

THE **iGamingFuture**

MAGAZINE

SERIES

June 2026

THE FUTURE OF

▶ AI

CASINO

▶ AFRICAN

SPORTSBOOK

▶ PLAYER

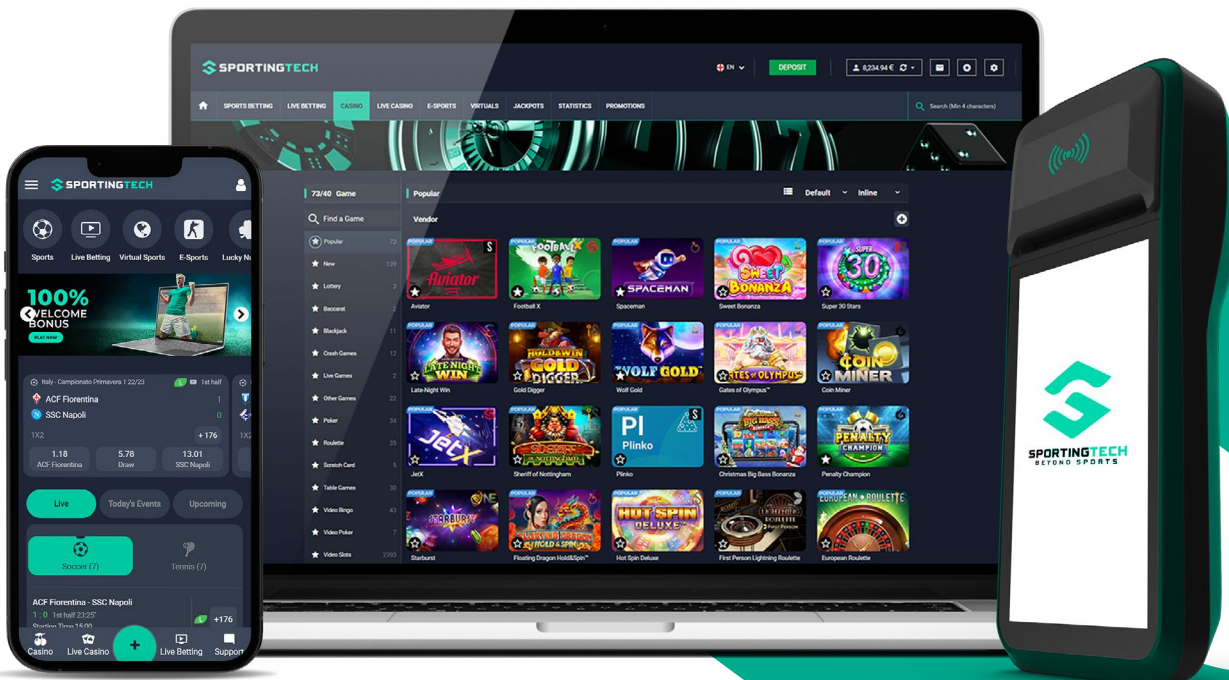
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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Setting The iGaming Agenda

It's another bumper triple-whammy from iGamingFuture this month with our latest magazine, featuring AI as the defining technology of our gambling times, scoring big in World Cup 2026 with your African sportsbook and the future of CRM and player engagement.

We bring you "The Future of AI Casino" before transitioning to "The Future of African Sportsbook", ending with "The Future of Player Engagement".

It's a truly remarkable editorial quarter, packed with data, insight and good sense.

Rocketing AI is estimated to soar in world value **to some US\$4.8 trillion (£3.5tn) by 2033**, according to the United Nations – something of an under-estimate, I'd wager; **while the global casino software market**, across the same time-frame, is **set to be worth US\$86.5 billion (£63.1bn)**.

How to meet or marry the twain? It's all here in our special focus on The Future of AI Casino. **The stakes have never been higher.**

Moving on to the FIFA World Cup 2026, it's only natural iGF should give you a progressive take on planet football's premier event.

Given Africa's increasing importance to the world's favourite sport - and the growing dominance of ethnic African players in the Beautiful Game - **we bring you killer insights, with our top division team**, with The Future of African Sportsbook.

Five-weeks, 104 matches and 48 teams, six billion enraptured fans, this is sportsbetting's biggest opportunity, with an anticipated take

of some US\$150 billion (£112.6bn).

One-in-five World Cup wagers are expected to come from first-time bettors, and with an unprecedented nine African teams in the running to lift the storied Jules Romet trophy come July 19, **the possibility of not just acquiring but also retaining iGamers represents the golden goal for every operator** on the Mother Continent.

We continue on the theme of retention by exploring The Future of Player Engagement.

As the cost and churn of acquiring new punters reaches an all-time high, retention has become a key battleground. And here **our team of experts give you world-class advice on how to forge a winning CRM strategy.**

With over 5,000 online gambling brands competing in a heavy-set market, **this is the mother of all marketing battles.**

And marks **essential reading for all of our top line subscribers.**



André Dubronski

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THE **iGamingFuture**

MAGAZINE

SERIES

Featuring:

Casumo
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THE FUTURE OF AI CASINO

GR8^{TECH}

**PLATFORM
FOR CHAMPIONS**

REDEFINE
~~FOLLOW~~
**ESPORTS
GAMING
RULES**

GR8^{TECH}



READY TO FIGHT
BY OLEKSANDR USYK

MARKET OVERVIEW

The UN recently recognised AI as “fast becoming the defining technology of our time”, valuing the market at US\$189 billion (£138bn) in 2023 and set to soar to US\$4.8 trillion (£3.5tn) by 2033. That’s a 25-fold increase in just over a decade.

Simultaneously, the global online casino software market is forecast to grow significantly, from US\$28.6 billion (£20.9bn) in 2023 to US\$86.5 billion (£63.1bn) by 2033, driven by increasing AI adoption and innovation.

As these two great industries collide, a new generation of software is emerging, capable of processing vast amounts of real-time data to streamline operations and improve the player experience. But accessing the benefits of this technology largely depends on how well operators integrate it.

For an industry known for resilience and

Today’s players are tech-savvy, experience-driven and expect highly personalised experiences, meaning the industry is facing one of its biggest reinventions to date.

Read on as our industry experts share real insights on the most effective ways to integrate AI, reveal how to manage expectations for the long game, how to avoid common pitfalls and explore what it really takes to deliver the casino products and experiences of tomorrow.

reinvention, the stakes and the learning curve have never been higher.

In this edition, industry leaders Tim De Borle, COO of *Casumo* and Lusine Khudaverdyan, Head of Casino at *GR8 Tech*, cut through the noise to offer practical tips on AI implementation.



Lauren Harrison

SENIOR REPORTER
iGF



TIM DE BORLE
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

Casumo



**LUSINE
KHUDAVERDYAN**
HEAD OF CASINO
BUSINESS

GR8 Tech

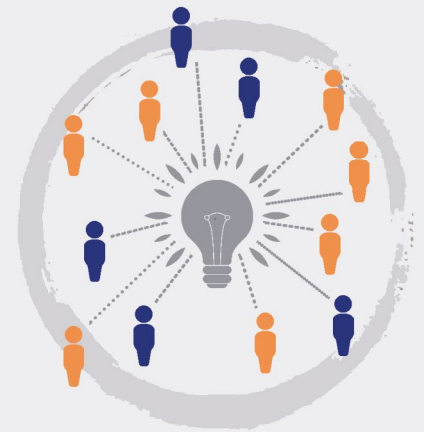
OUR EXPERT SPEAKERS

INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

As the market landscape evolves and adapts to new trends, our industry has now been compelled to react accordingly.

