

trafficology

Marketing & affiliate focus by *Gambling Insider*

MARCH 2021

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AffiliateCon: Hayley Stansfield on ways to increase visibility

Upping your game with AFFmore's Thomas Azzopardi

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FROM THE GROUND UP
Emerging esports platforms raise their game



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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. In this edition, we review affiliate programmes globally for January 2021. The below is a breakdown of the top 10 sites by vertical, including: overall, casino, sports and poker across mobile (phones and tablets), and overall, casino, sports and poker across desktop.



OVERALL (MOBILE)

Rank	Name	Website
1	bet365 Affiliates	www.bet365affiliates.com
2	NetHive Affiliate Program	www.nethive.com
3	AfiliadosW	afiliadosw.co
4	betway Partners Africa	www.betwaypartnersafri-ca.com
5	Entain Partners	www.entainpartners.com
6	Euro Partners	www.europartners.com
7	eToro Partners	www.etoropartners.com
8	Best Partners	www.bestpartners.com
9	Yahoo Fantasy Sports Affiliates	sports.yahoo.com/dailyfanta-sy/affiliates
10	Kindred Affiliates	www.kindredaffiliates.com

CASINO (MOBILE)

Rank	Name	Website
1	Gamesys Group Partners	www.gamesysgrouppart-ners.com
2	Euro Partners	www.europartners.com
3	WinBet Affiliates	winbetaffiliates.bg
4	Platin Casino Affiliates	partners.platincasino.com
5	bet365 Affiliates	www.bet365affiliates.com
6	Entain Partners	www.entainpartners.com
7	Buffalo Partners	www.buffalopartners.com
8	Sweetspot Affiliates	sweetspotaffiliates.com
9	PlayAmo Partners	playamopartners.com
10	LeoVegas Affiliate	www.leovegasaffiliates.com

SPORTS (MOBILE)

Rank	Name	Website
1	AfliadosW	afliadosw.co
2	NetHive Affiliate Program	www.nethive.com
3	bet365 Affiliates	www.bet365affiliates.com
4	betway Partners Africa	www.betwaypartnersafri-ca.com
5	Entain Partners	www.entainpartners.com
6	Best Partners	www.bestpartners.com
7	Bovada Affiliate Program	www.bovada.lv/new-bovada-affiliate-program
8	Tipsport Partners	www.tipsport.cz/partner
9	Betway Partners	www.betwaypartners.com
10	Betfair Partnerships	affiliates.betfair.com

POKER (MOBILE)

Rank	Name	Website
1	Stars Affiliate Club	www.starsaffiliateclub.com
2	WPN Affiliates	www.wpnaffiliates.com
3	Winamax Affiliates	www.winamax.fr/en/affiliates
4	U-affiliates	www.uffiliates.com
5	Entain Partners	www.entainpartners.com
6	The Spartan Poker Affiliate Program	www.thespartanpoker.com/affiliate/overview.html
7	bet365 Affiliates	www.bet365affiliates.com
8	CommissionKings	commissionkings.ag
9	GGPartners	en.ggpoker.com/partners/affiliate-program/
10	Black Chip Poker Affiliates	affiliates.blackchippoker.eu



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.

OVERALL (DESKTOP)

Rank	Name	Website
1	bet365 Affiliates	www.bet365affiliates.com
2	eToro Partners	www.etoropartners.com
3	Yahoo Fantasy Sports Affiliates	sports.yahoo.com/dailyfantasy/affiliates
4	Betfair Partnerships	affiliates.betfair.com
5	DraftKings Affiliates	www.draftkings.com/affiliates
6	Gamesys Group Partners	www.gamesysgrouppartners.com
7	NetHive Affiliate Program	www.nethive.com
8	Kindred Affiliates	www.kindredaffiliates.com
9	BinPartner	binpartner.com
10	Entain Partners	Entain Partners

CASINO (DESKTOP)

Rank	Name	Website
1	Gamesys Group Partners	www.gamesysgrouppartners.com
2	Stakes Affiliates	affiliates.stakes.com
3	Betsson Group Affiliates	www.betssongroupaffili-
4	WinBet Affiliates	winbetaffiliates.bg
5	Platin Casino Affiliates	partners.platincasino.com
6	LeoVegas Affiliate	www.leovegasaffiliates.com
7	Kindred Affiliates	www.kindredaffiliates.com
8	Videoslots Affiliate Program	partner.videoslots.com
9	Paf Partners	www.pafpartners.com
10	U-ffiliates	www.uffiliates.com

SPORTS (DESKTOP)

