

# trafficology

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## MAKING WAVES

We compare how lockdowns impacted  
online casinos in both the US and UK



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Hey guys! Today's serious bit of #igamingnews is hot off the press from Spain!

It seems that the Spanish government has rolled out stricter regulations for gaming operators. Well, maybe not so suddenly... they went into effect in April, but back then it was like: "Don't worry guys, it's temporary, we'll lift the ban once the quarantine is over, 100% guaranteed!"

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# TRAFFIC REPORT

*Trafficology has partnered with data experts Casino City Press to provide insight into website and traffic trends across the gaming industry. The below is a breakdown of the top 20 affiliate programmes by market for September 2020, including: overall across all devices (desktop, mobile and tablet), casino (mobile and tablet), casino (desktop) and sports betting across all devices*



## OVERALL

Rank	Name	Website
1	bet365 Affiliates	www.bet365affiliates.com
2	Yahoo Fantasy Sports Affiliates	sports.yahoo.com/dailyfantasy/affiliates
3	NetHive Affiliate Program	nethive.com
4	IQ Option Affiliate	affiliate.iqoption.com
5	Best Partners	bestpartners.com
6	eToro Partners	etoropartners.com
7	Bovada Affiliate Program	bovada.lv/new-bovada-affiliate-program
8	Betfair Partnerships	affiliates.betfair.com
9	betway Partners Africa	betwaypartnersafrica.com
10	Kindred Affiliates	kindredaffiliates.com
11	AfiladosW	afiladosw.co
12	GVC Affiliates	gvcaffiliates.com
13	DraftKings Affiliates	draftkings.com/affiliates
14	FanDuel Partners	fanduel.com/partners
15	Gamesys Group Partners	gamesysgrouppartners.com
16	William Hill Affiliates	affiliates.williamhill.com
17	Stoiximan.gr Affiliates	affiliates.betano.com
18	Betway Partners	betwaypartners.com
19	U-affiliates	uffiliates.com
20	FDJ Affiliate Program	fdj.fr

## CASINO (MOBILE)

Rank	Name	Website
1	Gamesys Group Partners	gamesysgrouppartners.com
2	StarVegas Affiliates	starvegasaffiliate.com
3	WinBet Affiliates	winbetaffiliates.bg
4	bet365 Affiliates	bet365affiliates.com
5	Platin Casino Affiliates	partners.platincasino.com
6	Casino Secret Affiliates	casinosecretaffiliates.com
7	William Hill Affiliates	affiliates.williamhill.com
8	Videoslots Affiliate Program	partner.videoslots.com
9	GVC Affiliates	gvcaffiliates.com
10	U-affiliates	uffiliates.com
11	Kindred Affiliates	kindredaffiliates.com
12	Rabbit Affiliates	rabbit-affiliates.com
13	LeoVegas Affiliate	leovegasaffiliates.com
14	Buffalo Partners	buffalopartners.com
15	InTouch Partners	intouchpartners.com
16	Wildz Affiliates	wildzaffiliates.com
17	Mr Affiliate	mraffiliate.com
18	Paf Partners	pafpartners.com
19	Rank Affiliates	rankaffiliates.com
20	King Billy Affiliates	kingbillyaffiliates.com



Rankings are estimated using statistical data and should not be considered absolute ranking values. More than 50 complementary top lists are available on the iGamingDirectory.com website operated by Casino City Press

# CASINO (DESKTOP)

# SPORTS BETTING

Rank	Name	Website
1	Gamesys Group Partners	gamesysgrouppartners.com
2	Betsson Group Affiliates	betssongroupaffiliates.com
3	WinBet Affiliates	winbetaffiliates.bg
4	LeoVegas Affiliate	leovegasaffiliates.com
5	GVC Affiliates	gvcaffiliates.com
6	Stakes Affiliates	affiliates.stakes.com
7	Kindred Affiliates	kindredaffiliates.com
8	Wildz Affiliates	wildzaffiliates.com
9	Videoslots Affiliate Program	partner.videoslots.com
10	Mr Affiliate	mraffiliate.com
11	Platin Casino Affiliates	partners.platincasino.com
12	U-affiliates	uffiliates.com
13	Paf Partners	pafpartners.com
14	Best Partners	bestpartners.com
15	Buffalo Partners	buffalopartners.com
16	Casumo Affiliates	casumoaffiliates.com
17	ComeOn Connect	comeonconnect.com
18	GIG Affiliates	gigaffiliates.com
19	Rabbit Affiliates	rabbit-affiliates.com
20	William Hill Affiliates	affiliates.williamhill.com

