

trafficology

AFFILIATE FOCUS BY GAMBLING INSIDER

JANUARY 2018

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CATENA MEDIA CONTINUES MAMMOTH SPENDING SPREE

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At the backend of 2017, Catena Media announced the purchase of another two affiliate networks. The first was the acquisition of German sports affiliate provider Baybets Ltd, for €26.5m.

Under the terms of the deal Catena will pay a total consideration of €26.5m, of which €13.25m will be paid with newly-issued shares in Catena Media, while the remainder will be paid in cash.

The acquisition deal also includes a further earn out agreement based on the performance of the purchased assets over a 24-month period, potentially

adding a further €65m to the acquisition cost.

In a statement announcing the acquisition, Henrik Persson Ekdahl, Acting CEO of Catena Media, said: "We are proud to announce the largest acquisition made by Catena Media since company inception, making us one of the strongest sports betting affiliate players on the market.

"We have set ambitious financial targets for the company, and the acquisition is fully in line with those targets. We are excited about being

able to complete this deal, given the upcoming sports year of 2018, which will have both the Winter Olympics and the World Cup."

Additionally, the company acquired troubled football and DFS website Squawka.com for an upfront fee of £1m. In addition to the upfront payment of £1m, the acquisition is expected to generate annual sales of €2m, with an estimated margin of 60%. Announcing the company's second merger in a month, Ekdahl added: "We see potential for Squawka as a high-volume traffic site with a global audience, to which we look forward to implementing an affiliation business model. "The company has invested in automatic data feeds for its user-friendly graphical interfaces, which is something we aim to integrate into other Catena Media products."

The Squawka website currently attracts four million users a month and has approximately 800,000 followers on Twitter. Squawka and its related sites currently only generate revenues through banner advertising. Following a recent downturn in revenues, the company revealed that it was in financial difficulties and voluntarily placed itself into administration.

LEOVEGAS DOWNSIZES AFFILIATE OPERATIONS IN THE UK

Late last year, LeoVegas announced that it would only offer its services to a small number of affiliates in the UK due to various recent regulatory changes. Back in September, the company announced it was withdrawing its services from the Australian market in response to new gambling regulations. Now the company has limited its services as a response to a number of recent announcements made by the UKGC regarding market updates.

In November, the UKGC warned operators to review their terms and conditions to ensure customers are treated fairly, as well as enhance consumer protection efforts to better protect punters. In its statement, LeoVegas stated it had been working closely with the UKGC to ensure its business with various affiliates were compliant.

"As we appreciate the challenges around implementing these changes,

we have provided clear guidance of what we expect from our affiliates and have tried to keep an open line of communication with our affiliates to support them throughout this process," a LeoVegas spokesperson said. "We are encouraged to see that several affiliates are taking these changes seriously and have taken on compliance managers or external legal counsel to ensure their ongoing compliance; this is something that we welcome."

Nonetheless, during this period of consultation, various affiliates were not willing to comply, resulting in LeoVegas' decision to reduce its business relationships. "Based on the response we have received to these initial actions, it is clear that these compliance requirements are not easily met for some affiliates," a LeoVegas spokesperson stated.

Earlier this year, Sky Bet made the controversial decision to close its affiliate programme, raising concerns over the compliance of the marketing of a number of its affiliates amid mounting regulatory pressure.

"The recent announcements from UKGC and guidance from the CMA delivered at the Raising Standards conference clearly indicate further ongoing changes to compliance requirements going forward and, naturally, we must ensure our affiliates are prepared to address these needs," added a LeoVegas spokesperson.

In regards to affiliates, LeoVegas explained it would be unable to continuously provide review and guidance services to all affiliates, placing emphasis on the fact that "this responsibility to achieve compliance ultimately sits with the affiliate". ◀

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WHAT HAPPENED AT SIGMA 2017

WHAT: Summit of online gaming Malta (Sigma)

WHEN: November 22-25 2017

WHERE: Malta Fairs and Convention Centre, Malta

www.maltaigamingsummit.com



The Summit of Igaming Malta welcomed over 7,000 delegates, 200 sponsors and exhibitors, and played host to over ten dedicated conferences on pressing industry issues in the heart of European gaming, Malta.

Building on the success of the 2016 show, the event organisers moved to a bigger venue with an exciting set up branded 'Online Gaming Village', with six themed bars, three themed restaurants and two themed lounges.

On Day One the of SiGMA, gaming company Wazdan staged a spectacular flash mob with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra to highlight Maltese culture and Valetta in particular, as it begins its tenure as European Capital of Culture 2018. Other Day One highlights included a five-a-side football tournament, the Affiliate & Adventure dinner, the Malta Gaming Awards and ended with a networking poker tournament designed to break the ice between delegates.

Along with the exhibitors, there were a number of conferences on pressing industry issues with Day Two playing host to the European Fantasy Sports Summit, which showcased a Daily Fantasy Sports focused agenda highlighting the global current 'state of the union' for the sector, encompassing the European challenges and opportunities and comprised a number of discussions on regulatory efforts and making the case for DFS as an igaming vertical. The afternoon conference on

Day Two provided useful tips and tricks for affiliates and CMO's on subjects including PPC campaigns, media buying, player acquisition, conversion optimisation and advanced SEO.

There were additional seminars in payments, poker and immersive technology.

Day Two's Start-up Pitch attracted 100 start-ups as registrants and exhibitors at SiGMA. Ten of the 100 start-ups were chosen to present their innovative offering to a panel of judges and eSports-focused PVP.ME was crowned the winner. PVP.ME will now be given the chance to utilise office space in the new Maltese Gaming Hub, Msida Skatepark, for a full year should they wish to use Malta as a base for business development or even a full relocation and will benefit from full consultancy services provided a team of grizzled industry veterans.

Principle sponsors of the event, BtoBet, created the biggest stir at the event with their Technifying iGaming Tour 2017 and portal. In a departure from the norm, a company of five multinational trained and highly flexible dancers: Anna Armato, Georgia Evans, Liz Strini-Brown, Patrick Laera and Gianluca Blandi (who doubles as the groups choreographer) performed a dance routine set to illustrate how the igaming industry and the dancing spheres have "a common ground when it comes to trust and flexibility, to cement a relationship and to establish a long-term partnership." ◀

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM LAC 2018



WHAT: London Affiliate Conference

WHEN: February 7-10 2018

WHERE: ExCeL London Convention Centre, UK

www.igbaffiliate.com/events/london-affiliate-conference

The London Affiliate Conference 2018 plays host to some of the biggest names in the affiliate sector, welcoming over 5,000 delegates including over 3,500 affiliates. Taking place at the ExCeL London centre from February 7th to the 10th, the event offers free entry to affiliates and introducing brokers.

