are all there to support tribal self-reliance and tribal gaming”

GUEST COLUMNIST



ALEX CZAJKOWSKI
CMO, RTG ASIA

Czajkowski examines how AI-enabled "conversational commerce" chat bots enable mass personalisation for 1:1 player communications

As "marketing" turns more into "conversational commerce" these days, automating 1:1 conversations is essential to scale an enterprise without adding dozens of bodies. But, perhaps more interestingly, it can also increase player lifetime value by impacting almost every phase of a player's lifecycle, from acquisition to reducing churn and reactivating inactive players.

At its most basic level, you can automate a company's 10-20 most commonly asked questions and deflect the chat from call centres, managing the conversation automatically with a smart chat bot. This, as you've probably already heard, enables better use of existing CS/chat agents to focus more on difficult issues and/or VIP players who require individualised attention. At the same time, it will still manage the masses in a more personalised manner. This can reduce your call-centre expense and shouldn't cost any more than your basic CS chat tool, such as LivePerson or Zendesk.

Automating CS chats makes handling new markets with a smaller number of native speakers viable, increasing revenue to support additional team members needed for those languages, e.g. going into Japan without a room full of native speakers.

The key to this intelligent automation relies on a) understanding the player's request in their language and b) being able to respond in their language without tying up limited resources, generally without any integration into backend data. While there are plenty of chat bot solutions for English and other Western languages however, intelligent options for languages like Chinese and Thai are far fewer; Sinitic.ai being the leader in those markets.

Other standalone applications for an intelligent chat bot can include acquisition and reactivation. With integration into backend data, an AI-based chat bot will be able to reduce churn in real time. These applications are where things get a lot more interesting.

If you look at where players spend their time these days, it's generally on social platforms – but on the 1:1 messaging side of those platforms, messaging apps have more monthly users than other social platforms. Sinitic's conversational commerce apps

can be used to reach out over these platforms in volume for acquisition, the way mass emails used to, but with the benefit of feeling like a personal 1:1 chat.

With additional integration into backend data, an AI-based proactive conversational commerce can also be used to interact in real time with players who are about to finish their bankroll (offer another deposit bonus). Catching someone at the moment you expect them to churn is the best time to prevent it, again with an appropriate offer. A good example of such an offer is: "Here's a free chip to try a game that should be better for you, or here's a game you should try to further your winnings." A percent or two in prevented churn at this stage drops right down to the bottom line.

An intelligent chat bot can even be used via SMS or other 1:1 messaging apps, initiating engagement in a conversation to segmented groups. This does not then require tight integration into your database, but is still able to convince a player who has churned to come back and try again. Could even VIPs have some conversation via the bot rather than their personal agent for faster service? It's right around the corner.

We're looking at launching a new site in a new territory leveraging this sort of technology. It's an exciting new way to talk to your players with a form of mass personalisation for online gaming. Even the lowly NPS survey can be performed this way, with the chat bot able to respond to free-form responses as to why the player gave you that low (or high) rating.

While traditional mass communications will still of course have their place, the future of marketing will need to work in this environment – sell where your prospects are. Sinitic.ai and other gaming-specific, intelligent chat bots, or AI-enabled conversational commerce systems, will be essential to reach players at these key points in their lifecycles.

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