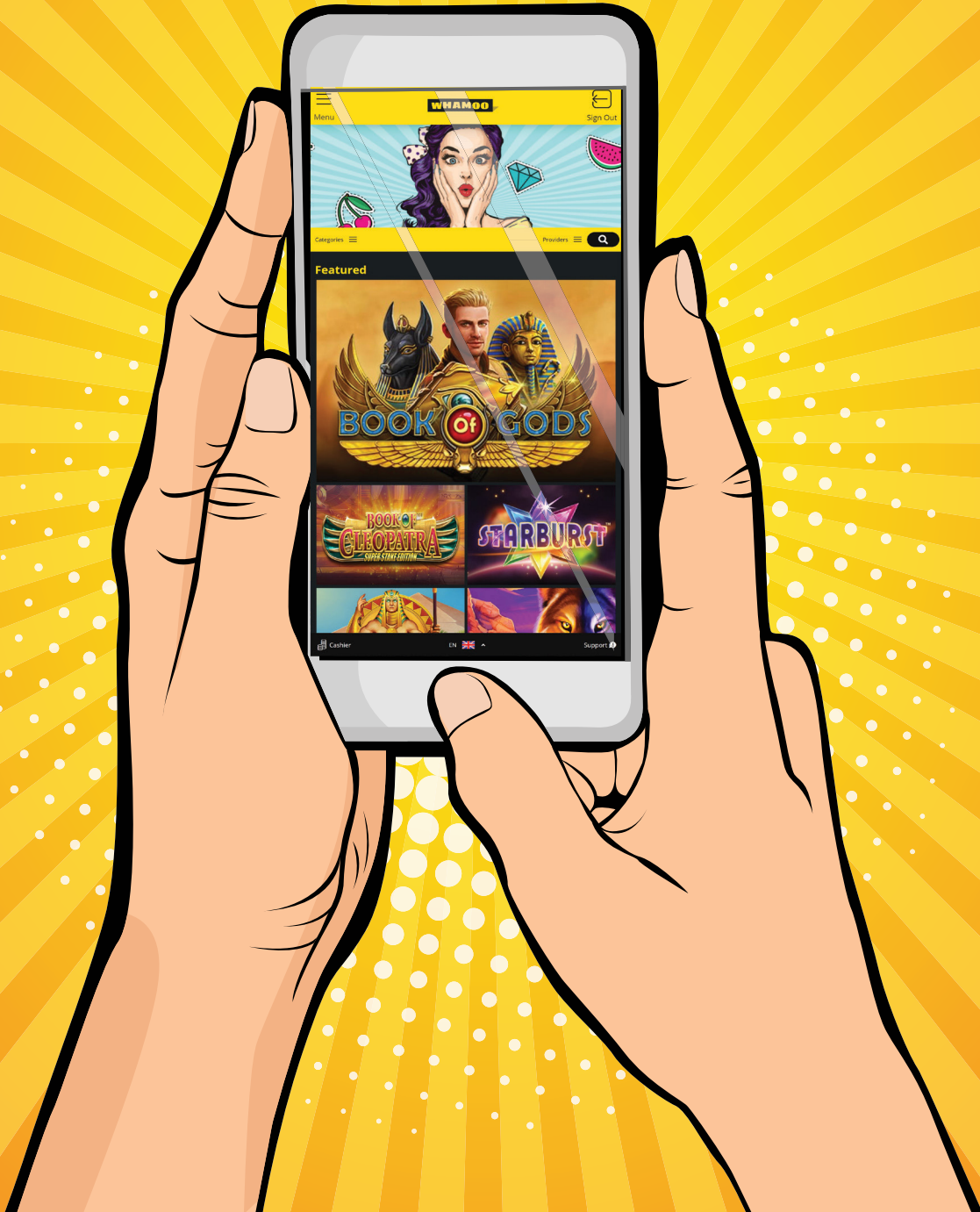
Rank	Name	Website
1	bet365 Affiliates	www.bet365affiliates.com
2	NetHive Affiliate Program	www.nethive.com
3	Best Partners	bestpartners.com
4	Bovada Affiliate Program	bovada.lv/new-bovada-affiliate-program
5	betway Partners Africa	betwaypartnersafrica.com
6	AfliadosW	afliadosw.co
7	Betfair Partnerships	affiliates.betfair.com
8	Kindred Affiliates	kindredaffiliates.com
9	GVC Affiliates	gvcaffiliates.com
10	Tipsport Partners	tipsport.cz/partner
11	William Hill Affiliates	affiliates.williamhill.com
12	Stoiximan.gr Affiliates	affiliates.betano.com
13	Betway Partners	betwaypartners.com
14	Tipico Affiliate Program	tipico-affiliates.com
15	1xBet Partners	1xpartners.com
16	PM Affiliates	pmaffiliates.com/en/
17	Sportsbet.com.au Affiliates	sportsbetaffiliates.com.au
18	Ladbrokes Partners	ladbrokescoralpartners.com
19	Paddy Partners	paddypartners.com
20	Rush Affiliates	rush-affiliates.com



Rankings are estimated using statistical data and should not be considered absolute ranking values. More than 50 complementary top lists are available on the iGamingDirectory.com website operated by Casino City Press

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# ‘MORE STABILITY BROUGHT TO THE MARKET’

*Trafficology* catches up with **Kyriakos Fourniadis**, managing director for Greece & Romania at Better Collective, to discuss the new gambling bill introduced in Greece



KYRIAKOS FOURNIADIS

new terms and conditions about the fees, the taxation and the new advertising policy. And it seems we'll have some different advertising policy regarding slots. So operators won't be able to advertise slots, but they will be able to advertise live casino. Additionally, there will be some limitations to the maximum bet in slots, which will be €2 (\$2.37). Another new thing we will have – which is not actually from the advertising policy but is important in the new gambling bill – is local casino jackpots. So the Greek casinos will not participate in the international jackpots that all the big casino providers have.

