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THIS WEEK

- UK sportsbooks seek alternatives
- Esports revenue doubled?
- Wynn CEO wants May Las Vegas return
- Tal Ron at AffiliateCon

LIVE CASINO SPECIAL

Begins on p7, featuring NetEnt and Live Solutions

GUEST INTERVIEWS

- Björn Krantz, Head of Publishing, Yggdrasil
- Serge Mukhanov, CEO, Connective Games

WEEK 17

FRIDAY 24 APR 2020

COVID-19: FLUTTER, STARS Q1 REVENUE IMPACTED; RANK FURLOUGHS 90%



Flutter Entertainment revenue grew 16% year-on-year for Q1 2020, to £547m (\$680m), despite the impact the coronavirus outbreak has had on sports betting.

Before the suspension of all major sport in March, group revenue was up 29%, with sports revenue increasing 30% up to 15 March.

However, the impact of the outbreak meant overall Q1 revenue from sports betting increased only 13% to £407m. In its trading update, the operator also

PERFECT BLACKJACK



NETENT live



THIS WEEK IN NUMBERS

\$125m

Loan obtained by Everi Holdings, with revenue and associated workload having been reduced to zero during the COVID-19 pandemic



Year-on-year rise in Q1 revenue for NetEnt, to SEK 518m (\$51.4m), during a period which saw the supplier fully integrate the Red Tiger brand post-acquisition



£10m

GambleAware received record donations (\$12.3m) from the gaming industry between April 2019 and March 2020, with GVC's £1.4m fee among the top contributions

51%



Stake in Stoiximan Group's Greece and Cypriot operations for Greek operator OPAP, which has been cleared to proceed with its acquisition



Year-on-year fall in Paf revenue from customers who lost at least €30,000 (\$32,630) in 2019, after cutting mandatory loss limits to €25,000 in October

stated that since the suspension of UK and Irish racing, group revenue has declined 32% from last year, with sports revenue down 46%.

Paddy Power Betfair, in the four weeks from 16 March to April 12, sports betting revenue declined 57% from 2019, although revenue from gaming was up 15%.

Meanwhile, they announced that following approval of Flutter's acquisition of Stars Group by the Irish Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, the deal should be completed in Q2 pending shareholder and regulatory approvals.

Elsewhere, Stars Group saw record revenue for Q1 2020 of \$735m, a rise of 27% year-on-year.

Operating income was in the range of \$140m – \$149m, up 133%, while adjusted EBITDA was between \$291m – \$297m, an increase of 51%.

The operator attributed continued growth to the strong performance of its online poker and casino segments, which helped mitigate the cancellation of sporting events.

The growth in online poker and casino has continued into the first two weeks of Q2, with consolidated average daily revenue reportedly 33% higher in comparison to Q1.

By contrast, casino and bingo hall operator Rank Group has furloughed nearly 90% of its UK employees after being forced to close venues due to COVID-19.

Rank suffered a 4% decline in like-for-like net gaming revenue for the three months through March, while total gaming revenue went up by 5%.

If the venues remain closed for a prolonged period, the group's annual underlying operating profit could fall between £48m and £58m.

Shockwaves have also been felt in Asia. According to an internal memo seen by Bloomberg, Genting has proposed an employee salary cut for the first time since its founding in 1965.

The memo proposes a 20% temporary salary cut for employees based on their rank, while Genting Hong Kong may introduce a cut of up to 50% for those in VP roles or higher.

Finally, French operator Française des Jeux (FDJ) has announced a 1% year-on-year decline in revenue for Q1 2020 due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Revenue is down to €500m (\$543m), while player stakes for the first quarter have decreased 5% from 2019, to €4.1bn.

Yet, since the start of lockdown in France on 16 March, stakes have dropped 60%, with amounts wagered on lotteries declining more than 40%.

The operator says the impact of the coronavirus has led to a €100m hit in revenue and €50m in EBITDA.

FDJ has implemented an action plan to save more than €80m for the rest of 2020, while the board of directors has proposed to maintain its dividend payment, but reduce the amount by 30% to €0.45 per share.

GI Verdict: Although Flutter's continued growth seems promising, it's clear the impact of coronavirus has majorly impeded its revenue since mid-March, with group revenue growth down 13% from that point onward.