IN THIS EDITION a panel of industry experts to explore the world of AI in Casino. Moving beyond buzzwords, this discussion focuses on practical implementation and measurable results. It examines AI's impact on player engagement, personalisation, automation, risk management and operational efficiency, while offering insights on successfully integrating AI and preparing for the casino experience of tomorrow.

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THE FUTURE OF CASINO TECHNOLOGY: From Content Factories to Creative Platforms

Thomas Smallwood, CCO at *OpenSlots*, discusses the **advent of AI technologies** in slot creation, **and why it could be a crucial development in broadening the creative approach to the industry's core vertical.**



Thomas Smallwood

□□□
OpenSlots

For decades, casino technology has been built around scale, stability and efficiency. Slot suppliers perfected industrialised content pipelines, such as large teams, long roadmaps and heavy upfront investment, all designed to deliver games that could perform across multiple markets for years. That model served select studios well, but has increasingly put a strain on creativity, disruptors and smaller teams looking to be reactive.

Today, the future of casino technology is being shaped by a fundamental shift, powered by AI and there is a chance the next era will be defined, not by who can build the most games, but by who can empower the most creators. This opens the door to greater tailoring of an operator's content offering, such as more bespoke content or country specific variants.

Speed, flexibility, and control are key

Player behaviour is evolving rapidly. Game lifecycles are shortening, seasonal and promotional content has become strategically

important, and operators increasingly want games that reflect their own brand, their brand partners, audience and timing, not just a supplier's roadmap. At the same time, the cost and complexities of traditional slot development have made the industry increasingly inaccessible for smaller studios and specialist creators.

This tension has created a clear mandate for technology in this space to enable faster creation, greater flexibility and more control, all without compromising compliance, fairness, or quality.

AI-driven development platforms are emerging as a

direct response to this challenge. Not as a replacement for human creativity, but as a force multiplier. By introducing AI into asset creation, prototyping, documentation and testing workflows, slot development can move from months to days, allowing teams to iterate rather than commit prematurely.

Accelerating creativity, not replacing it

One of the most persistent misconceptions around AI in not just iGaming, but across the world, is that it removes the human element. In

reality, the opposite is true. The most effective implementations of AI place humans firmly in the loop, using intelligent tools to eliminate friction rather than decision-making.

Math models, RTP, volatility and compliance parameters remain human-defined and regulator-approved. What changes is the ability to explore those parameters in a secure sandbox environment, exploring different variations, adjusting features and refining player experience, without the sunk-cost pressure that has historically shaped release decisions.

This shift is profound. It

allows slot creators to embark on iterative experimentation grounded in rapid validation at a lower cost. AI becomes a co-pilot, rather than a competitor.

Democratisation empowering creators

Perhaps the most exciting implication of this technological shift is market expansion. When slot creation becomes faster, cheaper and more modular, entirely new participants can contribute to the ecosystem. Operators can create bespoke or branded games on their own timelines. Smaller

studios can focus on ideas, rather than infrastructure. Niche content can be commercially viable again. New speciality services can be born within the game development eco-system.

Platforms that enable others to create, distribute and monetise content will sit at the centre of a much larger value network. As we are beginning to see B2Cs will also champion creators to develop on their own platforms. Distribution, compliance expertise and commercial support become just as important as game design itself, offering a number of avenues for commercial growth.

The advancement in AI technology and its application will not change the fact that slots will remain at the heart of the industry, but the way they are conceived, built and delivered has the opportunity to change fundamentally. Those who embrace this shift early have an opportunity to gain a rare first mover advantage and influence the next wave of game development.



FROM INSTINCT TO PRECISION: *SlotCatalog's* Data-Led Approach To Content Strategy



Mykhailo Kachanov

CHIEF BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT OFFICER
SlotCatalog

What should operators be stocking and prioritising in their casino lobbies? It **sounds like a simple question, but content curation remains one of the most consequential**

decisions operators make. Aside from bonuses and service quality, **if a casino does not have the games players want, gamers will soon move on.**

Read on as Mykhailo Kachanov, Chief Business Development Officer at *SlotCatalog*, explores the latest developments in real-time games data and the products helping operators get their lobby and content strategies in order.

Traditionally, decisions around **which games get promoted, which providers get more visibility and which new titles should be added** were **based on historical data** or the **instinct of experts** in the field. **But as the industry's ability to gather and analyse data has increased, so too has its ability to observe and understand player behaviour in real time.**

Operational since 2016, **SlotCatalog has more recently evolved from a leading B2C affiliate, expanding into B2B services that help operators make more informed content decisions.**

By providing tools like SlotRank and Provider Rank, the company offers real-time analysis of market trends and player demand across multiple jurisdictions, meaning operators can meet those demands and - with the right strategies - get ahead.



1 Many operators still rely on instinct rather than real-time player demand when selecting content. **How can live market intelligence and behavioural data help operators make smarter decisions about what games to launch and where to position them?**

Instinct is expensive when you are wrong.

In a market where player preferences shift faster than product roadmaps, the cost of a misread is real: titles don't convert, budgets are spent on the wrong content, acquisition traffic arrives with nowhere useful to go.



What **live market intelligence changes** is the **timing of the decision**.

SlotCatalog generates demand signals from real player behaviour: search intent, game comparison journeys, traffic patterns across providers and geographies. That **data shows where demand is forming, not where it peaked** three-months-ago.

In practice, we **worked with one operator partner where data analysis revealed that around 10 percent of provider-level demand in their key market was concentrated on studios they had not yet integrated.**

The **traffic was there. The intent was there. But the product was not. Closing that gap drove over 54 percent month-on-month growth in first-time depositors without any additional spend.**

The **data did not say to spend more. It said where to look.**

2 Fragmentation between product, marketing and commercial teams remains a major operational challenge for many operators. **How important is having a shared data framework when trying to improve performance, acquisition and player retention?**

Misalignment between teams is almost always a data problem, before it is a communication problem.

Product evaluates titles against internal metrics, marketing optimises for acquisition, commercial focuses on deal terms and none of them are necessarily working from the same picture of what is actually performing in the market.

Without a shared external reference, every cross-team conversation becomes a negotiation over whose numbers to believe. Content gets featured that does not match acquisition traffic.

Bonuses get attached to games with weak retention profiles. Studios get signed, based on pitch quality rather than verified market demand.

SlotRank gives all three teams a common, independently measured baseline, derived from daily crawling of 2,000-plus casino lobbies across 50-plus markets.

When product, marketing and commercial are referencing the same signal on how games and providers are actually performing, the internal debate shifts from interpretation to execution. Which is where the money actually moves.

3 Operators are under increasing pressure to maximise ROI from game launches in highly-competitive markets. **How can predictive data tools like SlotRank help operators identify emerging trends before they become oversaturated?**

SlotRank tracks where games sit in casino lobbies in real-time, crawled daily in incognito mode to remove personalisation effects. The result is a market-wide, unfiltered view of what operators across 50-plus markets are actually featuring and how that changes over time.

Provider Rank works at the studio level, aggregating the SlotRank performance of a studio's full portfolio by market.

If a studio's Provider Rank is rising ahead of a major release, that reflects genuine lobby presence across multiple operators, which is a measurable indicator of growing distribution that shows up in the data before it becomes widely discussed.

For operators, the practical value is in understanding which studios and mechanics are gaining real ground across markets with similar player profiles to their own.

Content acquisition decisions grounded in that read are based on what is already performing broadly, rather than on what a sales deck was designed to make you believe.

4 **The industry is seeing growing demand for differentiated content mechanics beyond traditional slot experiences. How do proprietary mechanics such as CrossyRun™ help operators stand out while reducing the risk associated with experimental game launches?**

CrossyRun™ came from search data, not a creative

brief.