## **Why do you think this decision has been made now and what opportunities does it present?**

I think we should have had the new permanent bill some years ago, but it's good we have it even now. Of course, this new bill will bring some stability to the market and will probably attract more gambling actors to the market in the long term. I think and I hope this will also help the players, because since we have a more stable regulatory framework, and more clear advertising policies about what operators can advertise and what they can't, people will be less exposed to gambling ads. It will benefit the players because there will be bigger competition, so that will lead to better offers from operators and of course that's really good.

## **We touched on the opportunities, but what setbacks does this present for the industry in Greece?**

The only thing I can see at the moment actually is that there are some high fees. It's €3m for the sports betting license and €2m for the casino games license, which is one of the highest in Europe. But this license is for a seven-year period and there are a lot of instalments, so I think it should not be an obstacle for new entrants. But of course that's something that maybe the new entrants will consider twice before taking the final decision to enter the market.

## **Why do you think the fees are so high?**

I think the Government seems to understand the Greek market is big enough to have such high fees. So, since at the moment we see there are a lot of applications already made to the Hellenic Gaming Commission, they probably think their expectations have already been met, or are actually above their targets. So I think that was the reason. They understand the market is already a well-established market with some good players already. They may have also thought these amounts are not high enough to prevent any of the existing operators from applying for the permanent license.

## **Could you provide us with a brief historical overview of the market in Greece?**

It was back in 2011 when we had the temporary gambling license in Greece, so we are now nine years in with this temporary status. We do have some big players in the market, like Bwin, bet365, Sportingbet, Interwetten and Stoiximan, which is actually number one in the market. Back on 5 August this year, the new gambling bill was enforced and now the temporary licensees have already applied for a permanent license. And the new entries will follow with their applications in the next month. It seems the market now has the final structure and we hope this new regulation will help all stakeholders improve the current framework we have.

## **What was your immediate reaction to the news that gambling licenses will now be made permanent?**

It seems current operators expected these new regulations, these



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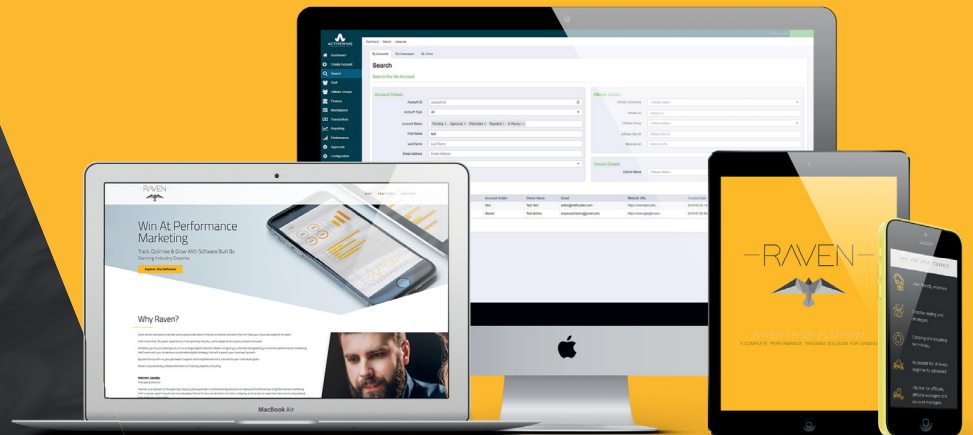
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# MEET THE TEAM: MOBIUS INTERACTIVE

*Trafficology* meets Lynn Pearce, Gary Eldridge, Robin Lawson and Nicholas de Freitas of Mobius Interactive Ltd, who share their experiences in the gaming industry and the hobbies they enjoy when taking a break from a 14-hour workday



LYNN PEARCE

## What are your goals going forward?

The hard work continues, because we can't stop now. We have to actually seriously consolidate and push forward. The days are very long; I think all of us are working between 12 and 14 hours a day, it just goes with the territory. We are a startup and we are going to make our name out there. And we are going to leapfrog competitors in various regions, because we know them, we know what we believe they might be lacking. Some of them we can benchmark ourselves against because they really are worth doing that, and some of them we are trying to attain. So it's a great combination. All our competitors are basically friends anyway, so it's a friendly competitiveness that we have out there.



GARY ELDRIDGE

## GARY ELDRIDGE - CHAIRMAN

### How did you get into the company?

I have a friend of mine who is actually a mutual friend of Lynn's, who lives in Prague, and he suggested the two of us get together. I had been looking to get involved in the space and was really impressed with Lynn and her team.

We agreed to start a company together and that's what we've done. I was immediately impressed, because I saw all the energy Lynn had. I was aware of how much success

## LYNN PEARCE - CEO

### What makes Mobius different from the rest?

Once players enter our domain, they are never going to leave. It's like the Hotel California – they will arrive and they won't want to leave. What's happened to us is really great: the esports companies started approaching us for sponsorship deals; we had not even launched, our name was not really out there and already they were keen to discuss tournament deals.

It shows the value of building good relationships, and I'm glad I had the time in the beginning to do that. We've got three major brands rolled out in three months. I don't think that's ever been done. In fact, I was thinking about entering us in The Guinness Book of Records! If we tell people we've launched three brands in three months, I think they would find it hard to believe to be honest.

### Describe yourself in three words

I was going to say "Approach. With. Caution." But then I thought that might frighten off potential partners, so I think I'll go with "Force of nature."

she'd had in the business previously. It's a lot of work starting something like this, but it's been a great experience and I think we've all had fun doing it.