With most major sport essentially business as usual until mid-March, it's likely we'll only see the true effect of sporting suspensions in Q2 reports, which may paint a bleaker picture.

However, Stars Group's growth suggests online poker and casino are experiencing a resurgence in customers, with homebound players searching for entertainment – something a lot of traditional sports-based operators seem to be recognising by shifting their focus towards other verticals.

For heavily land-based operators such as Rank, governmental assistance in business rate relief and financial assistance for employee salaries could prove vital in surviving this crisis.

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Year-ban for former Manchester City and Nigeria international footballer Dickson Etuhu from all football activity in Sweden, for his involvement in match-fixing



€50,000

AskGamblers will donate the majority of the €66,900 (\$72,723) the affiliate raised at its charity night in January to UNICEF, to help fight the impact of the coronavirus outbreak

6



Year contract awarded to Scientific Games by the South Carolina Education Lottery to run its Scientific Games Enhanced Partnership program

UK SPORTSBOOKS LOOK TO DARTS AND FIFA TOURNAMENTS

Sky Betting & Gaming, William Hill, 888 Holdings, GVC Holdings and Bet365 are among the UK operators to feature FIFA tournaments and Home Tour Darts on their sportsbook homepages.

In the absence of major sport, many brands are offering added table tennis markets and promotions, while some operators have also begun to offer new free-to-play competitions in a bid to attract players.

However, sportsbooks have been given the chance to still provide major darts markets due to the creation of the Home Tour, where professional players play at home through a video feed.

Meanwhile, Premier League footballers – and others around the world – have been taking each other on from home in tournaments on the video game FIFA 2020.

As well as several bookmakers, some sports betting affiliates have chosen to focus on FIFA and darts rather than pivoting more towards other verticals like casino or poker.

In the US, DraftKings has expanded its virtual sports offering recently, signing a partnership with Inspired Entertainment.

Operator 888 has also expanded its virtuals offering after partnering with Golden Race. Elsewhere, a number of gaming firms, EveryMatrix being a prominent example, have prioritised esports as a whole.

GI Verdict: As with other substitutes, these new products are unlikely to fully fill the void left by competitions such as the Premier League, UEFA Champions League, the Wimbledon Championships and so on.

But the ability for betting companies to feature Premier League footballers and world-class darts players in this varied format is certainly a valuable bonus during the absence of major sport.

These new options are definitely worth pursuing, although operators and affiliates should continue to significantly push verticals like online casino in tandem with these promotions.

THE WEEK IN QUOTES

“We want to listen to the legitimate concerns people have of the gambling industry as well as ensure the industry gets a fair hearing as well. I am determined that we listen to a wide range of views and make evidence-based recommendations, which will ensure we enhance our global reputation as having the best regulated gambling industry in the world.”

Co-Chair of the Parliamentary All Party Betting & Gaming Group, Philip Davies MP, speaking as the group launches a review of the UK's Gambling Act 2005

“I see a big growth in the virtual sports in-play market and believe it can offer markets not available at the moment in live sports. Virtual sports should continue to grow after the outbreak, when people get used to the games and when business is back to usual, which I see as good news for us and our operators.”

Golden Race CEO Martin Wachter, speaking at the Betting in Face of COVID-19 digital conference about the future of virtual sports

“We are committed to running the World Series of Poker (WSOP) this year but need additional time to proceed on our traditional scale while prioritising guest and staff well-being. In the interim, official WSOP competitions are expected to be played online this summer and we will soon announce details of an expanded series of tournaments to be played on WSOP.com.”

Executive director of the WSOP, Ty Stewart, confirming the tournament originally scheduled for 26 May has been postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic

ESPORTS BETTING REVENUE EXPECTED TO REACH \$14BN IN 2020

Revenue from gambling on esports is estimated to double to \$14bn worldwide in 2020, according to new research.

Research from global consumer research agency 2CV and market researcher ProdegeMR suggests the popularity of betting on esports, which generated revenue of \$7bn in 2019, will rise as players look for alternatives to sports betting since major sport is suspended due to the coronavirus.

On the impact the pandemic has had on gambling in the UK, a survey of more than 1,000 gamblers found 59% had reduced their spend, with 32% saying they have looked for new things to wager on.

The research found 36% of players have wagered on esports in the past three months, with 30% starting within the last month.