We identified a consistent global spike in queries around crash-style and crossing-style casino games across markets from Latin America to Southeast Asia. Players were already looking for this format and the product catalogue had not caught up. That gap between player intent and available product is where launch risk lives - and where demand-validated mechanics remove it.

The mechanic is a step-crash format where players advance step-by-step, with each move increasing the multiplier and the risk. Visual theme, multiplier logic, bonus structure and multiplayer format can all be tailored by the licensing studio, so the core framework supports genuinely different game experiences.

For operators, there is a specific commercial benefit beyond the mechanic itself.

SlotCatalog actively promotes every CrossyRun™ release across its platform and social media channels and directly connects titles to casino audiences.

Operators are not just adding a differentiated game to their content mix. They are adding a title with active distribution and marketing infrastructure

already in place.

5 **What do you believe will be the biggest competitive advantage for operators this year: Stronger data intelligence, faster content distribution, better localisation or a deeper understanding of real-time player intent? And why?**

All of these matter. But they only deliver value when operators can actually verify what is working. The capability that will separate strong performers in 2026 is making decisions based on data they can audit, rather than data they have to take on trust.

The iGaming affiliate market is worth over US\$18 billion (£13.4bn) today and is projected to approach US\$32 billion (£23.8bn) by 2031. A significant share of that is still transacted on private rates, undisclosed benchmarks and reporting that neither side can independently verify. Operators who have accepted that model are carrying a risk they may not be fully accounting for.

That is why we built our affiliate marketplace differently.

Transparency is not a feature - it is the product. Operators log in and see every available

placement with audited click and conversion data attached, per position and per geography, with public pricing. The commercial conversation moves from negotiation to planning because both sides are looking at the same verified numbers.

Operators who demand that standard across all their partner relationships will have a measurably cleaner view of what is actually driving performance.



EDITOR'S NOTE



The **ability to gather and analyse large amounts of data** is **revolutionising every area of iGaming**, particularly when it comes to decision-making and how operators select and position content within their casino lobbies.

By generating demand signals based on real player behaviour-search intent, game comparison journeys, traffic patterns across providers and geographies, **operators can now see and react to live demand, prioritising the most relevant content and even getting ahead of trends before they become mainstream.**



This means that **rather than relying on historical data, sales pitches and supplier narratives, operators can move towards real-time strategies that meet evolving content demands.** For Mykhailo, the **value of this data extends beyond the consumer benefits and lobby optimisation.**

By providing a common baseline, he says product, marketing and commercial teams stop focusing on different, often divisive, metrics and begin working collaboratively on strategies that drive performance, acquisition and player retention.



Given that AI is still in its early stages of adoption within the iGaming industry, what are the most effective ways you've seen, or implemented, AI so far? And how long do you think it will take before AI is deployed to its full potential?

TIM

AI itself isn't new. It's built on engineering technology and has been around for a long time.

What's changed is the pace at which it's growing, and right now that growth is exponential.

When you look at AI on a maturity curve, it's already quite advanced. But we're not at the end and that's what makes it so exciting.

The challenge isn't the technology, but that most companies don't know how to integrate it.



iGaming is no different. We haven't really cracked the code.

Most companies make the mistake of expecting to see an immediate uplift and ROI from AI.

But AI requires strong foundations:

High-quality data, the right implementation within an organisation and, importantly, educating people on how to use it.

This is a gradual process that is essential to success with AI.

At Casumo, we launched our AI project in 2023. It has now gone through several phases.

We started by experimenting and focusing on the foundations: building a new data platform, setting up governance and ensuring we were prepared for the EU AI Act.

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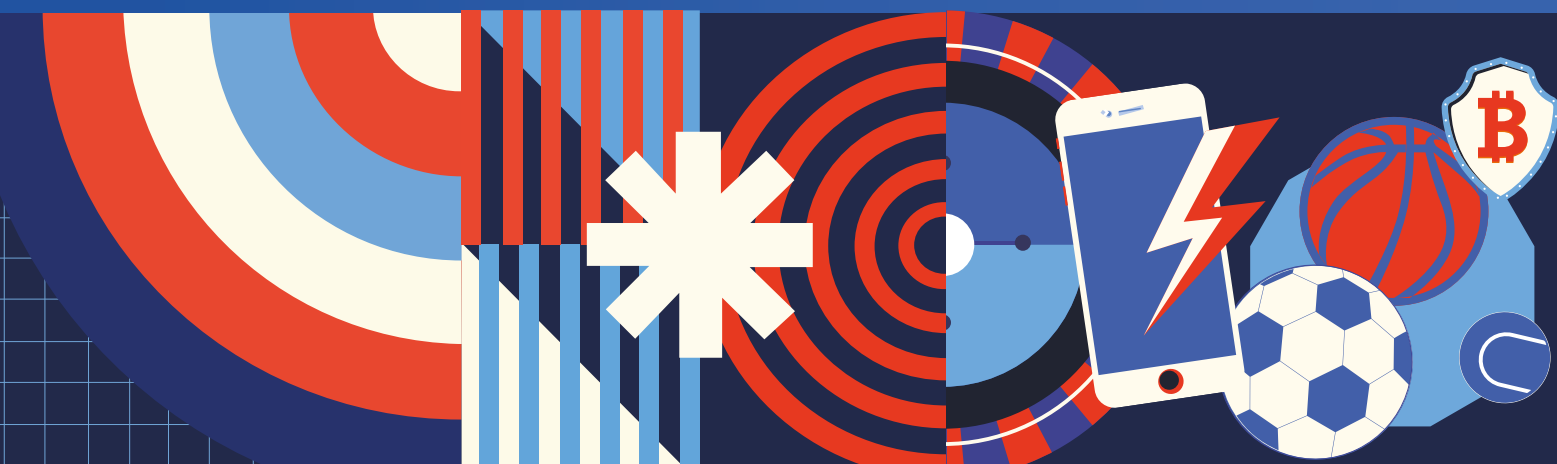
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LUSINE

A few years ago, AI was just a **buzzword**, but in terms of technology, it is **already very advanced**.

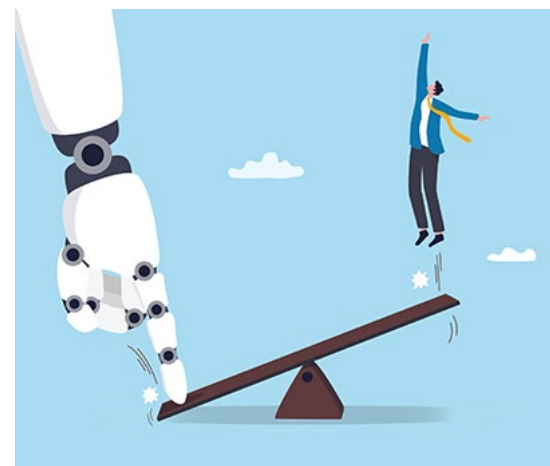
iGaming companies have taken their time to implement AI, which is the correct approach as it involves sensitive data. It's far better to implement the right controls gradually than to experiment and risk losing control.

From the *GR8 Tech* perspective, **we've been gradually implementing AI** for the past two-to-three-years, **and we're now starting to see strong results, especially across our platform and in personalising the experience for both players and operators.**

AI is definitely valuable. But only when it's implemented gradually and carefully.

Now, we're **implementing AI across our operations, products and services** and are **only just starting to see ROI** from this investment.

The **next phase is about turning AI into a strategic asset** for the business. I'm really excited about what this next step will bring, **but it's taken a lot of time, investment and patience** to get here.



As Tim mentioned, a common mistake is expecting an immediate uplift from AI. What are the other pitfalls, or misconceptions you've seen, either across the industry or in your own experience, when integrating AI; and how can organisations avoid them and achieve real value?