The event kicks off with registration and welcome drinks at the Tower Hotel, located next to the River Thames and St Katherine's Docks. A stone's throw from the Tower of London and Tower Bridge, the hotel offers stunning views and a central location which gives affiliates access to the best that London has to offer.

Day Two talks include increasing conversion through psychology, ensuring production of the right content, migration to HTTPS, SEO and a late afternoon seminar on the ever changing US online poker landscape, chaired by Jonas Ödman, General Manager of social poker site Global Poker.

There is also a session called the Million Dollar Dog, in which Matt Beswick, co-founder of digital media agency Aira recounts the story of how his dog cost him \$1m, offering guidance on how to make social media advertising work for you.

Must attend seminars on Day Three include trends in online casinos, opportunities for affiliates in Latin America and a session on how the gambling industries hot topic, cryptocurrencies might present opportunities for affiliate operators and their partners. The session is chaired by affiliate conference stalwart and director of online marketing company Madabout Media, Andrew Edmonds.

Networking parties and events are spread over all four days, giving affiliates the opportunity to mix business with pleasure and offering free drinks to all attendees. Event organiser Clarion has increased the number of networking areas at the conference, maximising the networking opportunities available to affiliates.

The event is also home to the Financial Partners Expo (FPE). FPE brings together brokers, affiliates and introducing brokers in the retail finance sector. If you are currently operating in or considering exploring the retail finance sector, the show is a great place to establish new connections, build your network and learn about the constantly evolving industry.

Synonymous with attracting off the wall guests, the 2017 London Affiliate Conference played host to the Leicester Tigers, Jimmy Bullard, the DeLorean from Back to the Future, Harry Redknapp and Russ Bray. If these are anything to go by the 2018 event should showcase a number of very interesting guests and brands. ◀



THE LONDON AFFILIATE CONFERENCE 2018: THE EXHIBITORS' PERSPECTIVE

With the London Affiliate Conference, one of the most significant events on the affiliate networking calendar, just around the corner, *Trafficology* asks a number of the key exhibitors why the conference is such a crucial event for business, and what the key topics of conversations will be as the gaming affiliate industry heads into 2018

into improving and maximizing the efficiency of our retention channels. Finally, we were proud to welcome several highly experienced affiliate managers to our team, who have already proven to be invaluable assets to the company.

Petra Blixt: During 2017 we launched in Denmark and are already one of the top three operators in the Danish market. We are also growing fast in Italy with Leovegas.it. Throughout the year LeoVegas Group has further expanded, acquiring Wingasrl & Royal Panda. Finally, on 6 December 2017 LeoVegas announced its acquisition of 51% of the shares in the streaming network CasinoGrounds.

We ended the year on a high, receiving unicorn status. We are now one of only 57 tech unicorns in Europe.

Rene Hartl: The past year has brought us many highlights, including a very successful market entry in Sweden. Also, the expansion of our product range with eSports was an important step in offering our customers even more entertainment.

Why do you look forward to events such as LAC?

EM: Popular conferences such as LAC are one of the very best places where a company such as ours can have the spotlight and present its services efficiently. By using this platform and the outstanding marketing efforts that go along with the event, we have plenty of opportunities to expand our operation. ▶

THE PANEL:

RENE HARTL

Affiliate Manger, Interwetten

EREZ MARGALIT

Head of Affiliates, 18bet

PETRA BLIXT

Head of Sales, LeoVegas

What were your highlights of 2017?

ErezMargalit: Over the last year, we succeeded in greatly expanding our marketing efforts, enabling our brand to reach a wider audience. Naturally, this resulted in the acquisition of numerous new affiliate partners. We also put a lot of effort



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PB: We thoroughly believe that the key to our success is the close relationships we have with our partners. Being one of the largest conferences in Europe, LAC is the perfect place for us to meet everyone in one location.

RH: London is simply the largest online-affiliate fair in Europe. It is great fun to personally meet your partners who you have previously only communicated with via phone, Skype or e-mail. Of course you also pick up new input from competitors and get advice in lectures as well.

What are your main objectives for LAC?

EM: First of all, we are very excited to meet and mingle with our best affiliate partners. Apart from that, establishing new connections and making new partnerships is, as always, our main objective. We will be ready to talk business with anyone. We have also prepared something quite special when it comes to the 18bet Affiliates brand, and we cannot wait to see the reaction of the attendees.

PB: We will take the opportunity to meet with many of our existing partners to discuss how our business partnerships can develop in the upcoming year. We also look forward to building new business relationships as well as taking the chance to collaborate with up-coming affiliates and other potential partners.

RH: Our aim is of course to have as many great and productive conversations with current and potential new partners as possible and come back with plenty of exciting new projects in store.

What will be the highlights of the show?

EM: Our booth will certainly be one of the highlights. When it comes to marketing our company for this event, we can safely



PB: Since we are in London we believe that compliance will be a dominant topic. Changes in marketing compliance regulations and how this will affect the affiliate industry will probably be a topic of great interest for most attendees.

RH: The European Data Protection Regulations and the e-privacy guidelines will be important topics. It is essential to optimally prepare for this together with our partners. The coming World Cup will also be an important issue of course.

In your opinion what does 2018 hold for the gaming affiliate community?

EM: The rapid developments in iGaming technology are sure to continue in 2018, perhaps more dynamically than ever. This will push affiliate companies to keep up and continue expanding and improving their services. We expect to see further advancement in the use of social media in the affiliate industry, with giants like Facebook making way for other networks and tools that will prove more efficient and worth investing into.

PB: 2018 is definitely going to be another exciting year of changes. We believe that adapting to new compliance regulations across all markets in the coming year will have a positive reflection in the affiliation industry especially the ones focusing on social media.

Why should affiliates visit your stand at LAC?

EM: We really don't want to spoil the surprise we have prepared – we will just say that on this year's LAC, you would definitely want to go over to the 18bet Affiliates booth. Apart from that, our affiliate program is bigger and better than ever, and any potential partner can come over and see how they can start earning money with us. Of course, attendees of the conference will be able to take advantages of the special deals we have prepared just for them.