2CV technology and entertainment research director, Martin Bradley, said: “The COVID-19 pandemic has led to

many forms of sports associated with gambling being cancelled or postponed, but is also a big opportunity for esports to get in front of this audience.

“Short-term growth is likely to come from sport-based games, but there are huge opportunities to make this more long-term, as long as consumers are educated properly on esports and what it can offer, as well as considering which kinds of events are best-suited to a particular audience.”

GI Verdict: Esports had been a fast-growing vertical even before the coronavirus outbreak. Just like virtual sports and online poker, players are turning to alternatives; esports attracts a new and younger audience, as well as converts traditional sports bettors.

A doubling of esports revenue, therefore, seems fully plausible, standing the vertical in great stead to maintain volumes after sports betting resumes.

WYNN CEO PROPOSES MAY REOPENING OF LAS VEGAS CASINOS

Wynn Resorts CEO Matt Maddox has released a 23-page health plan that asks Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak to open Las Vegas casinos by mid to late May.

Maddox listed a five-step plan to reopening the Las Vegas economy as it responds to the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

He would like to see parts of the Nevada local economy reopen as soon as early May and begin with reduced occupancy, physical distancing measures, temperature checks and no large gatherings.

Maddox said: “Our economy is in free fall. Nevada will likely be one of the hardest-hit states in the nation and suffer very high unemployment. It is imperative to flatten this curve so we can re-emerge in a safe, sustainable way.”

Maddox detailed casino operations protocol, including social distancing and sanitation of slots and table games.

Upon reopening, Wynn employees would follow a number of health protocols including COVID-19 training, regular hand washing and the wearing of personal protection equipment.

Guests would be screened upon arrival and then be asked to use hand sanitizer and wear a mask provided by the casino.

Maddox added: “We will continue to refine and update the plan as our experts provide us more advice. Our procedures are extensive and not applicable to all resorts in our industry.”

GI Verdict: It's no surprise to see the Wynn Resorts CEO desperate for casinos to reopen, but reopening and flattening the curve are mutually exclusive.

While the casino operator continues to pay its employees, it's estimated to lose \$3m per day. Share price has plummeted from a year-high of \$151.62 on 17 January, to \$70.03 at the close of play on 22 April.

While Maddox's plea will be heavily impacted by Wynn's own massive losses, the fact Nevada's unemployment rate has jumped to more than 6% – the highest in the US – is another factor. Everyone is desperate for the land-based gambling industry to re-open its doors but, unfortunately, May does seem like wishful thinking.

TAKING STOCK

SHARE PRICES COVER THURSDAY 16 APR TO THURSDAY 23 APR (10AM BST)

Everi Holdings
3.85 USD



1%

Wynn Resorts
70.03 USD



3%

Genting Singapore
0.73 SGD



3%

Rank Group
163.41 GBP



2%

FDJ
25.81 EUR



11%

TAL RON TO HOST ALL STARS PANEL AT AFFILIATECON VIRTUALLY LIVE

Tal Itzhak Ron is returning to AffiliateCon this May to headline the AffiliateCon Virtually Live conference on Tuesday 12 May.

Hosting a Tal Ron All Stars Panel following his appearance in the 2018 edition in Sofia, the lawyer has gathered industry experts to analyse the foreseeable future of the gaming industry.

The panel comprises:

Moderator – Tal Itzhak Ron – Tal Ron Drihem & Co, Chairman and CEO

Matan Amoyal – Boiling Offers, CEO
Saulius Racevičius – ConnectPay, CEO
Assaf Stieglitz – Odds1x2 and PlayWiseCasino Co-Founder

Overcoming operational challenges, regulatory and financial hurdles, recent trends will be discussed, as well as professional tips to make your business successful.

Tal Ron said: “Without giving away any spoilers, I’ll touch on the recent hot potatoes occupying the industry: how COVID-19 disrupted the industry; banking and compliance tips; projections and suggestions; and more. In any case it will be exciting.”

You can read a full Q & A on the Tal Ron All Stars Panel on the AffiliateCon website.

Among a long list of industry experts, the AffiliateCon Virtually Live agenda will also feature Netpeak CEO Gennadiy Vorobyov, discussing SEO techniques for 2020, and Golden Race CEO Martin Wachter speaking about the rise of virtual sports.

Other speakers include Racing Post CMO Louise Agran and many more.