One of the reasons we are having so much success – and we've had an overwhelming response to date from interested affiliates – is because the team is well known and well respected, and it has had so much success in the past. So it's really allowing us to move forward a lot more efficiently and quickly than most companies would be able to in our position. We're very, very lucky to have that team with us.

As much as we joke about how much fun it is, this team has really put in the maximum amount of effort over the last three months. They've done a year's worth of work in 90 days. It's been very challenging and rewarding at the same time.

#### **What do you get up to in your spare time?**

I'm pretty blessed. I live in Vancouver so the summers here are incredible. If you're familiar with North America, there are no islands until you get to the very tip of the US, so a lot of the big boats from California come up here to spend the summer months. It's absolutely heaven on earth, spectacular.

And then in the winter, I'm 70 miles from Whistler, so it's a great place to live, I'm blessed. Other than that, I try to do some hot yoga every couple of days and drink some wine; life is good. How bad could it be?

#### **How would you describe yourself?**

Tenacious, or just too dumb to quit.



**ROBIN LAWSON**

#### **ROBIN LAWSON - VP COO**

#### **What are your goals for the company?**

Esports traditionally has always been very fragmented, so if you wanted to research any specific esports information, or just find something of interest, you would have had to go to multiple sites to find all the information you needed. All of a sudden – especially driven by this COVID-19 situation – we've seen this great synergy between online gaming and esports

taking place. So it's really propelled it. And I think a lot of companies have missed a trick here; they've missed that niche. So we aim to really go after that in a big way.

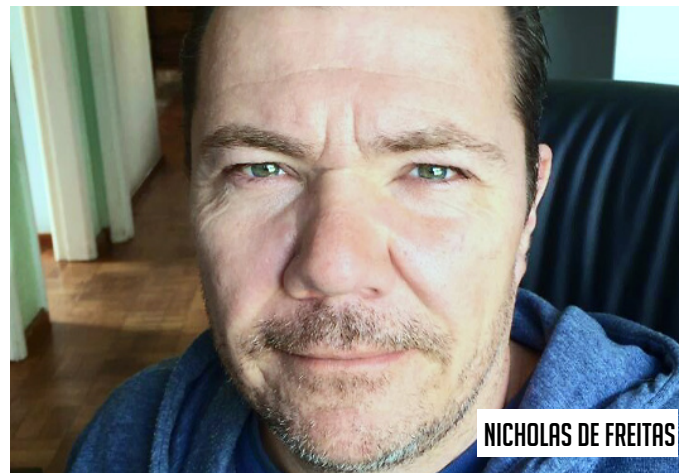
I can't go too much into it, there are certain secrets we can't reveal just yet, but we have great ideas to be involved in esports communities from literally grassroots all the way up to pro level. All of this stuff brings us to the point where – in online gaming and esports – we want the first thing people think of to be the Mobius Interactive brands.

#### **Describe yourself in three words**

Dynamic, intuitive, determined.

#### **What do you get up to in your spare time?**

Where's the spare time? Please show me. I like to play tennis as much as possible. I'm a big tennis fan and always have been, so when I can and when the time affords, I like to go out and play. It's a great moment to go out and completely switch off. You have one hour where you are intensely focused on something else that isn't Mobius. It's very healthy for the mind to do that.



**NICHOLAS DE FREITAS**

#### **NICHOLAS DE FREITAS - VP MARKETING**

#### **How did you get into Mobius and how have things been during the pandemic?**

A lot of thought went into all of this, so it took a while to get up and running. I got a lot of the information I needed from Robin because he was big into esports already. I still deal with the creative side daily, but it feels like meetings 24/7. It doesn't really feel like I'm in the office because it started during this coronavirus lockdown, so I'm sitting at home and it never ends. You just stay in that loop non-stop. It just keeps going on and on and on, which is great, because it's keeping me really busy.

#### **How would you describe yourself?**

If I told you all my ideas, you'd probably put the word nuts down, but I'd rather think of it as visionary. And then at the same time, realistic and reasonable, because I will plot it out and make sure it will all make sense. I've got a lot of ideas that are way out there, but I can't tell people them because they'll think I'm crazy. You have to be realistic about rolling out your ideas. But there's nothing like taking on the big guys, I love it.

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**LeoVegas**

# US VS UK CRM KPIs

Online gaming CRM consultant **Shahar Attias** compares the key performance indicators in CRM across the Atlantic Ocean



to ask me what kind of impact the lockdown had on online casinos from both sides of the pond. As previously mentioned, much like with any assignment, I went right at it, and six months later, you can find below my insights, benchmarking OCT/2019-MAR/2020 with APR/2020-SEP/2020. That's what superheroes do – analysis and Sailor Moon.

## TERMINOLOGY

A few clarifications before diving into the reports: clearly, I have focused just on casinos, as the “impact of COVID on sports” is self-explanatory. Same as what's a Deposit (DEP) and why you should never say no to another Pretzel (the trans-fat falls through the holes, so in fact they are nutritious; ask any scientist).

Net Gaming Revenue (NGR) is our income and is measured differently across the world (mainly, as DEPOSITS – WITHDRAWALS in the CIS); but we will calculate it as TOTAL MONEY WAGERED – TOTAL MONEY WON BY PLAYERS – PLAYER COSTS (BONUSES, ETC.). A very important ratio is, therefore, NET/DEP; portion of the profit kept out of money injected into the system.