Rank	Name	Website
1	bet365 Affiliates	www.bet365affiliates.com
2	Betfair Partnerships	affiliates.betfair.com
3	AfiliadosW	afiliadosw.co
4	Entain Partners	www.entainpartners.com
5	Best Partners	www.bestpartners.com
6	NetHive Affiliate Program	www.nethive.com
7	Bovada Affiliate Program	www.bovada.lv/new-bovada-affiliate-program
8	Stoiximan.gr Affiliates	affiliates.betano.com
9	Kindred Affiliates	www.kindredaffiliates.com
10	Tipsport Partners	www.tipsport.cz/partner

POKER (DESKTOP)

Rank	Name	Website
1	WPN Affiliates	www.wpnaffiliates.com
2	Winamax Affiliates	www.winamax.fr/en/affiliates
3	Stars Affiliate Club	www.starsaffiliateclub.com
4	Entain Partners	www.entainpartners.com
5	U-ffiliates	www.uffiliates.com
6	GGPartners	en.ggpoker.com/partners/affiliate-program/
7	CommissionKings	commissionkings.ag
8	bet365 Affiliates	www.bet365affiliates.com
9	Natural8 Affiliates	affiliate.natural8.com
10	Best Partners	www.bestpartners.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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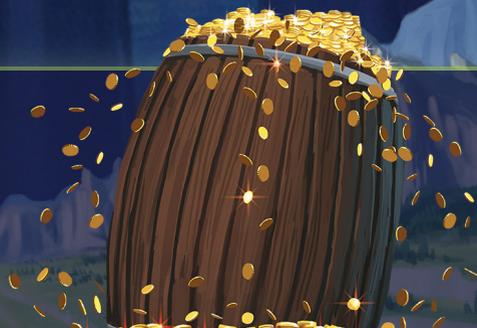
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TOM WADE

ZERO TO SIX-FIGURE HERO

Tom Wade, esports specialist and software engineer, speaks about growing esports affiliate SickOdds from zero to a six-figure sale



SickOdds was, and still is, one of the leading affiliate platforms in the esports space. Myself and my co-founder, Nick, started developing SickOdds as an odds comparison platform that we'd want to use ourselves as gamers back in 2016.

Esports has been running on a large scale for substantially longer than when we first started, but the betting industry had only recently begun offering markets and covering esports titles. Due to this, when we started, there were very few affiliates in the space and especially those solely dedicated to esports as an emerging market. This turned out to be a double-edged sword.

On the plus side, we quickly gained a large segment of the market and ranked highly on well-targeted SERPs with very little effort required. We focused on title-specific landing pages for games, whilst supplementing this with relevant news, bonus and betting content. This was even before sportbooks had launched a bidding war on PPC terms, so Google life was good.

With SickOdds we spread our bets, so to speak, on emerging esports titles. The aim was always to facilitate any title that had betting markets from any of our top partners and this gave us an advantage over competitors. We covered 20+ esports titles with varied levels of relevant content.

Roughly 80-90% of all esports betting traffic is powered by just three games: League of Legends, CS:GO and Dota 2. The remaining 10-20% is made up of the remaining 21 that we also covered. We made an early decision to, of course, cover these top three titles, but also focus on the niche titles in order to face less competition.

A small number of titles flourished (e.g. Fortnite, Call of Duty and Rocket League), but the majority of tier 2 and 3 titles never really became commercially viable. This was a learning experience, but one that needed to be taken as new esports titles emerge and fade over time. For the ones that did solidify themselves, we had a solid

foothold on SEO and content which was a major advantage. When the first Fortnite World Cup took place we had secured a top spot for the search term and we sent an average of one click every 3.5 minutes to our betting partners over the 48-hour event.

The downside of this was the traffic, in line with traditional more established sports, was negligible in comparison. We're talking less than 1%. This is always the trouble when targeting a niche, but we were looking at the long game and knew that building a solid foundation would pay dividends over time.

In the summer of 2020, we were approached by an established affiliate network, which prefers to remain unnamed, with the intention to acquire SickOdds as the flagship of its esports branch. Below is a brief explanation of the journey from where we started to where we ended, with all the little bumps along the way.

DEVELOPMENT LED

During development we wanted to offer something above just news posts and simple links of where to place bets. One of the key components of our infrastructure was our internally developed Odds Engine. At its peak this amalgamated, normalised and compared odds from 28 sportbooks across 24 esports titles.

One of the first questions we asked potential sportbooks when signing up was: "Do you have an API or data feed?" If the answer was yes then we would prioritise getting their live esports odds fed into the Odds Engine. Allowing us to pull out comparisons for matches, show upcoming matches with the best odds for targeted geos and so much more. If the answer however was no, without hope of a "sneaky" way to glean esports betting odds, then as a rule of thumb we passed until they did.

The Odds Engine became a key part in both our platform's growth and our sale. For traditional sports there are quite a few pre-built API's for this, but with esports being in its infancy there was a definite gap that we filled.