Click here to see the full AffiliateCon Virtually Live agenda, which includes panels on SEO, sports betting, esports, virtual sports and affiliate/operator market trends



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PA FALLS

Pennsylvania gaming revenue fell 51.36% in March as casinos were closed halfway through the month.

Average daily revenue fell 5.76% for the 16 days of operation this year vs. 31 days last year.

Valley Forge benefited from strong sports betting and online gaming revenue, falling just 4.67% for the month. The casino fell 66.18% when factoring out those new gaming options.

Online gaming had a record month of \$21.133m revenue as

gamblers moved to online gambling options. Fantasy contest revenue fell 55.72% from last year to \$723,942. DraftKings generated 51.29% of fantasy contest revenue while Flutter's FanDuel followed with 47.4% of revenue share.

FanDuel's fantasy contest revenue fell 56.7% from February while DraftKings fell 55.55%.

Revenue from slots at truck stops fell 30.4% from February to \$934,003.

TOTAL PA GAMING

MARKET/PROPERTY	REVENUE (M)	% CHANGE
Valley Forge (BYD)	\$12.540	-4.67
Rivers Philadelphia (Rush Street)	\$21.275	-22.71
Mount Airy	\$11.146	-31.82
Lady Luck Nemaocolin (CHDN)	\$1.498	-45.63
Hollywood (PENN)	\$12.483	-48.07
Presque Isle (CHDN)	\$5.929	-51.97
The Meadows (PENN)	\$10.610	-53.66
Parx (Greenwood)	\$26.217	-53.84
Mohegan Sun	\$9.464	-56.01
Rivers (Rush Street)	\$15.590	-56.40
Harrah's Philadelphia (CZR)	\$8.868	-64.61
Wind Creek Bethlehem	\$14.666	-71.21
South Philly Turf Club (Greenwood)	\$0.088	N/A
The Oaks (Greenwood)	-\$0.009	N/A
PA Gaming Total	\$150.363	-51.36
Same Store*	\$120.624	-60.98

ONLINE GAMING

MARKET/PROPERTY	REVENUE (M)	% CHANGE
Rivers Philadelphia (Rush Street)	\$6.757	Rush St
Valley Forge (BYD)	\$4.969	BYD/FLTR
Mount Airy	\$2.831	Kindred/TSG
Parx (Greenwood)	\$2.728	Greenwood/GAN
Hollywood (PENN)	\$2.619	PENN/TSG
Mohegan	\$0.803	Kindred
Presque Isle (CHDN)	\$0.426	CHDN
iGaming Total	\$21.133	N/A

LEGACY CASINOS

MARKET/PROPERTY	REVENUE (M)	% CHANGE
Lady Luck Nemaocolin (CHDN)	\$1.498	-45.63
Rivers Philadelphia (Rush Street)	\$13.601	-50.58
Mount Airy	\$8.052	-50.75
Presque Isle (CHDN)	\$5.427	-56.04
Rivers (Rush Street)	\$14.759	-58.72
Hollywood (PENN)	\$9.810	-59.19
Parx (Greenwood)	\$22.606	-60.20
Mohegan Sun	\$8.539	-60.31
The Meadows (PENN)	\$8.488	-62.93
Harrah's Philadelphia (CZR)	\$8.773	-64.99
Valley Forge (BYD)	\$4.448	-66.18
Wind Creek Bethlehem	\$14.666	-71.21
Legacy Casino Total	\$120.668	-60.96

SPORTS BETTING

MARKET/PROPERTY	REVENUE	% CHANGE	PARTNER VS. FEBRUARY
Presque Isle (CHDN)	\$76,380	+52.39	CHDN
Valley Forge (BYD)	\$3.123M	+14.44	BYD/FLTR
Parx (Greenwood)	\$882,817	-30.42	Greenwood/Kambi
Rivers (Rush Street)	\$830,627	-31.18	Rush St/Kambi
The Meadows (PENN)	\$2.121M	-38.30	DraftKings
Rivers Philadelphia (Rush Street)	\$915,943	-39.75	Rush St/Kambi
South Philly Turf Club (Greenwood)	\$87,757	-51.58	Greenwood/Kambi
Mount Airy	\$263,172	-64.08	TSG
Mohegan Sun Pocono	\$122,032	-75.69	Kindred
The Oaks (Greenwood)	-\$8,526	-148.64	BYD/FLTR
Hollywood (PENN)	\$53,730	N/A	PENN/WMH
Harrah's (CZR)	\$94,122	N/A	CZR/SGMS
Mohegan Pocono	\$44,078	N/A	Kindred
Sports betting Total	\$8.606m	-24.72	N/A