PB: Firstly, because we are fun and friendly. Plus, this year two experts from our Ad Operations team are flying out with us and will be present at our stand to answer any technical questions that may arise, both from our current and potential affiliate partners.

RH: Interwetten is a renowned and reliable partner who has been in the market for 27 years and offers a broad range of Sport Bets, Casino, Games and eSports. Affiliates who haven't partnered with Interwetten yet should definitely pop around and have a chat with our Affiliate Team about a potential cooperation. We welcome each visitor. ◀

“CHANGES IN MARKETING COMPLIANCE REGULATIONS AND HOW THIS WILL AFFECT THE AFFILIATE INDUSTRY WILL PROBABLY BE A TOPIC OF GREAT INTEREST FOR MOST ATTENDEES”

say that we have done something that has never been done before. You will just have to wait and see.

PB: SEO remains a current hot topic and features frequently in the LAC event schedule – however we are looking forward to attending all the conference sessions.

RH: A visit at the Interwetten stand and a personal conversation with our Affiliate Team. The exchange with Affiliates and competitors is a personal highlight for me from which I can take away many things.

What will be the topics that will dominate conversations at LAC?

EM: One of the areas that will certainly see a lot of discussion will be content marketing, and what companies should do in order to improve their results from it. Another topic that should spark conversations is best SEO practices for affiliate ventures. We would also love to chat about one of our favorite topics right now – H2H.

THE DIGITS

Trafficology has partnered with data experts Casino City Press to bring you an invaluable insight into website and traffic trends across the gaming industry. This month we rank the top 20 bingo gaming sites and web portals.

BINGO GAMING SITES

Traffic Rank	Website	Operator
1	<i>bingohall.ag</i>	Digital Entertainment Services
2	<i>botemania.es</i>	Jackpotjoy
3	<i>tombola.it</i>	Tombola International
4	<i>heartbingo.co.uk</i>	Gamesys Entertaining Play
5	<i>tombola.co.uk</i>	Tombola International
6	<i>giochi24.it</i>	Giochi24
7	<i>galabingo.com</i>	Ladbrokes Coral Group
8	<i>jackpotjoy.com</i>	Jackpotjoy
9	<i>meccabingo.com</i>	Rank Group
10	<i>playbonds.com</i>	Maxxi Media PlayBrands Group
11	<i>yobingo.es</i>	BingoSoft
12	<i>bingocams.co.uk</i>	Dazzletag
13	<i>sunbingo.co.uk</i>	Virtue Fusion News Group Newspapers
14	<i>bingo.giocodigitale.it</i>	GVC Holdings Gioco Digitale
15	<i>bingo.williamhill.com</i>	William Hill WHG Trading
16	<i>skybingo.com</i>	Sky Betting & Gaming
17	<i>slingo.com</i>	Gaming Realms Bear Group
18	<i>tombola.es</i>	Tombola International
19	<i>bingobilly.com</i>	Double B. Invest
20	<i>shinybingo.com</i>	Dazzletag

BINGO PORTAL SITES

Traffic Rank	Website	Owner
1	<i>superfreebingo.com</i>	Little Star Media
2	<i>bingoport.co.uk</i>	Digital Blue
3	<i>freebingo.co.uk</i>	Fable Media
4	<i>loquax.co.uk</i>	Loquax
5	<i>whichbingo.co.uk</i>	Focus Online Manage-
6	<i>freebingohunter.com</i>	QuickThink Media
7	<i>bingolobby.co.uk</i>	HWB Media
8	<i>bingo.es</i>	CAB Magazine
9	<i>joyofbingo.com</i>	Cassava Enterprises
10	<i>i-love-bingo.co.uk</i>	Bello Group
11	<i>latestbingobonuses.com</i>	LCB Network
12	<i>boomtownbingo.com</i>	
13	<i>twolittlefleas.co.uk</i>	LCB Network
14	<i>onlinebingo.co.uk</i>	GVC Holdings
15	<i>bestoffersbingo.co.uk</i>	Take Marketing
16	<i>bingo.org</i>	Match Publications
17	<i>thebingoonline.com</i>	
18	<i>bestnewbingosites.co.uk</i>	
19	<i>internetbingosites.com</i>	IBS
20	<i>bingoadvantage.com</i>	

Rankings are estimated based on a panel and should not be considered absolute ranking values. Over 20 complementary top lists are available on the iGamingBusinessDirectory.com website operated by Casino City Press.



FOUR WAYS TO BUILD AUDIENCE TRUST USING CONTENT

Corey Padveen, Director of Global Social Business Strategy for t2 marketing international, tells *Trafficology* why content should always be king to affiliates

At this point, it is no secret that content is going to be at the root of any successful brand development campaign. Whether you're creating videos, writing blogs, posting to your social channels or sharing content with your audience directly through email and messaging platforms, you are going to need to rely heavily on content in virtually every aspect of your communications strategy.

While content can accomplish a number of objectives, perhaps its most powerful strength is the ability to help you build up your authority within your target audience, and establish a level of trust on the part of the consumer. Authority and trust are both essential elements to your continued growth, and there are a few reasons why. First, trust is among the most important factors prospects consider when choosing one brand over another.

Advertising has seen its share of controversies, which has left a fairly sour taste in the mouths of consumers. Honest, authentic content helps build that trust and showcase your brand's story. Second, building authority, akin to building trust, showcases the value your product or service has over your competitors. This further adds to the story you

are trying to tell about your brand, and leads to a greater connection with your target audience.

Knowing the kinds of intrinsic values content can provide, it is worth looking at a few content-related strategies that you can adopt and implement as a means of building trust with your targets. Though there are a number of content strategies that can be leveraged by your organisation, the four covered here can help in building long-term brand value and authority. With that in mind, it is still worth exploring some of the other ways your content can boost your brand in both the short and long runs.

1. MAINTAINING BRAND CONSISTENCY

Content comes in many forms, and its flexibility means that there is a virtually endless list of manipulations to content that a brand can leverage. Within every one of those transformations and uses, however, you're going to want to focus on a degree of brand and message consistency. Both of these elements are essential in fueling your objective to build trust among your audiences. ►



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With regards to brand consistency, you never want a stray piece of content to resonate significantly with your audience, only to have your brand lost within the message. For example, if you put all of your efforts into writing a phenomenal guest post for a third-party or aggregate blog and overlook brand references, backlinks and a degree of pseudo-promotional content, your brand might disappear in an otherwise powerful written piece.