Moving on to Retention Rate: measuring how many players have made real-money activity in a month, out of the same group of players who have made such activity in the previous month. And yes, of course there's an acronym here as well... MoM RR. Diving deeper, if we look at all the players who have made their first ever deposit (FTDs, first-time depositors) in the previous month, and check how many of them have also made real-money activity in the current month, we will refer to it as 1M RR.

Speaking of FTDs, shout out to our beloved audience who work in affiliation, or function as account managers for affiliates: first, well done – you have managed to read a very long sentence (you just won yourself a Pokémon sticker!); and second, I will also benchmark Conversion – the ratio between all registrations in a month and the number of FTDs within the same period.

## BENCHMARK

Let's kick in with some basic ballpark: in the past 12 months, on average (AVG), a US online casino player has deposited every month \$750-\$800 (~£600), and generated \$150-\$200 of NGR (~£130), monthly. In the UK, we are talking about much lower numbers: £250-£300 in DEP and £50-£60 NGR.

“What? How can he say that?? My casino's numbers are so much higher/lower!!!” A few clarifications: (A) It's based on partial data, and I still don't cover all operators (I'm hiring!) – so it is, by nature,

You might get the impression that I am lazy, judging by the title. Far from it. If there's a chore I promise to complete, you can consider it done. There's hardly a need to remind me about it every half a year. But I do like acronyms. Working as a consultant requires me to scribble swift comments during sessions with clients – and acronyms just make my life easier. COVID-19, on the other hand, did not.

The common conception in the online gaming industry is that the coronavirus did wonders for online casinos, and forced the sports betting operators to take involuntary leave, in which they had a chance to lay back, relax, and rightfully feel sorry about working in sports. So, not much of a change. Banned from traveling, I had to completely change the way I work, burn midnight oil (well, whiskey) while bridging across time zones and deprive my dear CRM teams from the unmatched luxury of my striking presence. Surprisingly, that actually brought more work to me. So weird.

Anyway, I am working from home, and have clients in Europe, as well as in the US, so it made sense for *Trafficology*

biased; (B) As the great American poet, T. Alison S., once said, "Haters gonna hate."

Back to KPIs, we can already learn that US players are more

MARKET	KPI	+/-
US	DEP	(+) 50% - 60%
	NGR	(+) 10% - 15%
	N/D	(-) 20% - 25%
UK	DEP	(-) 0% - 5%
	NGR	(+) 10% - 15%
	N/D	(+) 15% - 20%

lucrative (NGR is about x2-x2.5 higher), and even their NGR/DEP ratio is slightly better (US: mid-20%; UK: low-20%). But what impact did the pandemic have? In the table below, you can review the changes in the KPIs between the recent six months, ever since the first quarantine (APR/2020-SEP/2020) and the Pre-COVID era (OCT/2019-MAR/2020):

NGR had a nearly identical impact, but while the AVG monthly DEP per player grew dramatically in the US and remained pretty much stagnant in the UK, the NGR/DEP ratio is the real story here: down 25% in the US, up 15%+ in the UK.

Why? One explanation could be the changes in mindset and cultural differences. The UK market has been working online for decades now, and is known to be infused with bonuses, as well as geared towards the non-hardcore players (stay-at-home bingo moms: we love you exactly as you are!). As such, a lack of sport wasn't a huge factor. On the other hand, economical uncertainty caused a slight decrease in deposits, but players weren't cashing out; not knowing if they will have additional funds available for gaming, they kept on playing, thus boosting NGR.

At the same time, in the Land of the (gluten) Free, sports used to be the major acquisition channel; when it stopped, operators started a bonus war, trying to ensure their players didn't go anywhere, while attempting to remain attractive to untapped traffic. Lack of sports also brought conversion rates to new heights: from ~35% to ~45% in the US, and from 40%-45% to 50%-55% in the UK. Again, the mood is probably: "There's nothing else going on, so we might as well play the same book of whatever our friends are playing."

In terms of retention, there wasn't much of a change – only a slight decline across both markets. US remained very high (potentially world leaders in this aspect; maybe behind only the not-so-white-markets-that-we-never-mention-out-loud of Netherlands & Turkey), and the drop was within a very narrow gap between low-80% to mid-70%. The UK is used to different thresholds; but again, just a minor drop from high to mid-60%. Similar change in 1M RR for the UK. But not in the US. Moving from 40% to nearly 50% is quite impressive and I associate it, as before, to the battle over newly converted leads (also, resulting in mental CPA, Cost-per-Acquisition).

## CONCLUSION

This industry is dynamic and quickly evolves to overcome challenges. There's a global catastrophe? We adapt, find solutions, adjust marketing tactics to fit the new situation, focus on segmented groups with relevant promotions and trigger campaigns to prevent churn in real-time. How do we keep that rugged, masculine look yet remain so agile & flexible? Well, good genes to begin with. Oh, there's also a travel ban, so we currently focus more on work; at least until they air the next season of "Selling Sunset" ( Go Team Chrisell! ).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

As an iGaming CRM consultant, Shahar Attias has helped both startups and publicly traded operators to optimise their Player Retention efforts, and can help your company to benchmark your strategy, procedures and KPIs with the competition. After a decade of experience in senior operational roles, he has founded Hybrid Interaction Ltd., the premier online gaming consulting firm, and has held successful projects across all verticals and through most jurisdictions, including online migration projects with brick-and-mortar casinos in the Dutch, Swiss, UK and the US markets. Among his clients are Hard Rock NJ, Holland Casino, Grand Casino Baden, Horizons Casino, GVC Holdings / BwinParty / Sportingbet / Bet.pt, PokerStars, William Hill, BetConstruct, EvoPlay, bgo, Win2day, DazzleTag and NightRush.