COVID-19

Covid-19 affected not just the sporting industry, but the world as we know it. Though while the majority of businesses suffered, the esports industry was a rare exception that seemed to flourish. The virtual world slowly built upwards, from a primarily online-only scene, to filling packed stadiums along the way. So reversing these advancements back to online was a relatively simple step with the infrastructure in place.

With this, esports had a strangle-hold on the betting market with large numbers of traditional sports bettors looking for similar esports titles to satisfy that 'itch'. Football fans turned to FIFA, basketball to NBA2k and esports titles saw betting growth of 200%+ over the span of mere weeks.

With this surge of interest, the eyes of the betting industry as a whole turned to esports and lit a fire underneath it. There were some traditional sportbooks such as Betway whose efforts in esports I've admired for many years; though they are the possible exception. As more sportbooks focused on esports, SERPs quickly became hot property for PPC, pushing our organic terms further down so we had to begin to expand our approach. Another double-edged sword.

SOCIAL

In an effort to compliment our SERP positions, we looked to branch out and gain a social presence.

We quickly became known in the esports ecosphere and always strived to offer usable, informative content that wasn't just farming



TOM WADE

clicks through the site. This was greatly helped by a passionate writing team of esports fans who wrote about what they loved, and it really came through.

With its online focus, esports is a 24/7 global ecosystem so there are plenty of people to engage with, regardless of time. It's vitally important that you know what you're talking about, though, as each title has its own nuances and are keen to sniff out an imposter.

A number of affiliates work solely through social platforms and it can be a great tool at your disposal. If you are looking to quickly bolster a following, there are plenty of in-game items ready to be given away to snowball your growth.

HLTV ACQUIRED

In early 2020, CS:GO esports specialist network HLTV was acquired by sports betting affiliate Better Collective for €34.5m (\$41.7m). This was a huge moment for the esports affiliate scene; seeing such a large news-focused community with near-to-no betting content, and recognised for such a high amount shows the vast potential there. Since its purchase we've seen plenty of odds tables and betting content start to be implemented and fortunately it has been done quite tastefully.

TAKEAWAYS

For someone wanting to undertake the esports affiliate journey, I'd definitely recommend it wholeheartedly. The market is far more established than it was back in 2016, but this comes with a number of benefits. We've seen in HLTV and ourselves how success can come from this in time.

The esports community is thriving and betting is a core concept that many already understand from gaming. Lootboxes are betting personified, which has been a recent hot topic, and gamers are inherently competitive. This combined nature and nurture creates a very strong betting candidate.

WHAT'S NEXT?

While at SickOdds I interviewed emerging UK-licensed sportsbook, Midnite, and have since began working full-time as a Software Engineer. On the affiliate side I'm also now working on a Call of Duty focused esports affiliate, codbets.co.

AFFILIATECON REVIEW: KEEPING VISIBLE

Hayley Stansfield, PR & content marketing manager at SEO agency BlueClaw, presents at AffiliateCon on how to use digital PR to improve organic visibility for affiliate sites



a comprehensive checklist in place, including: ranking positions for keywords, current traffic to key landing pages, domain authority of your site before starting PR work, number of back links and percentage of links from publications your competitors have been featured on.

GAINING AN UNDERSTANDING FROM WITHIN

As well as these SEO insights, your own data can be really crucial to generate good ideas that are going to appeal to your target audience as well as journalists. For example, you may want to use Google Analytics to see what types of people are most likely to interact with your brand and use your services. Facebook Audience Insights is really good for seeing what types of content and pages they follow online to get a good understanding of what kind of media and topics they like. Also, your own sales and customer profile data ensures you are the best person to gain access to a good understanding of your audience, including the age, sex and location data.

Once you have all this information, you can look to generate ideas that will stand out in a crowded market, but will still earn the top-tier media placements you need to improve your site's overall visibility. The key to this is really thinking outside the box, especially now advertising is stricter than ever. Make sure the ideas are trustworthy for Google and in line with your target audience, and that they also tie in with the targeted keywords you want to rank for.

THINK LIKE A JOURNALIST

The media love to hear about entertainment topics, so you need to think about who reads these publications. Topics that tend to work for affiliate brands are entertainment, such as lifestyle and culture, celebrity news and finance data. Journalists love big numbers and prediction-based data too. Anything to do with the environment and its impact on wider business is equally doing really well at the moment. There are many different avenues you can take in terms of data sources.

Your own unique sales data can be used to create a story. You can use third-party data such as polls, data such as Government research and predictive data. There are also plenty of free data sources as well as some paid ones. Once you have an idea, think like a journalist when speaking to them. Journalists really want something that's relevant to them so make sure you know what topics they've covered before and get to know their specialisms. Try to prioritise national publications initially when sending out a press release. They get to cover the story and nobody else for 24 hours. Then after 24 hours pass, you can go out to the wider media.