Sharing visual or video content should also maintain a degree of brand consistency, where the immediate exposure to the content tells your audience that this is your brand, and not an independent piece of visual media. Perhaps the simplest way of achieving brand consistency with your visual content is through the strategies use of branding elements, such as color schemes, logos or, in the case of videos, greeting and sign off messages that include calls-to-action as well as brand references. This degree of consistency with your branding builds authority and showcases the brand's active nature and attention to detail among your target audience.

Message consistency needs to be maintained for the purpose of building trust. While the medium used might mean changes in the structure of your message, consistency with how you portray your offers and customer value shows your prospects that there is no disparity when targeting one demographic over another. While your offers might be tailored to the tastes and preferences of the specified hyper-targeted group of prospects, consistency with your overall message will lead to a more trustworthy image in the eyes of all your target audiences.

2. AIM TO TELL A STORY

You've likely heard someone within the marketing field describe 'content marketing' as the process of telling a story through content. While this description tells us very little about the actual process of content marketing, the ultimate, more robust definition of content marketing is as follows: The process of using content to tell a non-linear but cohesive story about your brand using several platforms and media in an effort to build a strong, lasting connection with your customers. So the question becomes, how can we do that?

The intricacies of content marketing are far too great and expansive to get into in a single article, but in terms of the focus of the practice and how it impacts your organisation, that comes down to one word: value. The 'story' you're telling is not necessarily a narrative in the traditional sense of the word. Instead, you're using content that is both unique to the target prospects yet also inextricably linked to the other elements you're using to build your brand's image and presence. This practice showcases a degree of transparency and authenticity, which is crucial to the process of building trust with your audience.

Using content to highlight how you do business, and showcasing a version of behind-the-scenes content to your audience build a relationship, and relationships are the key to long-term customer loyalty in the modern age of marketing.

3. PROVIDE VALUE WITH YOUR CONTENT

In the age of news feeds and mobile applications, there is more than enough content being thrown in the eyes of consumers to keep them busy. This means that you need to edge out the competition by setting yourself apart, and the best way to do that is by providing value in the form of content to your audience. Of course, value is a fairly subjective term; by better understanding your audience through the process of analyzing data, you can create content that adds the kind of value that builds authority and loyalty.

Data exists for every one of your prospects, thanks to the modern age of consumer content digestion. This data can be extracted and analysed within your owned media, such as your website and email lists, social media, and of course through public data available online. By analysing the kinds of content your audience members are most drawn to, you can begin to craft content that not only plays to the preferences they've exhibited, but also enhances their experience with your brand online.

Some of the most prominent forms of value-adding content are detailed explanations or how-to forms of content, insider tips or behind-the-scenes content, and on a more personalized level, Q&A content specifically tackling issues that your audience has reached out to ask you about. Using these and other forms of value-adding content separates you from the herd and builds trust with your prospects by highlighting that your interests lie beyond simply making a sale, but rather in enhancing the customer experience with or without your brand's involvement.

4. ENGAGE AND BE PERSONABLE

It should go without saying at this point in time that the hard sell is no longer a successful strategy (in the majority of cases when it comes to the modern consumer) and that the

“YOU NEED TO EDGE OUT THE COMPETITION BY SETTING YOURSELF APART, AND THE BEST WAY TO DO THAT IS BY PROVIDING VALUE IN THE FORM OF CONTENT TO YOUR AUDIENCE”

purpose of new and social media is to be just that: social. When you're trying to sell your product or service using your content, the best way to do that is to focus on the abovementioned value-adding content and to subtly differentiate your products or services from the competition.

Of course, this is still a business practice, so you'll want to include calls-to-action and links to build your customer database and drive sales, but the aggressive used-car-salesman-style of marketing and selling is no longer a viable strategy. Instead, focus on individual and authentic engagement.

Some of the more successful brands to emerge in the age of the modern consumer are those that take the time to build up their personal connections with audience members. This kind of engagement is perhaps the most valuable to trust and loyalty building. People like to know that there is a person behind the big corporate identity, and the practice of maintaining brand and message consistency extends to personal engagement. Creating practices for personalised customer engagement will go a much longer than casting out as wide a net as possible and seeing what bites – and it will be far more cost effective as well.

Ultimately, we need to remember that content is a tricky but important beast. There is no perfect or right way to use it - though we have seen plenty of examples of content being used wrong - but as you can see, so much can be gained when it used in an honest and authentic way. It builds a brand image, a rapport with your prospects, and ultimately, it builds trust and authority for your brand among your targets audiences. ◀



WINNING THE LEAD GENERATION RACE: CATENA MEDIA

Catena Media's Acting CEO, **Henrik Persson Ekdahl** talks about taking the reins at the company and maintaining the positive momentum that the company has amassed in its first five years

quality that they are looking for, be it a sports operator or a casino operator. It's also about sustainability and making sure that you have assets or websites that are built to survive long term; most of our sites today drive traffic through content, not via SEO and not by links.

Very heavy content-led sites create sustainability in Google, Yahoo or whatever vertical you use. It helps our customers to budget the customer intake that we can provide them with and while we continue to deliver on the numbers that we have agreed we build trust between us and the operators. Previously the affiliate manager on the operator side and the product manager on the affiliate side were the historical connection point, over the past few years we have seen the dialogue move up a rung to the CMO level or even the CEO level of the company, meaning how you work together becomes a lot more strategic.

2017 has been a record year of financial growth for Catena Media, is there one factor to which you attribute this success?

We've been able to grow in every market in which we are currently operating. We have seen that our focus on revenue share rather than CPA as a payment method is now beginning to pay dividends, close to 70% of all our revenues comes from revenue sharing arrangements which also once again creates sustainability and gives the company a long term strategy for investors.

It creates stability, and the more customers we add to the revenue share database the more revenue we build, meaning we can scale good margins even if we are only a team of 250 people.

In addition to those people we also have 140 freelance journalists that write content exclusively for Catena, so we are talking about 400 people working with Catena. With ►

What has been the biggest challenge for you since taking the reins from Catena's previous CEO Robert Andersson a couple of months ago?

I was one of the first investors into the company in 2012, so I've been on the board and been working with the company daily for a long time. My focus since my appointment has been to educate the market, and in particular the investor market as we are a listed company on Nasdaq, about lead generation and its place within the ecosystem of the gambling industry.

In your opinion what are the principle qualities that make for a good affiliate provider?