TIM

There are plenty of pitfalls.

We certainly fell into a few along the way, but **I'll keep this short and focus on my top three takeaways.**

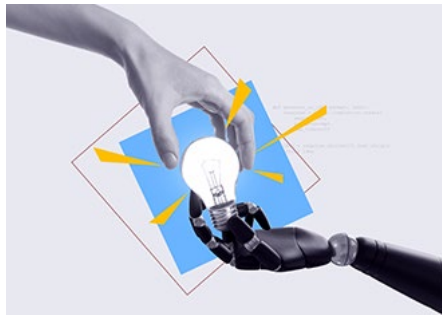
Firstly, when new technology such as AI emerges, everyone gets excited and **has ideas, but those ideas often lack ownership.**

If there's no ownership, not only from the **data or AI team, but also** from the **department the idea originates from, it will fail.**

The **second mistake is only focusing on the technology and not on people.**

You **can have the most advanced data platform, AI engineers and even your own large language model, but if you don't educate your people, you won't be successful.**

Investing in education outside the AI team was a major learning curve for us.



The **third common mistake is governance.**

You **need the right governance framework,** not only to **ensure success and smart investment, but also to meet regulatory requirements.**

For example, **we operate in Europe, which means compliance with the EU AI Act** - which is a set of compliance restrictions and rules we have to adhere to regarding AI use. **Implementing this after - and not before - the fact could have a huge impact on the success of your AI project.**

LUSINE

One of the biggest mistakes I see is operators investing in AI without a clear goal.



If you want to use AI, you need to understand why: what is the business use and what are you trying to achieve? **Once that's clear, it becomes much easier to cut through the noise and focus on what to implement and how to do it.**

Another common mistake is bringing in AI without ensuring people and processes know how to adapt.

If teams aren't educated on how their workflows will change, they'll continue in the same way as before and the technology won't deliver the expected results.

Much of the AI discussion has focused on operations and process efficiency, but how does AI impact personalisation and game recommendations? What does AI implementation mean for smart game lobbies and overall online casino UX? And how achievable is delivering truly personalised experiences at scale?

LUSINE

Personalisation is one of my favourite applications of AI. It's extremely important and is becoming critical as the number of operators continues to grow.

A few years ago, operators often focused on a single geographical market. Today, many are multi-geo operators, but the same content, UX and lobby don't work everywhere. This is where personalisation becomes essential.

Players don't want generic content.

Online casinos are largely commoditised: the same providers, products and games.

Generic experiences don't retain players in the long term.

Many companies, GR8 Tech included, have already implemented personalisation. We do this at the level of games, providers and categories.

Our Recommendation Engine allows operators to build customised lobbies, showcase trending games based on player history, and even forecast emerging global and regional trends.

TIM

Yes, absolutely. This is already an area we're actively focusing on, and we're certainly not alone.

I strongly believe that AI, and generative AI in particular, will significantly improve the player journey, especially in how players discover and browse games within the large catalogues that most operators offer today.



This personalisation can be driven by player behaviour, intent, lifecycle stage and, ideally, responsible gaming metrics, providing a strong opportunity to enhance the player journey, while ensuring it remains as responsible as possible.

I also hope that in the future, AI can help make casino games less commoditised.

To date, we've not really seen game studios implementing AI innovatively. I'm keen to see what's next in this respect.



AI sounds increasingly accessible, but what about costs? How expensive is it to implement AI effectively and how should organisations think about quantifying success, ensuring a good return on investment?



TIM

Cost is relative.

It depends on the size of your resources and how much you want to invest in this area, so it's difficult to say whether AI is expensive or not in absolute terms.

In general, if you look at AI itself, such as available models or off-the-shelf features and software, it's not particularly expensive yet.

But if you don't approach it in an organised way, costs can escalate very quickly without you even realising it until it's too late.

This comes back to governance and also to a point Lusine made earlier: you have to do it intentionally.

You need to know what you want to achieve and how you want to do it.

You also have to make choices. Yes, you can experiment with multiple tools, but after a proof of concept, you need to commit. Otherwise, you'll never achieve ROI for the specific use case you're trying to deliver.

For us, the value we offset against the investment comes from different areas. The first is efficiency gains.



That's one of the key use cases and layers of value we expect from AI.

The second is revenue uplift.

Recommendation engines, personalisation and campaign management, for example, should directly support revenue growth.

The **third area is risk reduction, which is harder to quantify or assign a direct monetary value to.**

Here, we utilise AI to identify risks, support responsible gaming and enhance risk management.

These are the three levels where we expect value, and it's important to offset them against a limited and intentional set of investments. It's also important to remember that, for the most part, this ROI is not immediate, with most AI investments happening behind the scenes.



LUSINE

As Tim said, **cost is relative, so you always need to look at the value AI brings.**

We've **seen operators** adopt recommendation engines and **achieve increases of around 30 percent in player engagement and lifetime value.**

When you convert that into numbers, it clearly makes sense to invest in AI, as it directly impacts revenue and player engagement.

From a company perspective, **AI can also be used to optimise internal resources**, depending on where it's implemented.



You can apply AI in the casino and UX, but also across **processes and risk management.**

When implemented correctly and intentionally, AI in risk management can deliver very strong results and potentially save significant costs.



What will the online consumer experience look like in the next three-to-five-years? What steps does the industry need to take now to fully leverage emerging tech, such as AI?

TIM

That's a big question. And a hard one to answer.

I think for players, the experience will be more intuitive and individual, with each player receiving a bespoke experience.

I also think that in the future, this experience will feel more human.

For companies to fully leverage AI, it must be implemented in the ways we've discussed: governed in an intelligent way that ensures a symbiosis of technology and human skills.

LUSINE

When it comes to the future of online casinos, I believe it's all about hyper-personalisation, and this is where AI is highly applicable.

Generic is no longer acceptable.

If AI is implemented correctly into CRM, UX and risk management engines,



each user will have a personalised experience from the moment they enter the site.

Personalised content, games and promotions, which can deliver a strong ROI.



EDITOR'S CONCLUSION

AI is often positioned as a silver bullet - a quick win and an easy route to the hyper-personalised experiences players now expect.

But as this exclusive discussion demonstrates, successful implementation is complex and requires a long-term, strategic approach.

For leading operators like *Casumo*, developing in-house AI capabilities has taken years of patient groundwork: building robust data foundations, establishing governance frameworks and training teams to work alongside new technologies. Even for supreme AI tech providers like *GR8 Tech*, careful and strategic implementation remains the priority over speed.

How does this slow-and-steady approach translate into tangible value and ROI? That's where managing expectations is key.

According to Lusine, off-the-shelf solutions can deliver, but only when operators are crystal clear about the specific business problem they are solving and even then results can take time.

IMPORTANTLY, MANY OF THESE BENEFITS ARE NOT IMMEDIATE. YET, WHEN LAYERED TOGETHER, THEY UNDERPIN LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY AND VALUE.



For Tim, AI ROI is more complex and best viewed through a tripartite lens: efficiency gains from workflow improvements, revenue uplift from personalisation and UX enhancements and risk reduction through AI-led player protection, fraud and compliance savings.

ULTIMATELY, THIS DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS THAT AI IS NOT A SHORTCUT TO THE FUTURE OF ONLINE CASINO, BUT AN ENABLER OF IT.

WHEN IMPLEMENTED STRATEGICALLY, WITH STRONG GOVERNANCE AND CLEAR INTENT, IT CAN MAKE EXPERIENCES MORE RELEVANT, MORE RESPONSIBLE AND MORE VALUABLE. BUT ONLY FOR OPERATORS WHO TREAT IT AS A LONG-TERM INVESTMENT.