LIVE CASINO

- With live casino revenue ever-growing, even during the coronavirus pandemic, *Gambling Insider* explores the state of play within this booming vertical
- Andres Rengifo, director, NetEnt Live and Simon Croft, principal CEO, Live Solutions, provide expert analysis
- What can live casino offer players and operators that other verticals can't?



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ANDRES RENGIFO

Director, NetEnt Live



What benefits can an effective live casino offering have for an operator?

A combination of stickiness and high performance has given live casino a momentum that has seen it out-perform the industry in recent years. And this should only continue. It's a growth product, still a way off from saturation, which makes it a real differentiator in a casino operator's portfolio, one that not only widens a product offering but drives revenue.

Why? Well, the level of engagement is key. Through live casino, it's possible to simulate something that is every bit as realistic as – and sometimes even superior to – the real thing. From the moment they enter the lobby, live casino players are taken on a journey where their attention is focused. They are presented with a bespoke product that an operator can tailor to their own style, to an incredible level, whether that's logos on cufflinks or live dealers relaying marketing information.

With control over this level of detail, added to the knowledge some competitors don't offer live casino, it gives those that do a discernable market advantage, given that the types of players it attracts are proven to be

higher value. For new brands and market entrants, the product depth and human interaction of live casino brings extra and immediate levels of trust and integrity, demonstrating credibility and authenticity that can otherwise take time to engender.

That said, it's not just a case of finding a supplier and flicking a switch. While the heavy lifting will be done by the leading providers, the more an operator puts in, the more they'll get out. This is why we've seen the range and seniority of live casino-specialist roles grow brand-side; there's an understanding everyone must work together to create the best-performing live casino. Lastly, a lot of work has been done on the scalability and affordability of live casino. The barriers to entry have lowered significantly and will continue to do so.

What is the revenue potential for live casino in the long run?

As we've seen, especially in recent times, operators offering a diverse and regionalised product range are most robustly positioned to weather regulatory storms or other unforeseen events. Live casino isn't just a solid and exciting long-term proposition. It's an on-demand product that fits

very naturally with mobile, which is indisputably the long-term medium of choice for consumer interaction.

With above-average performance, new markets still to open (the potential in the likes of the USA and India is massive) and the fact peaks have not yet been reached in already-established markets, the revenue potential for live casino is high.

Even when we move closer to saturation points, ceaseless technological improvements will allow the live casino user journey and experience to flourish. Furthermore, the launch of new game variants and game show-style formats will continue to move the dial from an entertainment perspective.

What can live casino offer players that they might not be able to get with other verticals?

Live casino is a multi-dimensional experience with a superior level of player engagement and interaction. You truly feel as though you're playing outside of the home. You are making decisions. You are being entertained. It's the opportunity to play alone and on your terms, yet with others. It's instant and sociable.

What demographics does live casino attract specifically?

The stereotype is that live casino is overwhelmingly male – and VIP-dominated – but that's now being challenged. A decade ago, yes, it was around 80-90% male players, but the gender split is increasingly balanced and a more casual audience is being established.

This is through the launch of a new, broader range of game types that offer an alternative to certain elements of a casino offering, which may be seen by some as a little 'stuffy' or closed to new players. Today's live casino is about way more than just roulette and blackjack – it now offers around 40 different games with a variety of gameplay and volatility options.

SIMON CROFT

Principal CEO, Live Solutions

What benefits can a strong live casino offering provide for an operator?

First and foremost, it's all about the player experience. If the customer feels comfortable and assured by the functionality and integrity of a casino, they'll keep coming back for more. Building on this reputation is where an operator can really make great strides.

A good live casino will strengthen player conversion rates, offering a unique product for early adopters and then in turn deliver a reaction which will keep their attention for a longer duration. Player retention, although already high with online casinos, can be grown even further with the addition of live video streaming, drawing on the player's desires to share their gaming experience and boast about their successes.