The partnership needs to be a win-win; so we work closely with our partners making sure that we deliver the customer

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The company recently marked its five-year anniversary. As a co-founder of the business, how pleased have you been with the development of the business over that period?

For everyone that has been on the investor side and everyone else that has been at Catena since day one, if you are not pleased with our progress there is something wrong with you. However, we are not satisfied; if we were able to build a company of almost 400 people, generating an EBITDA of €9.5m, growing 60% quarterly year-on-year and with a €500m market capitalisation on the premier index of the Swedish stock exchange all in five years, then imagine what we can do in the next five.

What does 2018 hold for Catena in terms of new brand partners and corporate acquisitions?

On the acquisitions side we are actively looking at the markets in Spain, France, Italy, Portugal, the US and Japan. We are going to continue to buy into sports which I think is important for us, we have moved into the financial vertical so we will now build up the financial lead generation side of the business. We will see new acquisitions in that, tapping into new geographic areas in fields such as forex, CFD, stocks and bonds and financial trading tools.

I normally say that lead generation in the financial industry is five years behind lead generation in the gambling industry

“WE HAVE SEEN THAT OUR FOCUS ON REVENUE SHARE RATHER THAN CPA AS A PAYMENT METHOD IS NOW BEGINNING TO PAY DIVIDENDS, CLOSE TO 70% OF ALL OUR REVENUES COME FROM REVENUE SHARING ARRANGEMENTS”

so it is one of the great untapped markets and there are great opportunities, so we are going to focus on that and gambling to ensure that we are number one in both markets.

What makes an ideal acquisition target? Is there a set of criteria that you follow?

Primarily it is circumstances that determine an acquisition, however we are now looking to regulated markets or those markets where there is a timetable towards regulation, as we have done with Japan. ▶

that we can still produce an EBITDA margin of over 50% gross over a quarter, which for me is something that we are very proud of and makes us the company with the highest EBITDA margin on the Swedish stock exchange; that is all companies, not only lead generators.

Catena have recently announced its intention to reach a target EBITDA in excess of €100m by 2020, what does setting ambitious financial targets add to your business model?

All companies provide forecasts of estimated upcoming growth and revenue year-on-year. We wanted to make it crystal clear to the existing investors, potential new investors, and analysts where we are heading because that makes it easier for people to relate to. So we said by 2020 we will achieve €100m EBITDA, we have budgeted for that internally, we know what we need to do to get there and we feel comfortable that we will be able to achieve this target.

Catena has recently bought a Japanese affiliate network, marking its first move into the Asian market. Do you foresee further expansion into Asia?

Absolutely, this was our first acquisition but we have been studying the Japanese market for some time. I believe Japan is the first Asian market that will regulate; we are in dialogue with the regulator in respect of how and when this will happen.

In Japan alone you are talking about 130 million people and a stable economy; we now have an office in Tokyo with eight employees and have just appointed a full time managing director that will take over from the founder of the company we acquired. He will start in January and we are very excited about the potential for this business, as soon as he is up and running we will continue to look for further assets to purchase to consolidate the Japanese market.

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We are not looking to acquire affiliate networks or a group of sites, we'd rather buy one large asset for example when we bought AskGamblers or when we bought BettingPro, sites that are built on people wanting to use the product. The future is not SEO by link building, the future is SEO by content.

Google will favour content that people actually come back to read up on, if you look on many of our sports assets it is comparable to a sports section on a big newspaper. The sports newspapers are our competitors and that is where you create sustainability in your asset, because if you build your website on links to your affiliate sites and smart old SEO moves the likelihood of you being hit on a future Google update will be much higher than if your site is driven by users wanting to come to your asset.

Yes it requires a lot more work to build and it will take a lot longer to actually build a site that is driven by user visits, but it's the only way to be sure that your business will be long term.

How do you maintain forward revenue momentum after an acquisition once the original drivers of the momentum (i.e. the founders/developers) leave the organisation?

In any acquisition where there is no earn out you can take it for granted that we have done the due diligence and don't believe we will need the founders and potential staff of those assets; we can integrate the brand into our existing teams.

Where there is an earn out it is different, for example if the company has twelve months earn out we normally start the integration process from day one. We start talking to the staff, we start looking at the new agreement and we have them as part of Catena Media.

From day one you are part of our company, even if you are on earn out, which gives us time to make sure that people are taken care of and understand where we want to take the company. It also gives the founders of the acquired business time to see if they would like to stay with Catena after the earn out period ends. We have had several instances where sellers have chosen to stay on with Catena and become an employee, even after they have sold their company.

People forget that it's not only about buying a product and adding that revenue to your own, it's about taking care of the company, making sure that they grow the revenue, that is the hard part. Since we founded the company in 2012 we have made over 27 acquisitions and not a single one of them has been lost along the way, which is good in what is still quite a young industry.

How has Catena been adapting to the demands of the forthcoming GDPR?

One of the good things about being a listed company and going through that process with auditors, when it comes to compliance we have the same rules to live by as companies such as H&M, Volvo, Ericsson, so we have an equitable compliance team and a very strong legal team in-house.

When you look at the UKGC and what's happened in the UK, it is clear that we have to work very closely with all of our biggest customers, and while some customers have chosen to close down their affiliates, we are still active and working very well with all of our customers.

I have nothing against GDPR, I think it is a strong clean-up of the industry, some people don't play by the rules and over time they won't survive.

With the recent fines incurred by 888, Casumo, Ladbrokes and SkyVegas over fake news advertisements targeting

players, how does Catena Media ensure that its affiliate partners do not use these tactics?

It is very easy for us to adapt to any blacklist that comes from an operator, but you have to understand that we have never been active in either torrent, streaming or pornography. We have never used any of those sites to drive traffic and those have been hit quite heavily. We work so close with our customers so in the event that they say for example 'we cannot do this on Facebook' we just adapt our marketing accordingly.

You have to maintain a good relationship with your customer in so much as even if we don't have a licence to operate in the UK we ensure that we adhere to the licensing requirements that are put on our customers. I think that is the difficult thing for the smaller affiliates, to have that legal knowledge and teams in place to ensure that they do the right thing.

In your opinion what are the most significant trends in affiliate marketing tools we will see over the next twelve months?