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10.000⁺

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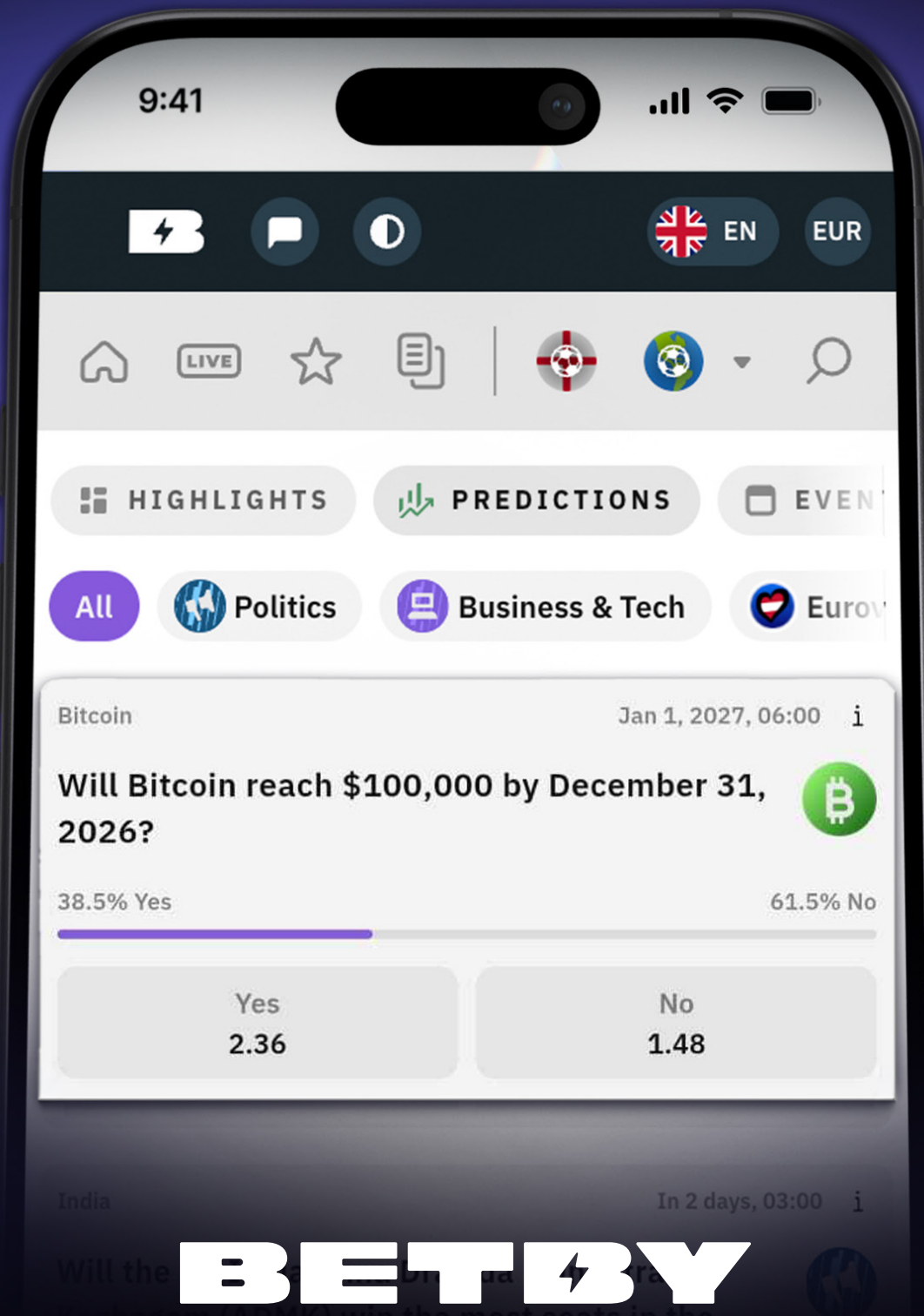
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MARKET OVERVIEW

The 2026 FIFA World Cup is a massive opportunity for iGaming operators and providers. With an incredible six billion people expected to tune in, it is on track to become the most-watched sporting event in history and, as preparations get underway, the excitement is reaching fever pitch.

That scale is expected to convert directly into a surge in betting activity, with global wagers forecast to hit the equivalent of some US\$150 billion (£112.6bn).

What makes these projections even more significant is that as many as one-in-five of these wagers is expected to come from first-time bettors, representing an unrivalled opportunity for operators to both acquire and retain players at scale.

While precise figures are not yet available, Africa is poised to emerge as one of the most important World Cup growth regions,

especially as there are a record nine African nations in the running.

But with such high betting volumes and a large share of inexperienced users, the tournament will also put operators to the test, challenging them to educate inaugural bettors, manage engagement effectively and ensure a seamless, high-quality betting experience from kick-off through to the final whistle.

To delve into how operators can maximise this potential and score big, iGF invited leading figures from across the African sportsbook ecosystem to come together for a dynamic discussion and exchange of insights to tackle the most pertinent challenges and solutions.

Read on as our expert panel dives deep into the most effective strategies to onboard, engage and retain players during this summer's World Cup.



Lauren Harrison

SENIOR REPORTER
iGF



OWOSENI ABIODUN
CEO

BetJara



RICH LEE
CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER

ServTech



CHRIS NIKOLOPOULOS
CCO

BETBY

OUR EXPERT SPEAKERS

INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

As the market landscape evolves and adapts to new trends, our industry has now been compelled to react accordingly.

IN THIS EDITION a panel of industry experts explore how operators can convert World Cup excitement into sustainable long-term growth. With a record number of African nations participating, operators are preparing for the largest acquisition and engagement opportunity in African betting history. This discussion examines how sportsbooks can leverage technology, content, marketing and localisation strategies to maximise player value at every stage.

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with all our **Expert Speakers**

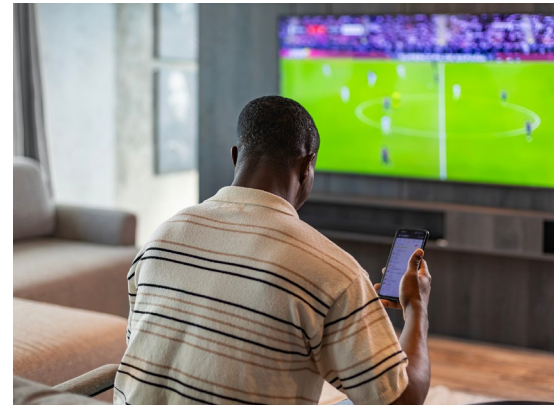
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THE WORLD CUP PRESENTS: North America's Fragmented Regulatory Model With Its Biggest Test

When the 2026 FIFA World Cup kicks off in Mexico on June 11th, the North American sports betting landscape and its fragmented framework will face its most intense test to date.



Liam Hoofe

CONTENT STRATEGIST
GameOn

The World Cup is set to be the biggest that FIFA has ever hosted. This is not hyperbole - the tournament will feature 48 teams for the first time and will also be co-hosted by three countries, in another first.

The tournament will run for 39 days, presenting huge commercial opportunities for operators. However, behind all of this is a regulatory landscape so fragmented and complex that no single campaign, product stack, or responsible gambling framework can cover it.

That is the central finding of *GO Intel's* latest research, *The Regulated World Cup: How North America's Fragmented Regulatory Framework Faces Its Biggest Test*.

The headline numbers for the tournament are certainly eye-grabbing. The report places legal, licensed handling across the United States, Canada and Mexico at \$5.2 billion to \$6.6 billion, with gross gaming revenue of approximately \$455 million to \$610 million. This is bigger than any sporting event in North American history.