**"IN THE LAND OF THE (GLUTEN) FREE, SPORTS USED TO BE THE MAJOR ACQUISITION CHANNEL; WHEN IT STOPPED, OPERATORS STARTED A BONUS WAR, TRYING TO ENSURE THEIR PLAYERS DIDN'T GO ANYWHERE, WHILE ATTEMPTING TO REMAIN ATTRACTIVE TO UNTAPPED TRAFFIC"**

# WILL ESPORTS BETTING OVERTAKE TRADITIONAL SPORTS?

The *Trafficology* editorial team debates whether esports proponents have hit the nail on the head, or are being far too ambitious with some of their estimates



## IQBAL JOHAL - ESPORTS PROVES ITS WORTH BUT LIVE SPORTS STILL WAY AHEAD

There's no doubting the boom of esports during 2020. At a time when live sport was suspended worldwide in mid-March until at least May, esports stepped up to the mark to cement itself as a viable offering for operators. Gambling Commission statistics from the biggest operators, covering approximately 80% of the online gambling market in the UK, showed the vertical's gross gambling yield went from £50,223 (\$64,977) in March 2019 to £4.6m in May 2020, at the height of the pandemic.

It's easy to see why, with titles such as *Fifa* and *NBA2K* proving the most popular titles among sports fans already familiar with players and teams. There's also the fact you can watch a game between two world-class esports performers, as opposed to

a "Danish Second Division match of a poor standard," as EveryMatrix CEO Ebbe Groes told me in May. EveryMatrix data showed a x40 growth in esports betting in the two months from live sport being suspended in mid-March, with 80% coming from such aforementioned 'cross-over' titles.

However, there's no coincidence that the same Gambling Commission data showed esports GGY fell 29% from July to August, down to £1.8m, as the major sporting leagues in the world returned; and sports betting was back thriving again. While it came about by accident, 10 September was an unprecedented date for sports and sports betting. For the first time ever, all four major US leagues – NFL, NBA, MLB and MHL – took place on the same day, along with Major League Soccer (MLS) as operators and players enjoyed a "proverbial feast" of sporting action.



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That led to New Jersey setting the record for the highest-ever monthly sports betting handle in the US, with the state collecting \$748.5m for September. That proves the appetite sports betting still has in the US and worldwide, despite other verticals such as esports betting, gaining prominence throughout much of the year. As H2 Gambling capital figures this summer pointed to, while it forecasts esports to grow 25% year-on-year, that still only equates to 1.3% of the overall sports betting market.

This year has shown the potential of esports, albeit in extenuating circumstances. Yet it still only represents 1% of the sports betting market, despite months of inactivity from live sports betting. Arguably it won't get a better chance to have a virtual free hit to attract new players; now live sport is back and hopefully not disappearing again anytime soon. This summer has proven the pull and appetite of sports betting across the globe and, no matter how popular esports becomes, there's no beating the thrill of traditional live sports.

### **OWAIN FLANDERS – ESPORTS IS A LOGICAL PROGRESSION**

During my recent interview with Luckbox CEO Quentin Martin, I have to admit I was taken aback when he said he was willing to bet "substantial amounts of money" that esports betting would overtake traditional sports betting in his lifetime. Like many traditional sports fans, I have always held a certain scepticism in regards to esports in general. For me, it has always seemed more like a passing trend – one that would eventually fizzle out into nothingness as traditional sports and betting markets surrounding them raged on.

That said, even the vertical's harshest critics cannot ignore the statistics we have seen over the past few years. Esports has been growing – and growing fast. According to reports, the vertical is seeing growth of around 24% each year, with revenue surpassing \$1bn in 2019. Undoubtedly, this growth has been accelerated by the pandemic, which – according to Martin – saw Luckbox's betting volumes increase by 500%.

While these growth figures are certainly significant, it might still be difficult to imagine esports will ever surpass traditional sports betting. After all, sports betting is still seeing huge growth around the world,

most notably in the US as further states look to legalise.

That said, if we consider the general demographic of esports enthusiasts, Martin's prediction becomes significantly more realistic. In the 18 to 25 age range, the vertical is already more popular than traditional sports betting. As these bettors age, it seems inevitable they will be replaced by more bettors with a similar love for the gaming world. Gaming technology is only ever improving, while streaming services like Twitch are becoming more and more popular.

Meanwhile, 10 years down the line, those who currently fall within the 18 to 25 range will become the gambling industry's main source of income. Will these bettors shift to traditional sports as they grow older, or could we genuinely be seeing a changing dynamic in the betting world? The latter certainly seems more logical.

For lovers of traditional sports betting, it is often easy to dismiss esports betting as another fad. But it is very clear it is here to stay. If esports continues to grow as it has for the past few years, in 10 to 20 years' time, we could genuinely see esports betting begin to challenge some traditional sports in certain markets. Who knows? Maybe Martin's theory is not so unimaginable after all.