Everyone has been so caught up in rankings on Google, but I think we have to look bigger. As an affiliate we need

"IF YOU LOOK AT MANY OF OUR SPORTS ASSETS IT IS COMPARABLE TO A SPORTS SECTION AT A BIG NEWSPAPER. THE SPORTS NEWSPAPERS ARE OUR COMPETITORS AND THAT IS WHERE YOU CREATE SUSTAINABILITY IN YOUR ASSET"

to be where the traffic is, the traffic is now turning to social media and sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitch, Instagram and Snapchat. We have to be where the customer searches and interacts, that is the biggest trend going forward and we need to be fast.

We have launched our own show on YouTube called askfans where we now have close to 100,000 unique viewers for every episode, we do four episodes a week primarily for the UK sports market. We have twenty dedicated journalists, one per premier league team that actually talks about sports and we allow the fans to interact during the show and upload fan content.

Catena Media have now been approved for share trading on the Stockholm Nasdaq exchange, what benefits does this bring and how will this affect the company's strategy?

We were listed on a stock exchange called Nasdaq First North premier in February 2016, and were the first lead generator to be listed in Sweden. We then immediately began the application to migrate onto the main Stockholm Nasdaq, which was hard work but now we are there we trade among the crème de la crème of stocks.

This allows us bigger reach in capital markets; if we wanted to raise funds or if we wanted to borrow cash for further M&A, we have the best platform in order to do so.

Much of my last three months has been reaching out to potential investors all over Europe and the US to educate the market on what Catena Media is and what we are doing, telling them that we are now on the main market and talking about our future plans. That was also one of the main purposes in naming the financial target, to show transparency. ◀

SEO MATTERS: COMBATTING GOOGLE AFFILIATE PENALTIES

Fili Wiese, SEO expert and former Google Engineer shares his simple five step guide to lifting an affiliate Google penalty.

Google – and other search engines – penalise websites they find to be cutting SEO corners. The euphemistic term used officially usually refers to “taking manual action”. The good news is that any manual penalty Google has issued can be reversed. However, the bad news is that there are plenty of issues that can arise before you can successfully remove a manual penalty.

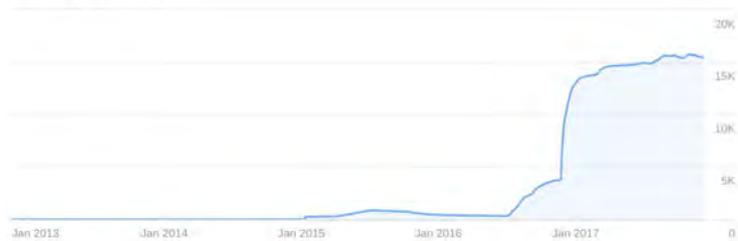
To avoid the biggest Google reconsideration request pitfalls, complete the following steps:

STEP ONE – CONFIRMATION

Before a manual penalty can be fixed, it needs to be confirmed. Google does notify the site owner of an impending penalty via Google Search Console (GSC >Search Traffic>Manual Actions). If there are no messages highlighting a manual penalty, chances are there are none to deal with. The site may have dropped in Google Search Results because an algorithmic update, some of which had become famous in the SEO industry and are for good reasons associated with lost rankings, such as Panda or Penguin. However, it is equally possible that the website’s technical SEO signals fail to help search engines crawl, index and the right content to users. It may also be a combination of more than a handful of reasons, all of which can be uncovered through performing an in-depth, data driven SEO audit.

and offers a first glimpse into the magnitude of the problem. If the issue relates to off-page Google Webmaster Guidelines violations a.k.a. link building, any site owner can likely take an educated guess how many links they happened to have built over time.

Referring domains



Referring pages

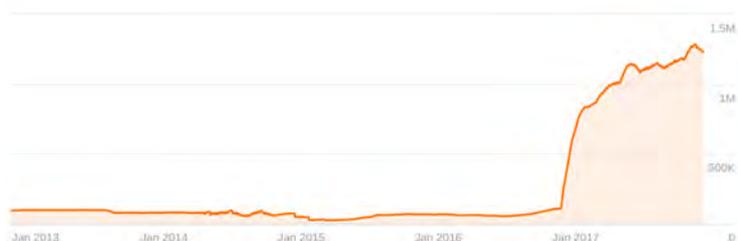


Fig 2 With accurate data, any penalty applied to an affiliate site can be resolved



Unnatural inbound links to your affiliate website violate Google Webmaster Guidelines

To: Webmaster of the affiliate website,

Google has detected a pattern of links from other sites to your site that is either unnatural or irrelevant. This pattern attempts to artificially boost your site’s ranking in search results. Such unnatural ranking would cause search results to show preference for results not relevant to the user’s actual query. It also violates Google Webmaster Guidelines. Therefore, when determining your site’s ranking, we will demote links to your site as a factor in our calculations. This manual spam action has been applied to your affiliate website. To fix this, remove a majority of unnatural links and file a reconsideration request. After we determine that you have complied with our guidelines, we will remove this manual action.

Fig 1: Google confirms manual penalties via Google Search Console. If there’s no confirmation, no manual penalty was issued

But if an actual manual penalty is confirmed, the recovery process can begin immediately.

DOS: Check Google Search Console for Manual Actions

DON'TS: Do not ignore a manual penalty

DON'TS: Do not apply for reconsideration (yet)

DON'TS: Do not contact an AdWords Sales representative, they can't help

STEP TWO – INVESTIGATION

Once a Google Search Console message regarding a manual penalty is confirmed – not to be confused with Google’s many technical escalations – it becomes the focal point of the investigation

Backlink profiles under 100 million backlinks are relatively small and with the right tools and expertise can be investigated in a short period of time. Anything above a billion backlinks will be time consuming with no quick workaround. In either case backlinks need to be crawled first, before they can be investigated. There are tools in the market that do offer some level of assistance here, such as LRT, Majestic and ahrefs, however none can fully replace an in-depth, manual analysis.

If Google’s ominous warning refers to on-page signals such as poor content, the site must be crawled – which can be done as part of an audit – in order to understand how many low quality and/or content lean pages Google has identified. Tools such as DeepCrawl and Screaming Frog SEO Spider are highly recommended for this purpose, even if they can only deliver a partial solution, until a manual investigation is concluded.