For the rest of Hayley's full presentation from BlueClaw, plus more great content for affiliates, register for free on affiliatecon.com

Some of the biggest challenges of trying to build links for affiliate brands can be general advertising restrictions, especially now that they're even stricter during the pandemic. And often journalists will prefer to feature a brand that isn't an online gaming client, so it can be really difficult. But there are many ways to overcome these obstacles. You need to be tactful and go about it the right way.

To make sure your PR activity is in line with SEO, it's really important to understand that Google appreciates trusted and organic content now more than ever. This includes avoiding any paid link building in any way whatsoever. Google wants to see content from websites that follow the EAT methodology, which stands for Expertise, Authority and Trust, the three pillars you should include when creating your content.

TRUST THE KEY TO AVOID FALLING BEHIND

This means showing a really good understanding of the topic you're talking about, making sure you're building links with sites that also have really good authority behind them, such as national publications that are likely to provide a link back. If you do all of this, ensuring the sites you link with are trustworthy, you minimise the chance of Google penalising you with its core updates, which can seriously impact your site's ranking and overall visibility. That's why it's crucial for your PR activity to be aligned with your SEO strategy. With this in mind, you want to begin by ensuring you have the correct tools and insights in place before generating ideas.

This includes knowing what keywords you want to target, the landing page you want to push out and that you have a really good understanding of where your competitors build links out from as well. Look at who's doing it right and what you can learn from their strategies. You can take all of this information to make sure you have

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AFFILIATECON REVIEW: NOW YOU SEE IT

Bastian Grimm, CEO and co-founder of Peak Ace, discusses Google's core web vitals and the importance of image optimisation

The critical rendering path is essentially the code and resource that you're required to render the initial view of a web page. So if you look at that conceptually, what we have is a section of a page that's critical. We call that the initial view. Then there is the stuff which is not so critical, or "below the fold", if you think about it. Of course, that also varies depending on screen size, resolution and device type.

Technically, what the browser needs is the CSS object model. Essentially it's kind of a map where all the CSS styles are found on a web page. It's a bit similar to the DOM, but it's for CSS, not for HTML. So for example you have a headline with a certain font size, then this would be one map entry. Or a background colour of something else, or a font colour of something else. So we're talking about a map for understanding style sheets for HTML. Web browsers would use this CSS object model to actually

render a page. Essentially, when they go through the HTML and build the DOM, they see that there are CSS codes in there - one or multiple ones - and if it's an external CSS, the browser obviously needs to wait for the download to happen. Then it can combine the DOM with the CSS object model to create what's called the render tree. Only then can the browser actually display something on the web page.

Google doesn't make a single CSS Get request, and that's quite interesting because requesting external CSS is actually more expensive than inlining everything, and the developers now would say, "If you inline everything, it's extremely hard to maintain. It's extremely hard to work with."

But there's something brand new that I'm excited about called the content visibility property for CSS. It enables the user agent to skip an element's rendering work, including layout and painting, which is the most expensive stuff and takes the most time. If you think about it conceptually, it's a bit like lazy loading for images, but not just for images since you could do it for entire paragraphs. This is super exciting and something that I think we will be hearing about a lot more in the coming months.

A big topic that I also want to address is image optimisation. Roughly 60% of all web traffic is made up of images. That's a lot. So every site gets around almost one megabyte of images per single URL. This is constantly growing, which is crazy. So basic optimisation should be done for everything and anything. I'm a big fan of tinyPNG and tinyJPEG, but there's a whole bunch of others that can do image optimisation work. Use whatever you feel like, but make sure that you do it. The reason why I like this one is because it has an API, it has WordPress integration, and it even has integration with Photoshop. So strategically what you could do is start the process very early on when your design team starts building things and export them. Let them already optimise, then you don't have to do it afterwards because that's what we see often in audits: people just forget about it; there's no kind of automated solution when someone uploads a new image and then you get your work done and then you need to start again.

One more thing about imagery is to make sure that you also generate responsive images. One image for all the screen resolutions doesn't really work. It's either too much overhead or too bad in terms of quality. If you don't know how to start with it, Responsive Image Breakpoints is a great help. You can put an image there that generates the responsive variants you can download and deploy it. And of course, always specify dimensions because that will prevent any CLS.



BASTIAN GRIMM

LOOK THE PART

Claire Wellard, CEO and founder of iGamingXL, on ramping up the motivation and determination to ensure 2021 is your most successful year



2021 is in full swing as we move into the last month of Q1. 2020 was a hard year for everyone on a global scale, one that no one in our lifetime has ever seen before. Not only did we have to adapt the way we live, but we had to adapt the way we do business as well.