However, the commercial potential and operational reality are not the same thing. North America is not a singular market; it is arriving in dozens of overlapping ones, each with complex compliance environments that, in some cases, even sit in contradiction of one another.

An Increasingly Complex Landscape

The scale of these differences can not be understated. New York taxes mobile sports betting to 51%, New Jersey raised its effective online sports wagering tax to 21% in mid-2025, and Illinois

graduated its sports betting tax to between 20 and 40 %, layered on a per-wager mobile levy and local city taxes. Florida's mobile market remains the exclusive domain of the Seminole Tribe. Texas and California, the two biggest states in the country, do not even have a legal sports betting market.

The picture does not get any clearer once you go north of the border into Canada. Ontario is currently the only province operating an open market and is expected to generate significant revenue throughout the tournament. To make matters more

complicated, Alberta is expected to launch its market during the tournament itself. Most other Canadian provinces remain under lottery-led models.

Mexico, meanwhile, remains one of the least transparent major betting markets globally despite its importance as a World Cup host nation. Football betting demand is expected to be enormous, but regulatory complexity and limited public market data continue to create uncertainty for operators and investors alike.

The consequence of this fragmented system is not just administrative. It adds a serious cost layer that will significantly benefit larger operators.

Larger operators with a mature compliance architecture, flexible marketing teams and established supplier relationships will be able to soak up the costs of this split landscape much more easily than smaller businesses. The gap between holding a license and being operationally tournament-ready is going to become increasingly visible throughout the tournament.

Of course, with such a complex landscape, there will also be another big winner during this tournament: the

black market.

The Black Market Threat

According to the *American Gaming Association*, Americans still wager more than \$673 billion annually through illegal and unregulated operators. States without legal sports betting, including California and Texas, represent huge audiences that regulated sportsbooks cannot formally convert. If regulated operators create excessive friction during the tournament, consumers in other states are also likely to migrate elsewhere.

This is exactly why regulators should be paying as much attention to this tournament as possible. *GO Intel's* findings highlight that this fragmented infrastructure is not consistent enough to sustain the millions of bettors who are coming into the markets. When there are billions of dollars in betting demand and no legal or clear-cut options, those funds will flow into unregulated alternatives.

A major international tournament, with all of the political pressure and media attention that can bring, is not going to be the best place for this system to be exposed. Sports betting regulation still remains a major source of



contention in the United States, and this tournament is likely to show that the current model may not be as fit for purpose as some believe.

Of course, this is not to say the World Cup can not be a success. The demand for sports betting has never been higher and the tournament is already proving to be a breeding ground for creative content and gaming. However, for it to be a success, honest conversations will need to be had about exactly what this regulatory model can and can not do. This is going to be a test of its strength in real-time and the World Cup is not going to wait around for regulators to adapt.

What impact do you expect the World Cup to have on the sports market in terms of global engagement and increased activity? And how do you plan to handle any resulting rise in demand and resource needs?

RICH

I've covered previous World Cups working in European brands and this will be my second time covering it with an African-facing brand.

The reality of the World Cup in African markets is that it's a nice market to have, but the most popular events are still the traditional seasons, like the Premier League and the Champions League, et cetera.

Because of this, we're taking a strategic approach and viewing it as a chance to experiment and learn.

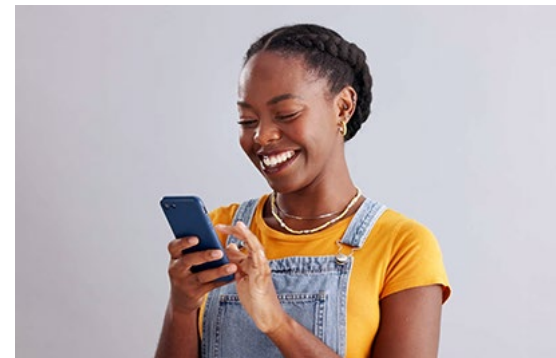
We're asking what we can implement during the tournament to improve our offering during the following football seasons.



There are nine qualifying African teams in the 2026 tournament and generally African teams don't tend to do as well in the rankings as European or South American teams, which leads to some disengagement.

In my experience, betting behaviour in this region often favours large selections with small stakes and high potential returns. Since the World Cup is a standalone competition with fewer overlapping matches and leagues, it may not fully align with these preferences.

I don't anticipate the level of activity and engagement compared with a Champions League group stage night or a Saturday or Sunday in the domestic regular season.



That's not to say we don't see the World Cup as an opportunity, but perhaps not in the sense most are thinking. Aside from it being a chance to test and learn, we're also looking at different verticals.

For example, there's going to be a lot of sportsbook "white noise", with everyone focused on the tournament and potentially sidelining casino, meaning the market share could be up for redistribution [and not expansion].

OWO SENI

I believe we're going to see the excitement build in the weeks running up to the World Cup. We're expecting a sharp increase in users and turnover, as well as account reactivations from dormant bettors because everyone will want to join in and take advantage.

During the event, when the games start, this will peak, especially during key matches as people will want to engage, boosting sign-ups. I expect turnover to increase fourfold.

To deal with the increase in traffic, operators need to ensure their platform can handle the load and that everything works perfectly, especially in areas like payments.

Operators must also ensure they increase their engagement strategies and that their UI and UX are streamlined with quick loading times and on-point targeting for key events.

After the tournament, we're going to be working hard to leverage the [expected] new acquisition and turn it into retention and long-term value. It's going to be busy.

CHRIS

From a B2B software supplier perspective, the first thing to say is that internally we view the World Cup as an "acceleration moment".

What we mean by this is that it can drive acquisition and introduce a large number of new recreational users, who only interact with sports betting during this type of event. Not bettors who stick year-round. As already mentioned, the challenge here will be converting and retaining these players.

In terms of infrastructure, and how operators should prepare from a tech side, I think many of the issues faced during peak traffic and with capacity are now in the past, thanks to solutions like cloud environments. The real problem is operational stability.



As a B2B sports supplier, we must ensure accurate pricing and risk management. This needs to be done fast, especially in a live betting environment. And as a global provider we have to ensure we are personalising the products per region and even for different users.

We're using automation because human decision-making alone would not be fast enough, especially with four or five matches a day.

We have to use automated trading tools, automated liability monitoring. And of course use it for personalised content to show the user what they want to see first and increase their engagement.





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JOIN THE DISCUSSION!

We all agree that the World Cup will generate an uptick in casual and first-time bettors. What can operators do to better engage and convert these less experienced players, particularly in terms of improving customer experience and helping users who are unfamiliar with pricing and betting mechanics?

WOSENI

Content is the number one strategy and it needs to be educational.

Firstly, you need to make sure everything is simple and understandable for those unfamiliar with sportsbooks.

This includes terminology and markets. For example, with each bet type, if the user clicks on it, **there should be an explanation** to guide them.

Localised content is also key, especially for social media content.

Operators **have to make sure** their **content suits** the **audience across various markets and channels.** **This will lead to greater consumer understanding and encourage acquisition,** particularly in the run-up period.

It is also important to ensure users can access all the information they need, like game stats and head-to-head records, **before a game starts.**

Looking at products, **in-play content can help drive engagement, including side games** such as virtual football that help keep the user active.