As far as affiliate websites are concerned, nine times out of ten they are affected by one of these two categories of manual penalties. However, there are a lot more penalty types that can also be applied for a variety of reasons. In addition, different penalties can be applied at the same time, to the same website. For a complete overview of Google Penalties, refer to the Ultimate Penalty Guide published by former Search Quality Googler Kaspar Szymanski. ▶

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- DOS:** Identify the main issue for the manual penalty
- DOS:** Gather relevant recent and complete data
- DOS:** Narrow down the scope of the problem
- DOS:** Document all steps taken
- DON'TS:** Do not apply for reconsideration (still)
- DON'TS:** Release major upgrades to the website

STEP THREE – THE SOLUTION

The next step is straightforward: Removing the problem from the equation. This includes disavowing low quality, PageRank passing links, no indexing low quality content not desirable for ranking, enriching actual landing pages, and putting the sites unique selling proposition prominently on display – these are all steps that are likely to greatly help to get the penalty lifted swiftly. If in doubt, choosing the cautious approach is the way to proceed. And if the exact course of action isn't clear, read up on the Google Manual Actions: FAQ and seek the assistance of a professional SEO expert who deals with penalties on a regular basis.

- DOS:** Fix the problem thoroughly
- DON'TS:** Apply half measures
- DON'TS:** Test Google Reconsideration team attention to detail

STEP FOUR – RECONSIDERATION

Drafting a compelling, likely-to-be-successful reconsideration request rationales is both an art and a science. The objective isn't perfection, but instead simply making a case convincing enough to succeed at the first attempt.

A promising reconsideration request rationale is short, omits any minutia or obvious facts of life, and includes facts and figures relevant to the solution of the problem, such as the number of links removed and disavowed.

It also might be useful to reference the exact steps taken, for example: to add value to pages previously deemed content lean doorways. Anything that isn't 100% accurate and will raise suspicion

to that promise, at least for the time until the request has been processed and granted, and preferably longer.

Once the submit button has been hit, the waiting game is on. Anything between a few hours and several weeks will pass from that moment and a Google response indicating its judgment. Any result other than a positive response confirming that Google has indeed lifted the penalty is a strong indicator that professional assistance is required in order to not further prolong the penalty, which may still unfold it's full impact on the SERP presence previously taken for granted.

- DOS:** Specify concrete steps taken to solve the problem
- DOS:** Submit a brief reconsideration request
- DON'TS:** Negotiate, plea for compassion or threaten legal action
- DON'TS:** Submit reconsideration before clean-up was been finished
- DON'TS:** Release major upgrades to the website

“IN ORDER TO AVOID THE PAINFUL AND DISTRACTING EXERCISE FROM REPEATING ITSELF, CONDUCTING A POST MORTEM IS RECOMMENDED”

STEP FIVE – OPTIMISATION

Once the reconsideration request was granted and a manual action a.k.a. penalty lifted, actual work on improving the website to provide a more compelling service and beat the competition in a tough vertical can finally resume. In order to avoid the painful and distracting exercise from repeating itself, conducting a post mortem is recommended. Some precautions aimed at avoiding future Google Webmaster Guideline issues can be taken at the same time. All link building activity, white hat or not, is to be thoroughly documented. An updated disavow file needs to be maintained by anyone willing to risk a manual penalty due to PageRank passing link building again.

Ready for submission in the case another manual Google penalty is issued. Keeping an updated disavow file – without uploading it to Google on a regular basis – will not prevent a penalty but can speed up the recovery process. Clever players amend their third party link building agency agreement to make ongoing documentation and link removal on request part of the service. Really smart people build links for traffic, not because of presumably passed PageRank or authority, and so avoid the risk of a manual penalty altogether.

Another best practice that can help with penalty investigations in the future is saving and preserving server logs. Neglected by most affiliate websites, it is of the greatest importance to identify which pages Google crawls and how often, especially for large services. The data can be used for optimising the website far beyond mere emergency situations, such as a penalty investigation, and is one of the cornerstones of any technical SEO audit, which is something that should be at performed annually similar to a financial audit.

- DOS:** Preserve all server logs
- DOS:** Continue building traffic links
- DOS:** Maintain and regularly upload a disavow file
- DOS:** Review Google Webmaster Guidelines monthly
- DON'TS:** Continue building PageRank links or other spammy methods ◀



Reconsideration Request for your affiliate website

To: Webmaster of the affiliate website,

Google has received a request to reconsider your affiliate website for compliance with the Google Webmaster Guidelines. It can take several weeks for your site to be reviewed. After Google reviews your site, you will receive a message indicating the outcome of your reconsideration request.

For reference, here is a copy of the reconsideration request that was submitted for your site:

Hello Google team, We have reviewed our past link building strategy and compared it against Google Webmaster Guidelines. These are the steps taken on our side in order remove the manual spam action applied to our affiliate website. We have aggregated backlinks pointing to the website using the following data sources: Google Search Console, Ahrefs, Majestic, SEMrush, LinkResearchTools We were able identify and manually review approximately 150 million unique URL patterns on approximately 185 thousand different hostnames. Specifically we looked into following types of PageRank passing links: Paid Link Posts, Infographics, Directories. As a result we removed links where we could and submitted an updated disavow file containing over 55.000 patterns at domain level. At this point in time, we have discontinued our link building efforts and we are committed to following Google Webmaster quality guidelines. We appreciate your time and consideration,

Fig 3 Short and to the point reconsideration requests stand best chance to succeed

must be avoided. Future truth telling is absolutely detrimental. Pro's close their reconsideration request rationale with a pledge to abide to Google Webmaster Guidelines. And actually live up

BIG QUESTION

Affiliates have fond memories of the glory days of online poker; but is a new era on the horizon? Will shared liquidity revitalise online poker in the US?



CAROLINE WATSON

Staff Writer, Gambling Insider

“Shared liquidity will not generate enough buzz alone to move the needle significantly enough to justify a swarm of affiliates returning to the market”

For many affiliates, the poker market was the entry point into the online gaming industry, back in the heady days of the online poker boom when Party Poker and its competitors seemingly proffered a never-ending supply of cash in exchange for reliable pipelines of new players.

The dream died in instalments, firstly with the hammer blow of UIGEA in 2006 that drove many sites, including then-industry leader Party Poker, from the US market. Many affiliates that had quickly built an empire off the back of perhaps the greatest gold rush in online gaming history had the financial rug pulled from underneath them overnight; with the majority of their revenue streams dried up, operations that had grown from a bedroom outfit to a dozen-strong workforce founded suddenly found themselves unable to financially prop up their rapid growth. For those that did manage to navigate through the choppy waters of UIGEA without sinking, Black Friday, the US Government's seizure of PokerStars, Full Tilt, and Ultimate Bet's URLs, was the proverbial cannon ball that sank every ship.