We have seen some countries on a total lockdown, only leaving the house for essentials, and other countries with a ban on alcohol sales.

As an industry, we should all feel very blessed that business life for most can continue. Of course, there have been redundancies, businesses scrambling to change from a sports-

focused business model to other verticals, learning quickly how to change focus to stay in business. If this is you, I take my hat off to you and you should be proud of what you achieved last year. Maybe you would have added new channels or verticals to your business in time, but this was forced upon you and it created some sink or swim scenarios.

One of the major changes which hit most of us hard was the travel ban and subsequently the lack of conferences. Sixteen years in this industry and last year was the only year I did not get on an airplane – not even pregnancy slowed down my conference attendance. But Covid-19 got me stuck at home

like it got us all. We all have friends, acquaintances, peers all around the globe, and not seeing them at all in over 12 months has been incredibly hard. Everyone I speak to tells me their number-one thing they are looking forward to is the travel ban being lifted and the return of the conferences.

2020 started a massive boost in Facetime, Zoom and video Skype calls. I am part of a Saturday Facetime/Zoom group that started probably six months ago with around 20 industry peers. The numbers have dwindled slightly as life continues to get back to some sort of normality, but it's amazing to hear how people in different countries are handling life. It's nice to see faces of those I haven't seen in over a year and hear about the highs and lows of their week, both from a business standpoint but personally as well. These things are invaluable in keeping us sane and building the bonds which would otherwise be made during conference times.

Clients call me now more than ever, and I am always prepared; you'll never catch me sitting here working from home in my PJs, so no matter whether the phone rings or it's a video call, I am always prepared. This is one of my biggest tips. Get dressed as though you are going to an office. You mentally feel better about your day. It's like the saying "dress for the job you want, not the job you have". The way you dress is reflective of your mood. Think about it and think how you feel when you dress in certain clothes and the way it makes you feel. Sit on the sofa in your dressing gown, laptop on your knee and you work on a go-slow mode. Sit with a shirt on and at your desk, and you will work faster and more concentrated on the task at hand.

Another problem I hear from people is about how they

don't have a proper home setup, even after all this time working from home. This is huge! Would you sleep on a mattress on the floor for six months and still expect to have a great night's sleep? No, you wouldn't. The same should be said for your working environment. You don't need a massive space to work in, but you do need an un-cluttered table where you have a clear backdrop for your calls; a place where you feel organised, professional, and ready to smash your day.

So now you look good, you have a place to work, but the lockdown has got your mood at an all-time low. You haven't seen friends or family in months, you haven't been to a restaurant, you haven't travelled – it gets to the best of us. Even the "fake it till you make it" isn't cutting it for you. I have a couple of tips for this to help you mentally get into a better place:

1. Get outside: Go for a walk, go for a run or just get to somewhere where you can get much-needed daylight and chill away from everything for 20 minutes a day. Vitamin D plays a massive part in our physical and mental health. Perhaps you can start the 10k step challenge, where your goal is to hit 10k steps a day. It can be hard with a desk job. Trust me, I just did a 30-day challenge on this and only managed about 20 out of the 30 days to hit 10k. Some days I barely hit 2k.

2. Start listening to motivational speakers, TEDx Talks on YouTube, or podcasts. These can be hugely impactful on your state of mind, how you think about life and how to put things in perspective. I've listened to these on many days where I don't feel my best, and also when I'm out running and they are hugely impactful on my day. They have given me new business ideas, boosted my productivity and changed my outlook on my day.

But on a more serious note, if these small changes and tips don't help, and you feel like you need more professional help, please pick up the phone. There are always people to help you and to support you. MIND (a UK mental health Charity) states one in four people will experience a mental health issue of some kind every year. During lockdown, they reported that 60% of adults and 68% of young people have said their mental health has gotten worse in lockdown. Pick up the phone if you need it. You are not alone.

I could talk for hours (and pages) about positivity, working from home, and how to have a successful 2021, but I will end with one final tip for you:

Set yourself some goals. At the end of 2021 what do you want to have achieved? Who do you want to be? Where do you want to be business-wise?

Maybe you have goals for business and goals for your personal life, and that's perfect. I have a vision board combined for business and professional, which is in front of my desk to look at every day. It helps me stay on track and work towards my goals at every opportunity.

Think about your own goals and write them down. For example, by December 2021: I want a pay rise or a new house. I want to launch a new website or hire two members of staff. Whatever your goal is, write it down. Then break this down into smaller monthly tasks to help you achieve this goal. Set yourself a target and work towards it. Rome wasn't built in a day, but everything is achievable if you just put your mind to it. And if you cannot do it in lockdown, when can you?