The knock-on effect of retaining players is two-fold. Customers allocate more playing time with the operator due to the confidence and relationship they've built with the brand, increasing the casino's player value. The players themselves develop a loyalty towards the online casino and the VIP managers through the live connection they share. VIP bonuses are more rewarding when they're delivered by an actual person rather than a faceless email.

Responsible gambling is, of course, a constant major topic in the online gaming world, and any platform wishing to progress must include all the features operators need to keep their business above board.

What is the revenue potential for live casino in the long run?

Obviously, the gaming world in general is currently talking about the COVID-19 pandemic and how this unprecedented event will affect short and long-term prospects. Live casinos will fundamentally remain

unchanged and, as such, the capacity for a stable long-term revenue stream is extremely positive.

Online casinos also provide a realistic social element that will prove vital during the extended home stays currently facing a large number of individuals across the globe. As restrictions in the physical world bring a halt to players actually visiting their local casino floors, there will be undoubtedly huge interest in the online variant, with the cross-over opportunity more tantalising than ever before.

What can live casino offer players specifically that they might not be able to get with other verticals?

Online gaming is commonly a solitary past-time. Take online slots, for example, this is one person against the slot, consisting of no interaction with other players during the session. These types of online gaming scenarios are devoid of social contact and a setting which can heighten a player's experience and add to the overall excitement.

Live casino brings the whole 'bricks and mortar' casino to virtual life, allowing players from any location to share their gaming cycle with other like-minded individuals.

What specific demographics does live casino attract?

The platform of a live casino can accommodate any demographic appetite within reason. The potential to cross language and cultural boundaries means it can cater for a wider-arching variety as opposed to a specific category or social division.

Our presenter recruitment facilitates a broad spectrum of possibilities when it comes to tables which appeal to, or are specifically set for, distinctive sections of society, cultural or personal preference. Local presenters, fluent in the native dialect, bring a familiar touch which allows them to converse seamlessly with the playing public.



Could you tell us more about your live casino hybrid?

Live Solutions aims to recreate the thrill of the real-life casino experience for the online player. How do we do that? Well, we've been able to add the ability to truly interact with the table host and other participants.

Through our live video streaming, players and hosts are literally face-to-face around the digital casino table. Whereas traditional online casino platforms are restricted to simple type-based conversations and players are only known by their onscreen name tag and selected avatar image, the Live Solutions platform takes the interaction to the next level. All parties can converse with each other in real-time over live video chat, building real relationships with each other and the table host.

GUEST INTERVIEW



BJÖRN KRANTZ
HEAD OF PUBLISHING,
YGGDRASIL

Krantz tells Gambling Insider more about Yggdrasil's publishing division and its efforts to address the coronavirus pandemic

How are you hoping to drive innovation across the gaming industry with the launch of Yggdrasil's Publishing division?

In today's competitive environment, it's important Yggdrasil can continue to disrupt the market and find value propositions that allow us to scale our operations and accelerate businesses strategies, in collaboration with our partners.

Within the Publishing division, we currently have three value propositions. The first is YG game IP. This is where we license out game assets for distribution to retail, land-based environments and social casino segments to mention a few examples. The second is YG Masters, a leading programme for game developers and game studios where they can realise their business growth strategy through our global distribution channels.

The third is YG Franchise. This is the industry-first white-label franchise offering that provides an opportunity for studios, developers, operators and any other industry player to license all and any element of our widely accepted and proven technology.

Our franchise value proposition allows partners to cost-effectively step up, launch and operate their own B2B gaming operations, taking their new online gaming development business strategy to the next level.

What new technologies are used within the Publishing division's market strategy and how does this support your value propositions?

From a commercial and operational perspective, the industry needs what we have seen: a faster, highly scalable and efficient path to realise business strategies, all in global collaboration with local revenue growth potential.

We address these business ecosystem needs through our disruptive technology GATI (Games Adaptation Tool and Interface). This is a pre-configured regulation-ready development toolkit that enables studio and game developers to use standardised technology solutions to develop games anywhere in the world.

This means our partners can source, build and distribute content and crucially accelerate global reach, finding new ways to increase revenues, all using one standardised interface.

Using GATI, our global partners will be able to build game engines in any way, any language and set up motion tools and take control of their roadmap, retaining their IP in a more secure and reliable manner.

How important is cross collaboration within the industry?