### **PETER LYNCH – PHYSICAL SPORTS WILL ALWAYS BE KING**

The demographics are undeniably very similar, with both sports betting and esports betting markets particularly appealing to young males. Both industries have a global reach and both have witnessed huge sums of money being gambled on various events. The only real difference is that traditional sports have been around for much, much longer, with esports a relatively new phenomenon that has gained huge momentum in the last couple of years.

There is, therefore, one major issue that stands out; the physical sports industry is worth an estimated \$620bn, compared to the \$1.1bn value of esports. The latter is growing, but the former is well ahead. Sponsorship, apparel and other components are key, though gambling is one of the major factors playing a part within these mammoth totals.

Several exciting esports events have certainly attracted huge numbers, with the MPL ID Season 5 tournament from Mobile Legends sitting top of the all-time list with 1.2 million viewers. The PUBG Mobile World League 2020 East (PUBG Mobile) and the LCK Spring Split 2020 (League of Legends) competitions closely follow, each boasting viewing figures of 1.1 million. The fact these events took place only recently proves just how popular esports currently is.

But such numbers are somewhat minuscule compared to the most popular traditional sporting events of all-time, with FIFA reporting 3.57 billion people had tuned in to the 64 matches at the 2018 World Cup. Over 100 million watch the Super Bowl every year, with half a million regularly switching on for the Grand National.

The growing momentum of esports has seen an estimated \$12.9bn globally wagered on events in 2020, but that is once again dwarfed by the numbers spent on major sporting events year in, year out. FIFA reported wagers of \$136bn for the aforementioned World Cup in Russia, with \$7bn alone bet on the final between France and Croatia. A similar figure was recorded in the 2020 Super Bowl final, with the \$250m spent at the 2019 Kentucky Derby another example in an endless list.

Esports is growing at an unprecedented rate, but physical sports will always be king within the world of gambling, in my opinion. Despite the ever-changing circumstances of the world we live in, a global thirst for tradition will always remain, while physical sports have the added bonus of the continued presence of star athletes and the worldwide reach that comes with them.

**“EVEN THE VERTICAL'S HARSHTEST CRITICS CANNOT IGNORE THE STATS WE HAVE SEEN OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS. ESPORTS HAS BEEN GROWING – AND GROWING FAST. ACCORDING TO REPORTS, THE VERTICAL IS SEEING GROWTH OF AROUND 24% EACH YEAR, WITH REVENUE SURPASSING \$1BN IN 2019” – OWAIN FLANDERS**

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# ESPORTS FOCUS: FANSUNITE

Jeremy Hutchings, CTO at FansUnite, reflects on 35 years of gaming and esports with Tim Poole



JEREMY HUTCHINGS

## Have you got any particular success stories or embarrassing defeats that haunt you?

At university I was part of a gaming group where we'd have regular LAN parties, and Command & Conquer: Red Alert was a favorite. I remember my mouth writing several cheques that my gaming skills couldn't match at the time. On more than a few occasions, I ended up buying a few rounds at the local pub after getting demolished.

During that time StarCraft came out, it was like the clouds parted and the gods had handed down a version of the future. Again, I ended up buying a lot of drinks for friends after failing to master the Protoss in the early years. En Taro Adun.

## If you could be a character in any video game, who would you be?

Many characters came to mind, though I think I'd choose Gordon Freeman from Half-Life. I like the idea of being a PhD in Theoretical Physics from MIT and being handy with a crowbar at the same time.

The original Half-Life came out in November 1998, so Gordon has had a good run over the last few decades. I think it's always handy for a solo character to have – or at least appear to have – a balance of skills. I think “a scientist with a machine gun” is a fair gaming translation of “a balance of skills”.

## If you were tasked with improving the FIFA game series, what would you change and why?

Well, I don't play the FIFA game series. Just not quite my interest. So, I guess I'd improve it by making it a game with spaceships and lasers.

## You are given unlimited resources and the chance to create your very own brand new esports game. What would you make?

I would make an esports game that works on two levels. There would be a fast, interactive period (like watching CS:GO or Dota 2), and then an underlying game that is slower and based on strategy (aka “the campaign”). There are lots of skilled gamers out there, but the usual esports are typically a subset of all games, and naturally high-action competitive ones. They are fun to watch, great to play and good to wager on.

Several games, such as Total War, already have shown that having a longer strategy-based game can be balanced with a shorter high-action game that complement each other. They can also be played independently. A campaign can be played and the outcome of any battles, conflict, etc., be decided by the roll of a dice. In the same fast capture, the flag games can be presented on a bigger map to show progress.

With both combined, there would be a story for an audience to follow between the big conflicts, which would be the esports tournaments, as well as seeing which teams were being set up better by the gamers playing the strategy game. Do you want to walk into a CS:GO game with \$5 because of bad strategy game play, or \$20,000? I know who I'd bet on in that game.

## What is your favorite esports game, be it to watch, play or bet on?

To watch, it would be CS:GO and Dota 2. They both require a combination of strategy and great team dynamics, which makes it fun to watch. There are some great teams out there at the moment. And when two well-matched teams meet, it makes for some compelling viewing.

I play a lot of games at the moment, though the one I play the most is Dota 2. Even though I play far more Dota 2 than CS:GO, I bet both. Both games are easy to watch and understand, which makes wagering possible, even for those who do not have expert knowledge.