Fast forward to 2013, and online poker returned to US shores, first in Nevada, followed in short order by Delaware and NJ. However, even the most fervent US online poker backer would acknowledge that its return has been more than a little underwhelming to date, with player pools and the size of the poker economy falling well below expectations. Figures echoing the heyday of online poker are nowhere to be seen on the horizon. But are we about to turn a corner? Late last year the NJ Gov Chris Christie, Nevada Gov Brian Sandoval, and Delaware Gov John Arney, announced that moving forward the three states would be sharing liquidity including player pools, boosting the size of the US poker market significantly for players in those states in the process. So should this latest development encourage affiliates to reinvestigate, and ultimately reinvest, in the US market?

YES, AFFILIATES SHOULD RETURN TO THE US ONLINE MARKET

Will this announcement of shared liquidity result in an uptick in players being attracted to online poker? Almost certainly yes. Will the surge be strong enough to immediately pay dividends to affiliates who invest in the market? Probably not. However, that doesn't reveal the full picture.

It is the long-term rewards that should attract affiliates. This shared liquidity deal lays the groundwork to grow the US poker community further; the most difficult deal of this kind is always the first one, any subsequent states that legalise poker will almost certainly join the agreement immediately once the legislation is implemented. This factor, plus the increase in the size of the poker economy and a general softening of the legislative attitude to online poker, are factors that

could see more states legalise the game before too long. The biggest fish in the ocean, namely California and New York, have both flirted extensively with legalising online poker in the past, the possibility of either or even both states legalising poker before the end of 2018 is currently extremely realistic. Two bills petitioning the legalisation of online poker, remain on the table in New York, indicating to many that New York will indeed be the fifth state to legalise online poker. California's relationship with online poker legalisation is somewhat more unpredictable, but there is perhaps no other state where the appetite for online poker amongst the residents is so strong. The result of this is something of an air of inevitability that online poker legislation will pass once the various wrinkles of disagreement between stakeholders have been ironed out. The New York and California markets being absorbed into the new shared liquidity agreement would result in a mammoth boost to the existing online poker market in the US. That is a realistic possibility in 2018. For affiliates, success in this new market will be predicated on being early to market. The opportunity to do so is now.

NO, THE VALUE IS NOT THERE

Whilst larger player pools resulting larger tournament fields, higher guarantees, and more regular mid-high stakes cash games will inevitable draw in players from the fringes of the current poker economy, shared liquidity will not generate enough buzz alone to move the needle significantly enough to justify a swarm of affiliates returning to the market. For gaming affiliates, entering new verticals should only be seriously considered when the profit margin is quantifiable. As an affiliate, spreading your assets or diluting the investment of your resources will have a negative impact on your revenues if there is no justification for doing so. It is easy to lose yourself reminiscing about the glory days of online poker in the US, and all affiliates wish we could return to those days, but the announcement of a shared liquidity pool isn't that.

Crystal ball gazing and envisioning a rejuvenated online poker market with multiple large states sharing liquidity is all very well, but CA and NY have spoken extensively about legalising online for years and there is little evidence that we are any closer to legislation being passed in that time. The rigmarole of dfs legislation in New York and the objections of many tribes in California don't bode well for a speedy resolution to online poker legislation in those states, and without those markets onboard the landscape will remain underwhelming. Affiliates would do better to focus on markets that offer certain profits until online poker matures. ◀

LASTING FRIENDSHIPS

The role of affiliates in the online casino industry is coming under increasing scrutiny. Growing regulatory concerns led to Sky Betting and Gaming shutting down its Affiliate Hub back in September, causing the likes of Paddy Power and bet365 to fire a warning shot at their affiliate partners by saying they were now taking a “zero tolerance” approach to those not sticking to their guidelines.

The stance taken by Paddy Power and bet365 is perfectly understandable, but the approach taken by Sky Betting and Gaming is a terminal solution to what is really a temporary problem. Affiliates play a vital role in the online casino ecosystem; aside from being a major source of traffic, they educate players, hold operators to account, and ensure casinos are run to the highest possible standards.

The problem, of course, is that a small number of affiliates are not practicing what they preach. Specifically, they are not marketing online casino sites responsibly, and are not affording their readers the same levels of respect and protection that operators and suppliers must offer. The reason for this is that affiliates are currently unlicensed, and are not held accountable by regulators.

That said, I believe affiliates can improve their approach to responsible marketing by working more closely with operators. Focal Click works with Omni Casino, which has been live for more than twenty years now. We have built long-lasting relationships – most are more like friendships – with affiliates, and together we have been able to advertise and market Omni’s gambling products responsibly.

So, what is the key to building a good relationship between affiliates and operators? The first thing to consider – and this is even before a partnership is officially formed – is that both parties must be fully transparent and honest. Terms and conditions, reporting and payments, and everything in between must be clear, concise and fair. This means everyone knows where they stand from the get-go.

A great way of bettering the relationship between operators and affiliates is to ensure the latter are generating maximum revenues. After all, they are investing their hard-earned traffic into an online casino operator, and should be sufficiently rewarded for their efforts. This, of course, means converting traffic into depositing players that stay loyal to that casino, and for that to happen they must be offered a first-class product.

Once operators and affiliates have a partnership in place, it is important to continue to work closely together to learn how to fine-tune this conversion funnel, driving player sign-ups and deposits for the benefit of both parties. Focal Click and Omni have partnerships with affiliates going into the tenth year, so we really have found the formula in this regard.

Again, it is all about trust, honesty and transparency, and understanding what both parties require to deliver maximum upsides. Armed with this knowledge, it is possible to deploy products, offers, bonuses, strategies, content and the like that drive growth for operator and affiliate, but within the bounds of regulatory requirements. This means affiliates are working to the same standards as operators.

That’s not to say hurdles won’t be encountered. Late payments, broken landing pages and campaigns not going live on time are just some of the issues operators and affiliates have to overcome. Planning and having systems in place is important, but being able to respond quickly and positively to unforeseen circumstances is ultimately what keeps the partnership successful for a long period of time.

Again, it all comes down to honesty and transparency. Partnerships built on these foundations will stand the test of time, and will also allow operators and affiliates to work to the highest possible standards. This, in turn, will help deflect some of the heat affiliates are currently feeling, and prove to the wider market that they are a reputable – and vital – channel for driving player sign-ups.

ELLIOTT RESNIK
Head of Affiliate Marketing
at Focal Click



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