Any of our global YG Franchise and Masters partners can cross collaborate with each other through GATI and share their respective game roadmaps in an efficient manner. This is a unique way to rapidly sustain distribution and revenue opportunities while enabling completely new ways of working and collaborating. We're really taking the scale of business opportunities to the next level.

It's important for us to stand out from the rest of the market. We pride ourselves on innovating in all areas with a very high-quality demand. We have a firm player-centric development focus and, in combination with our global partners, we can address our customers' real needs.

How can Yggdrasil and other suppliers best overcome the coronavirus crisis?

I really must say we're very fortunate that our industry is very digital, and the majority of our employees are working from home today. I am grateful to see how well everything has been working out from a productivity and output perspective. Our employees and their families' health and safety have always been of the utmost importance to us.

What we all need to think of here is we have a responsibility to follow the guidelines on responsible gaming and that's so important because it has to do with the reputation of our industry, that we continue to be very mature and professional in how we roll out our products, solutions and advertisements during these challenging times. We will continue following regulatory guidelines 100%.

"I am grateful to see how well everything has been working out from a productivity and output perspective. Our employees and their families' health and safety have always been of the utmost importance to us"

GUEST INTERVIEW



SERGE MUKHANOV
CEO, CONNECTIVE GAMES

The Connective Games team discusses taking a punt on online poker this summer

It looks like a bleak summer for sports betting enthusiasts, with all major events being called off, but that doesn't mean players the world over aren't looking for gambling entertainment opportunities.

The show most certainly goes on for online poker, which has experienced a boom since the start of the coronavirus outbreak, as people with time on their hands search for alternative games.

Recent global poker figures indicated a five-year high, with more than 45,000 average concurrent players at the end of March – an astonishing 50% surge on the previous month.

Figures from Italy also indicated an initial rise following the country going into lockdown. Some 5,000 players were logged into tables at one time on the first Tuesday of the curfew, which is around double the regular traffic level.

By contrast, sports betting has endured a miserable time with all the world's major events having been cancelled or postponed. The Premier League and NBA are both suspended, while tennis' French Open and golf Masters will be delayed until autumn; this year's Wimbledon and many Formula 1 races will not take place at all.

The 2020 UEFA European Football Championships and Olympic Games will also be held next year.

GENERATE EXCITEMENT

The lack of events means it's been a disastrous period for those operators who rely solely on sports betting.

Connective Games CEO Serge Mukhanov believes the addition of poker to an operator's portfolio can offer a much-needed additional revenue stream in this time of uncertainty.

He says: "During this pandemic, poker has proved to be more resistant to alterations in behaviour because, of course, there are no restrictions impacting the online world."

"If one compares poker to sports betting, we see the audience is similar in psychological and strategic features. In poker, just like in sports betting, you need to skilfully manage your play with good, informed decisions, making a positive result more likely."

"Both generate excitement and offer the capability of earning money without leaving home. In addition, these types of gambling are available to a wide range of people on any device."

MARKETING CAMPAIGN

Mukhanov believes the key to success is a well-structured marketing campaign to attract new customers while ensuring existing players are aware of the poker offering.

Newly registered bettors will be impressed by a stable, responsive mobile app or website and 24/7 support to speedily resolve problems.

With the reliability of the app or site so important, choosing a technology partner could be the brand's most important decision. An operator needs to know it can trust its partner's technology and access a portfolio of top-class games.

"The operator needs to be assured about the supplier they use. Don't settle for empty words," Mukhanov explains.

"The software provider should be able to back up their words and achievements by demonstrating, for instance, their back office and showing real-life examples of implementing their platform in different markets."

"The operator should look at the supplier's presence in the market and perhaps take into account which existing operators they already work with."

"Clearly, if a supplier works with successful brands it is indicative they're performing well in terms of helping the site attract and retain players."

GEOGRAPHICAL REACH

Mukhanov adds that a technology supplier's geographical reach is also important, as a supplier achieving success in one region may not be able to offer the same service elsewhere.

He says: "The operator should also consider the flexibility of the supplier's platform. For example, to what extent is customisation available to ensure the site is right for their audience and fits in with their existing product?"

At a time of uncertainty as the world adapts to the COVID-19 era and beyond, the success of poker could well be a safe bet.

SELF-NOMINATIONS CLOSE SOON

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