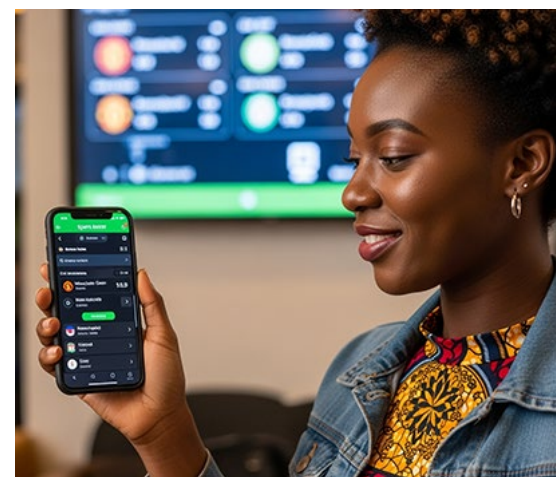
Personalisation is also vital for triggering more engagement with the platform.

Pop-ups can help suggest suitable content that matches a user's preferences and highlights what's happening at specific moments.

RICH

I think it all comes down to the on-site experience.

The **consumer has to have a good experience on the platform** and **when using its features,** like navigation and payments.



In African markets, trust is vital. For a consumer to trust a brand, they must be able to deposit and withdraw quickly.

If a casual player joins and has a positive experience with payments, the operator can probably retain them, but if someone has a bad experience, there's no chance.

Clarity around bonuses is also crucial.

There's a tendency to overcomplicate bonuses and it doesn't work well. Providing transparency around exactly what a consumer will get when they take an offer is very important.

Other elements include the technical experience: ensuring there are no latency issues when placing bets, that the pricing is right, and so on.

For me these are all the key areas that will drive success.



I think **those who will bet have already made that choice, so if the brand provides a positive experience** - starting with good marketing, as Owoseni said - **they'll be able to retain those players.**

Realistically, you're not going to retain 100 percent of casual bettors, but if you give them a good experience during the World Cup and follow-up with engagement strategies, you'll keep them interested for longer.

And as I touched on earlier, **some of these casual players will naturally gravitate towards other products, like online casino, so use your**

data to recognise this and act on it.

CHRIS

We've already covered most of the key points. I would only add that the consumers the World Cup brings in are fans, not typical bettors. They don't necessarily need a wide range of options. But they do need confidence in how the platform works.

It's about giving them a positive experience and guiding them through the platform, from sign-up to placing a bet, rather than focusing solely on the betting experience itself.



One of the biggest challenges with global sporting events across multiple time zones is scheduling. What are the best ways for operators to keep players engaged during periods when there are no matches? And what strategies can be used to maintain engagement, both during downtime and after the tournament ends?



CHRIS

Most operators start to focus on retention once the tournament is over. The end usually signifies day one for retention, but engagement takes place throughout.

There are three key layers that operators and providers need to focus on.

The first is intelligent content continuity.

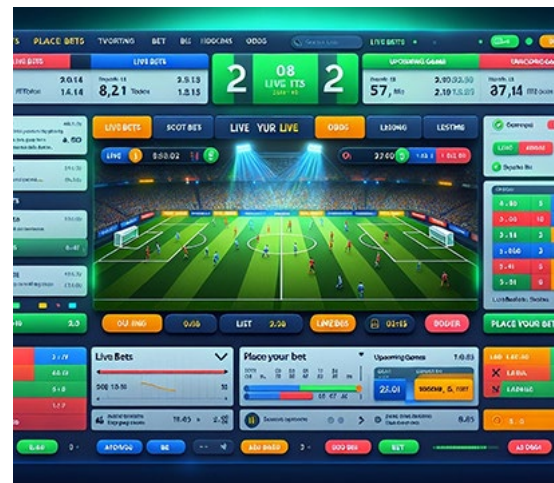
Content must be prioritised to be relevant to the user, their behavioural patterns and the region. It should highlight the most relevant sports, leagues and betting opportunities. Instead of



overwhelming users with thousands of events and markets, a “Netflix-style” experience works best, showing only what is most likely to appeal to them.

The second - this is a lesson we learnt during COVID when most sports were cancelled, but we still performed strongly and did not see a drop in revenue - is complementary products.

For example, simulation games played a strategic role. It is not that they replaced real sports, but they can stabilise engagement during off-peak hours. Looking at player demographics, many of today’s bettors are younger and respond well to simulated games. They account for around 10–15 percent of our turnover.



RICH

As I've mentioned, I think the **best way to engage** during these periods **is through casino-led products**. I also think you **have to give players a way to try before they buy**, which is where things like free spins come in.

As we know, **Aviator-style games dominate** the market across much of Africa and there are also **football-themed crash games** that operators can leverage while there are no live matches.

I also think it comes down to **strong CRM marketing**.

Operators **need to actively inform and educate players**, letting them know when upcoming matches are scheduled, highlighting relevant markets and using channels like SMS, email and in-app messaging **to keep them engaged**.

The third is product-led retention.

Platforms and operators should use the World Cup as a chance to **understand user behaviour and convert these insights into product-led**, rather than campaign or bonus-led, retention. **Importantly, this should not be isolated but a part of the wider platform ecosystem.**

OWO SENI

I agree, especially on the **importance of virtual products.**

We saw during COVID that **virtual sports became a key offering, keeping players engaged when live events were unavailable.**

Virtual games are highly accessible as they are fast and **allow players to engage within minutes, unlike traditional pre-match betting where users wait for scheduled events.**

This **helps keep users active** on the platform.

In my experience **virtual products can generate some of the highest levels of engagement and turnover**, sometimes even outperforming casino.

Do you think retention is still a premature focus for many African operators given that these markets are still in a relatively early growth phase and heavily acquisition-driven, and if so, how long might it take before the industry shifts toward a stronger long-term value and retention-focused approach?

OWOSENI

I think operators are already focused on retention. Looking at the more established markets with large operators, like Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, we can already see the shift towards retention.

When operators enter the African gaming ecosystem, they are naturally focused on securing market share, so acquisition takes prominence.

However, as markets mature and with the rapid growth of technology and mobile usage across the continent, operators have more tools and opportunities to drive retention, so this increasingly becomes the focus.

RICH

Retention is vital in all markets, whether they are the larger, more mature ones like Owoseni mentioned, or smaller ones.

Online gaming has been around for some time and in some parts of Africa it is more mature than in some US markets.

I think it is very clear that retention is key to success.

I have been working in the African market since 2020 and in my experience, there has never been a time when the focus has been solely on acquisition. Of course, acquisition brings customers in, but conversion has always been linked to ARPU and lifetime value.

I feel very strongly that we have reached a level of understanding around the importance of CRM and retention.

As we move further into areas like gamification and personalisation, it reflects the growing maturity of African

markets.

Retention goes beyond bonuses and free bets. It is about strong segmentation, valuation and data-driven CRM approaches. This applies to all markets regardless of size.

CHRIS

As a B2B sports provider, we do not deal directly with retention and acquisition as processes. Instead, our role is to provide the tools that enable operators to achieve both.

That said, I agree with Owoseni and Rich - retention is a necessity, especially as competition increases and acquisition costs rise.

An increasing focus on lifetime value is a natural progression. We have seen this in other markets, and it has already been happening in Africa for some time and will continue to evolve.



WORLD CUP 2026: Turning Tournament Traffic Into Long-Term Growth In Africa



With a record number of 10 African teams taking part in the upcoming World Cup 2026, the **audience numbers from the Continent** are **expected to be higher than ever**.

In this article, **Alea Gaming** have leveraged its wealth of cross-market data to provide an unparalleled overview of the African iGaming landscape, helping you to understand how you can best position your game content strategy and take advantage of the new wave of traffic expected during tournament time!

Operators within African markets **now have an amazing opportunity to grow their player base and convert new casual sign-ups into long-term customers**.

However, this **can't be done with sportsbook alone**.

To keep players returning, operators will need an **expansive portfolio of the most engaging game content**.