## Are you much of a gamer yourself?

For most of my life. In fact, I have been for the last 35 years or so. The first game I played seriously, which actually got me curious about software development, was the original Elite. That is not an esports, of course, but it is a legend in the game franchise world. Between then and now I have likely played hundreds of different games. Some that spring to mind include Quake, Unreal Tournament, every version of StarCraft (since the day of release) Dota 2, BattleTech, all of Borderlands and Doom franchises, and most of the Warhammer franchise, too.

To take a break from the action, I play a lot of sim world games. I've put more hours into Factorio than I care to admit, as well as lots of the classic Nintendo games on a Switch. There is something incredibly relaxing about switching off and playing some simple arcade games. Most recently, I've just started on Watch Dogs: Legion and I am looking forward to Cyberpunk 2077. I fell in love with Cyberpunk 2020 many years ago.



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# PLAY HARD

**Sandisiwe Bhengu**, business partner at Hollywoodbets, speaks to Tim Poole about working for the biggest radio station in Africa, why she would play Scandal's Olivia Pope and her biggest betting industry lesson

## YOU PREVIOUSLY WORKED AS A MARKETING COORDINATOR FOR THE BIGGEST RADIO STATION IN AFRICA. IF YOU COULD SET UP YOUR OWN RADIO STATION, WHAT WOULD IT BE AND WHAT WOULD YOU CALL IT?

It would be a station dedicated to empowering communities through information, and proceeds for advertising (that are not for station operations) would go towards community improvement and projects to empower women specifically. Because when you empower a woman, you uplift entire families and communities. The station would probably be called Amandla FM.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY INTERESTING STORIES FROM YOUR RADIO CAREER?

One memory in particular is at one of the festive season events for Ukhozi FM, which was held in Ladysmith, KZN. Ukhozi FM enjoys a listenership in excess of seven million and a cult following. I was wearing the branded T-shirt that the staff wear and had arrived in a branded vehicle with some of the radio personalities; so a lot of the crowd had spotted me moving around backstage and in the VIP section. When it was time to leave I walked out of there just like anyone else would and got into the car, and all of a sudden this huge crowd had gathered outside of the vehicle trying to get pictures and signed promo items. They kept asking me which DJ I was, some shouting out random DJ names to establish if that's who I was. It was so crazy and such a huge crowd that I had to get a police escort out of a sports ground.

## AS YOUR COMPANY IS CALLED HOLLYWOODBETS, IF YOU COULD TRAVEL TO HOLLYWOOD AND PLAY ANY FAMOUS MOVIE ROLE, WHICH ONE WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Not a movie per se but a series – I would play Olivia Pope (Scandal or the Fixer as it's known locally) for her tenacity, intellect, power and influence. It's definitely one of the most iconic female roles of the past decade. One of my favourite quotes from Olivia (played by Kerry Washington) is: "I am very good at what I do. I am better at it than anyone else. And that is not arrogance; that is a fact."

## WHICH HOLLYWOOD ACTOR/ACTRESS WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO WORK WITH?

I have the pleasure of working with one already, Nomzamo Mbatha who hails from KwaMashu in KZN and is currently based in California. Her Hollywood debut is coming up soon so watch this space. Nomzamo is a very talented actress; however,

what I enjoy most about working with her is her humility and philanthropic spirit. Hollywoodbets has partnered with her foundation, the Lighthouse Foundation, on multiple occasions to support young South Africans with bursaries for their education and empowerment. We also partnered with the foundation over the COVID-19 lockdown period to support communities all over the country; and we were able to deliver just under 6,000 relief packages to South African families.

## SINCE ENTERING THE BETTING INDUSTRY, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY THE BIGGEST LESSON YOU'VE LEARNED IS?

When I entered the betting industry it was a completely new world for me; and I had previously not been aware of its magnitude and impact – especially locally and on the continent. What I have learned is how competitive the industry is, more so than any other industry I have been exposed to; and what I enjoy most about it is the drive for innovation and how to do things smarter, better and faster through the integration of technology. It's really been an insightful and amazing experience.

## WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FAVOURITE PASTIME OR HOBBY DURING LOCKDOWN AND THE PANDEMIC?

I used the time to reflect a lot on what I have achieved and what I still want to achieve, and to really focus on the things that matter most. One of which is family – so in a nutshell my favourite pastime was spending all that quality time with family.



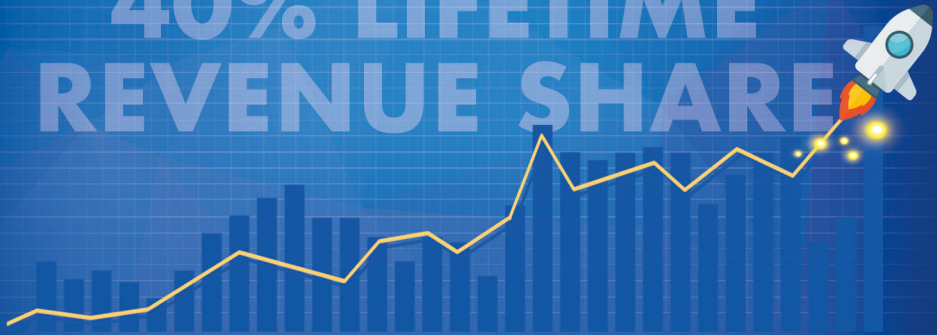
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