CLAIRE WELLARD

ONWARD & UPWARD

Trafficology catches up with **Thomas Azzopardi**, head of affiliates for AFFMore, to discuss new launches, industry changes and how the pandemic has had an impact on daily life



How has AFFMore developed since you joined five years ago?

I saw AFFMore being launched with LuckyDino when it was just a few months old, in a small office with only a few members of staff. Since then, I have seen it evolve into a success story. The number of employees has increased, and the company has grown month after month and year after year, delivering more brands, now totalling four casino sites; LuckyDino, CasinoJefe, KalevalaKasino and Olaspill.

We have also recently been acquired by EEG (Esports Entertainment Group), a NASDAQ listed company, running Esports and holding a Maltese, UK, and Ireland casino licence. We have now stepped into the big game, and people should expect to hear about us even more soon.

In the last couple of years, what changes have you seen within the industry?

I have seen a lot of country markets being regulated or implementing strict restrictions or new regulations. For example, the likes of Denmark implementing the NEMID into landing pages was "fun" back when I worked for a previous competitor. Sweden is another example where we had to step out with AFFMore, or more recently Germany where the new restrictions have affected GGR. I have seen companies such as AFFMore, and other smart competitors being agile and able to change focus and localise new

markets quickly via affiliates. In brief, I have seen many competitors closing down, and only a few remain serious nowadays.

What would you say has been the biggest positive throughout the pandemic for AFFMore?

I have been working remotely for more than seven years, and now working remotely is seen as the new normal for everyone. On a more serious note, the lockdowns and restrictions in our core markets raised our bottom-line numbers significantly. We have had the best months in terms of CRM, deposit levels, net revenues and so on. It mainly highlighted the importance of keeping social links with affiliates, and we are more than ever ready to meet everyone at iGB Affiliate in Amsterdam at the end of September.

On the other hand, what has been the most negative aspect of the pandemic for the company?

No longer being able to socialise and network with our affiliates as we used to. We miss all the conference fun, team dinners or extra team building activities and social events. I employed two more members to my team, and I am yet to even meet Gemma in person, while I rely a lot on Joonas travelling between Finland and Malta to keep up the team morale. I met Henna quickly in LAC before the pandemic, and then everything changed as we are all aware.

Speaking to Trafficology in October, you mentioned that moving into new markets was a key aim going forward. Was this something you managed to achieve, and were there any barriers along the way?

Yes correct, we have managed to start diving into the Canada adventure and hope to scale up soon with more game providers and products. We are also launching in New Zealand and India next, and more to come.

You also spoke of plans to implement more payment methods. How has this progressed?

We have added a few new methods and are still progressing forward to implement and launch new ones, once the acquisition is finalised. We have been lucky that we have been bought by a company which already has additional currencies and payment methods ready to go. They also have the benefit of holding additional licences. We are currently preparing for the New Zealand dollar to be implemented onto our platform.

October also saw the launch of AFFMore 2. What are the main improvements with this new platform?

AFFMore was initially built in one hour during a Netrefer meeting, with a smartphone device by our legendary J, head of tech. In my personal opinion, I would have to say this code is a work of art. It was built originally for our flagship Luckydino and a single brand program, whereas, AFFMore Version 2 is completely built for enhanced multi-brand reporting and use. Along the way, we have already made a few improvements with dynamic parameters, pixel tracking, bespoke marketing materials and landers, but

“I HAVE SEEN A LOT OF COUNTRY MARKETS BEING REGULATED OR IMPLEMENTING STRICT RESTRICTIONS OR NEW REGULATIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE LIKES OF DENMARK IMPLEMENTING THE NEMID INTO LANDING PAGES WAS “FUN” BACK WHEN I WORKED FOR A PREVIOUS COMPETITOR. I HAVE SEEN COMPANIES SUCH AS AFFMORE, AND OTHER SMART COMPETITORS, BEING AGILE AND ABLE TO CHANGE FOCUS AND LOCALISE NEW MARKETS QUICKLY VIA AFFILIATES”



THOMAS AZZOPARDI

AFFMore Version 2 also added a fresh new API system. A better front end was also developed, with more tools and clear information about our brands and promotions.

Has the platform met expectations?

Yes, it is really nice to work with; it's slick and useful. We can efficiently access player values and link performance better. We also have better reporting for dynamic parameters. There are a multitude of things we can do now and in the near future, like an automated invoicing system, which is the last to be implemented. There is always room for optimisation and we have seen how much AFFMore Version 2 has already developed in such a short space of time.

We've seen a number of game releases across AFFMore brands recently. Which ones excite you the most?

Personally as an online gambler, John Hunter and the Mayan Gods, I am really looking forward to trying this game. I still enjoy Reactoonz 2, and all the variety of Megaways games that are being produced. Games like Gonzo Quest Megaways or Fruits Shop Megaways are also nice for the turnover numbers and nice games indeed.

What does the rest of 2021 have in store for AFFMore?

Wow, I'd say a lot more than I can even imagine. Esports, sportsbook, new markets, new strategies and stepping up as a serious competitor in the scene. EEG's company value recently went from \$100m to \$250m in no time. Stay tuned, it seems big things are about to happen at AFFMore.



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THE AFFILIATE EXODUS

Tero Päivärinta, head of accounts at Mr Gamble, speaks about difficulties in Finland that are forcing affiliates to enter other markets



have to decide whether the impact on revenues means their business remains viable or not.

Expanding into new markets is tough, but it can be done even for a small site. There are plenty of markets to target, some regulated and some grey, and with the right approach and determination it is possible to compete with some of the larger brands in the space.

This is how.

ENTER ENGLISH LANGUAGE MARKETS:

For most affiliates, and certainly SEO affiliates, one of the greatest costs in terms of money and resource is content. By targeting English language countries, small affiliates can easily amend key ranking pages for each market without having to worry about translation.

This allows them to extract the greatest possible value from a page by simply making small changes to localise it to each market and ensure that it's considered unique by Google. For example, a New Online Casinos Canada page is not significantly different to a New Online Casinos New Zealand page.

Some of the most exciting English language markets right now include Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, India and of course the USA although here a licence is required and that may be cost prohibitive for smaller affiliates.

DO YOUR RESEARCH TO LOCALISE YOUR OFFERING:

To succeed in each market, it is important to do your research to fully understand player expectations and preferences. It's also important from a content perspective as some words and phrases are different in one market to another; slots are pokies in New Zealand, for instance.

Research also steers what pages you create – while PayPal casinos are popular in the UK, different payment methods are preferred in other markets and this will be reflected in the pages you publish.

PARTNER WITH THE BEST BRANDS FOR THAT MARKET:

Some online casino brands are international but have been developed with specific markets and players in mind. As an affiliate, it's important to understand what properties your readers look for in a casino and partner with the brands that best meet those needs.

Securing the best commercial agreement is vital, too, especially for smaller affiliates who really do need to maximise earnings across all the brands they work with. It's also important when it comes to being able to re-invest in your site as the competition in each market increases.

Ultimately, any affiliate can launch in any market. It just takes planning, research and the most effective use of available resources. The situation in Finland will undoubtedly force publishers to expand internationally and those that do will be in a strong position to not only survive but thrive.

Finland has long been seen as a land of opportunity for online casino brands and affiliates. While state operator Veikkaus holds a monopoly over the market, it is open and consumers are free to sign-up and play at other brands so long as they are not seen to have directly marketed to players.

This has presented affiliates with a huge opportunity to work with operators that accept Finnish players, and many publishers have built sizable businesses in the market. It was only a few years ago that XL Media paid €15m (\$18.2m) to acquire Good Game Ltd's Finnish-facing sites.

But fast forward four years and the Finnish market is changing. The government and Veikkaus are taking active steps to ban overseas operators from the market – a payment block is expected in early 2022 with other protectionist measures likely to follow.

Whether the government can bring its payment block to pass remains to be seen – the Norwegian government has been trying to do this for some time now – but it is putting the frighteners on affiliates with some looking to expand into other countries or leave the market entirely.

Those sites purchased by XL Media for €15m a few years ago are now up for sale.

Of course, big affiliates such as XL Media have the resources to rapidly enter new markets to mitigate any damage done by the changing situation in Finland, but smaller affiliates are not so well placed and it can be difficult for them to expand internationally.

For many, launching their sites into new markets is a huge undertaking and an action they will likely not take. Instead, they will ride out any changes to the Finnish market and ultimately

THRIVING AMID ADVERSITY

Campeón Gaming Partners CEO, **Marinos Shiapanis**, speaks to *Trafficology* about how the online gaming operator managed to come out on the other side of the coronavirus pandemic



MARINOS SHIAPANIS

and work in this new reality; we adopted measures within the office to keep everyone safe, wore masks and sanitised the office regularly, mainly worked remotely, adjusted all our meetings to be online, and postponed all of our internal and external events indefinitely. Our top priority since day one was the safety of our people.

On the other hand, we wanted to keep the quality of our work high towards our customers and our partners. Although we were working remotely, we managed to keep delivering exceptional service. On top of that, we aimed at expanding our business and targeting new key markets while exploring new business territories.

STRONGER THAN EVER

However, what we're particularly proud of is that we doubled our team members during this pandemic; 2020 started off with 23 employees and finished with 49. The dedication, hard work, and business integrity of our people gave us the chance to expand our business and grow our team.

A year ago, we didn't know how this pandemic situation would evolve. Today, we see it is much more seriously than everyone could have expected or predict. Our initial plan back then is the same as today: take it day by day and keep doing what we know best – gaming.

Life as we know it has changed drastically since the pandemic dominated on a daily basis a year ago. Every industry changed, and online gaming was no exception. However, a digital transformation experienced worldwide allowed those with a diverse offering to thrive. Marinos Shiapanis, the CEO of online gaming operator Campeón Gaming Partners, which possesses a substantial affiliate network, explains the reasons behind the company's most profitable year in 2020.

RIDING THE WAVE

It's already been a year since Covid-19 broke into the world and put everyone in terrifying lockdowns. We've experienced drastic changes to our lives, both personal and professional. We've witnessed many industries suffer from the strict measures applied in various countries, and learned to live in a new, profound reality.

The online gaming industry was one of the lucky ones, as it hasn't been impacted as much as others. However it too had to severely cut costs, employees had to learn to work remotely, offices were abandoned, and betting suffered a big hit, as sports tournaments were suspended for a long time.

But we managed to not only remain intact during such uncertain times, but to also grow and double our employees. As everyone else, we too had to adjust and learn to live

“THE ONLINE GAMING INDUSTRY WAS ONE OF THE LUCKY ONES, AS IT HASN'T BEEN IMPACTED AS MUCH AS OTHERS. HOWEVER IT TOO HAD TO SEVERELY CUT COSTS, EMPLOYEES HAD TO LEARN TO WORK REMOTELY, OFFICES WERE ABANDONED, AND BETTING SUFFERED A BIG HIT, AS SPORTS TOURNAMENTS WERE SUSPENDED FOR A LONG TIME”

PLAY HARD



Mark McGuinness, digital marketing director and igaming futurologist, speaks to Peter Lynch about lockdown hobbies, Scottish sporting heroes and the future of esports betting

WHERE IS ONE PLACE IN SCOTLAND YOU WOULD ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO VISIT AND WHY?

The United Kingdom as a whole has amazing landscapes to enjoy. In terms of Scotland, one of my favourite places is Eglin in Moray. It's famous for whisky, Gordonstoun School, Macbeth and the Elgin Marbles. The scenery is inspiring, and a short distance from the village of Findhorn and Findhorn Bay, which provides unparalleled beaches akin to the Caribbean.

HAVE YOU PICKED UP ANY HOBBIES THROUGHOUT LOCKDOWN?

I wouldn't class them as hobbies, but I'm really good at ordering food with Deliveroo, JustEat and UberEats right now. On a healthier note, I've reignited my interest in reading and ordered a lot of books from Amazon, most on neuromarketing, which I'm particularly passionate about, as it helps marketers in the responsible gambling environment to understand how the mind works. It also supports provisions for safer gambling processes in marketing.

AS A GAMING INDUSTRY VETERAN, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE BIGGEST CHANGE YOU'VE SEEN OVER THE YEARS?

Perhaps the swing in attitudes and sentiments towards online gambling. What appeared socially acceptable in one decade appears to be the polar opposite in another decade socially, morally and politically. I fully support an empirical evidence-based approach to behavioural biases towards problem gambling, but addiction isn't just the preserve of gambling; addiction as a whole is a societal problem, and goes across shopping, drugs, alcohol and food, to cosmetic surgery and so on. The threshold question or root of the problem - with mental health also a major public health crisis - is why is our modern-day

society developing these traits in the first place. That's what needs to be addressed for a safer, brighter world for us all.

WHERE ARE THE BEST PLACES YOU'VE BEEN FOR TRADE SHOWS?

That's a challenge, as I've been fortunate to attend a lot over the years. My two favourites would be G2E in Vegas and really dead-heating with Vegas is ICE in London. If I could only go to two shows a year, it would be those two.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE SPORT TO WATCH AND WHY?

I enjoy both horse racing and football, and coming from the west coast of Scotland and the city of Glasgow, Rangers are my go-to team to support and follow.

COULD YOU SEE ESPORTS BETTING OVERTAKING TRADITIONAL SPORTS BETTING IN THE FUTURE?

We already know that esports in terms of viewership figures is eclipsing the world of live sport, and therefore that interest is bound to cascade into an interest in betting. esports for me is the new form of digital entertainment, built around community interests, and as we are all aware with social platforms, community gaming is extremely popular. Whereas with traditional betting platforms, the experience is passive and siloed.

SCOTLAND HAS PRODUCED SOME FANTASTIC SPORTS STARS OVER THE YEARS, BUT WHO IS YOUR ALL-TIME FAVOURITE?

It's a very hard choice with Sir Chris Hoy in the mix, but I would probably say Allan Wells, the 100 metres Olympic Champion. Allan landed the gold medal in the 1980 Moscow Olympics, and became the first British Athlete to do so since 1924. And a couple of weeks later, he beat some of America's best sprinters.