Read on as we dive into Africa, exploring a continent of contrasts to understand regional divides, what works for players in different markets, and which strategies truly set operators apart.

Same Games, Different Results

The "Single African Market" theory usually survives until the moment of a real-world launch.

When we talk in broad terms about African mobile penetration and young demographics, **we risk missing the most important part of the story: the real person holding a smartphone** in Lagos, Nairobi or Johannesburg.

We see it in the data every day. **A game that is an absolute hit in one country** can suddenly **feel like a digital miss** in another.

These shifts in player

behaviour **might seem small** on a spreadsheet. **But in reality they** are the moments that **make or break an operator's ambitions**, deciding whether they build a lasting business or simply burn through budget on a market they never truly understood.

The Regional Divide

If you look at West Africa, particularly Nigeria, you're **looking at a landscape that values speed above almost everything else**.

Currently, **over 60 million Nigerians place bets daily**, collectively spending an **estimated US\$5.5 million (£4.16m)** each day **on online**

gambling platforms.

The energy is fast and furious. **Players want quick sessions and instant results.**

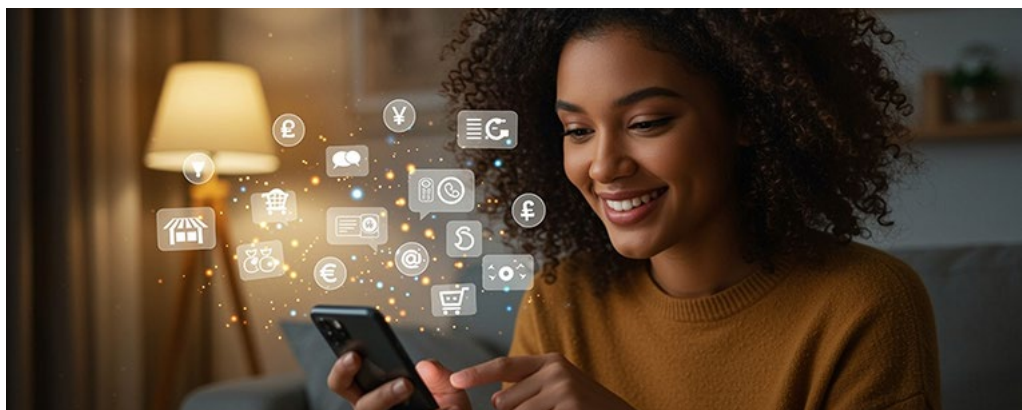
This is why crash games are more than a trend there. They are a perfect match for a young, fast-moving audience that doesn't want to wait around for a cinematic spin to finish.

Moving to East Africa, the priorities shift dramatically.

In Kenya, the mobile money experience, built around M-Pesa and deeply embedded in daily life, is not just important - it's everything. With 88 percent of all wagers in the country placed via mobile devices, Kenya represents one of the most mobile-native betting cultures not just on the continent but in the world.

Regardless of how impressive the graphics or the mechanics are, the integration between the device and the digital wallet has to be flawless. If the payment flow is clunky, or the software is too "heavy" for a standard device, you've already lost the player at the payment screen. And the game itself becomes irrelevant.

South Africa tells a different story entirely. Because the infrastructure is more stable and internet speeds are



higher, many technical barriers facing other African markets largely fall away.

Players here have both the patience and the bandwidth for a much more immersive experience. It's one of the few regions on the continent where we see sustained interest in live casinos and the kind of high-production slots typically found in European lobbies.

When Tech Meets Reality

There is often a natural temptation to take a library of games that performed well in Europe, move them directly into a new territory, and simply hope for the results to follow.

But the reality on the ground is that games designed for high-speed office Wi-Fi and the latest smartphones don't always translate to environments where connections can be shaky, and devices are often a few generations behind.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, a basic 2GB monthly data plan costs around 3.9 percent of the average monthly income, the highest relative cost globally, while four out of five smartphones sold cost under US\$200 (£151).

It is a tough but essential lesson to learn. In these regions, a five-second loading delay is far more than just a minor technical glitch; it can mean the difference between engagement and abandonment.

This is why offering "lightweight" content becomes a commercial necessity rather than just a technical preference.

At the end of the day, a title that loads instantly without draining a player's data will consistently outperform a "beautiful" game that spends half its time buffering - no matter how impressive it looks on paper.

Building Trust Beyond The Interface

Technical performance might be what gets a player to click, but it's usually cultural familiarity that keeps them coming back.

It's a cut we see across many emerging markets: content designed strictly for a Western audience might spark some initial curiosity, but it rarely builds the kind of lasting loyalty African operators depend on.

Recent surveys of over 6,000 African gamers confirm that more than half of respondents consider cultural relevance a high priority when choosing a game.

For instance, Egyptian-themed slots travel well globally because the iconography is universally familiar. But they're still a Western interpretation of African identity.

Operators who've gone further, curating lobbies around titles with genuine

African folklore, local wildlife, or mechanics that mirror familiar street games, have significantly stronger engagement than those who simply re-ordered a European library.

Players immediately know when something was built for them rather than translated for them. And that difference matters more than many operators expect.

With acquisition costs rising everywhere, this kind of local relevance has become a powerful commercial advantage.

In many cases, it's the primary reason a player stays with a platform instead of moving to a competitor the moment a session ends.

The View From The Ground

Looking at a map, it can be tempting to see one massive, uniform opportunity. But the data consistently shows a much more fragmented and

nuanced reality.

The African gaming market is projected to generate US\$2.29 billion (£1.73bn) in revenue in 2026, scaling toward US\$4.10 billion (£3.10bn) by 2031, at a compound annual growth rate of 12.32 percent.

Even the most impressive library of games loses its value if those titles struggle to load on a basic device or during peak traffic. A game might technically be available from Lagos to Cape Town, but the way it's used - and what people expect from it - can differ dramatically.

Ultimately, the biggest takeaway is that there is no shortcut for local insight. It is a landscape shaped as much by its specific technical hurdles as by its unique, varied cultures.

The operators who've stopped guessing and started observing are the ones building something that wins.



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East Africa

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EDITOR'S CONCLUSION

Our experts may differ in their views on how popular the World Cup will be with African bettors, but there is no disagreement that it will be a pivotal moment.

The real opportunity is less about securing a short-term spike in new users and more about how operators play the long game, effectively converting that initial interest into sustained engagement.

From a tech perspective, our experts agree that there is no room for error - execution is critical. Trust, transparency and automation will play crucial roles in delivering a reliable and positive experience, particularly when it comes to payments, pricing accuracy and risk management. But, as Owoseni emphasises, educational content, prompts and on-site explainers will also be key in guiding new consumers on how to bet and build trust. For Rich, nurturing the type of platform confidence that sees consumers return comes back to the technical experience.

Fast deposits and withdrawals, transparent bonuses and a frictionless journey are not

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS FROM THIS DISCUSSION IS THAT ALL PARTICIPANTS AGREE: ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION ACTIVITIES SHOULD NOT START AFTER THE TOURNAMENT ENDS.



optional, but defining factors for success.

During downtimes, operators must look beyond the core product, provide intelligent content suggestions and engage players with virtual games and casino products based on their behaviour.

WHAT IS CLEAR IS THAT THE WINNING WORLD CUP FORMULA IS NOT A SINGLE STRATEGY BUT A COMPREHENSIVE, HOLISTIC APPROACH THAT COMBINES ROBUST TECH, INTELLIGENT AUTOMATION, EDUCATIONAL CONTENT, A SEAMLESS USER EXPERIENCE AND PERSONALISED ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES.

ONLY WHEN ALL THESE FACTORS ARE PRESENT CAN OPERATORS LEVERAGE THE OPPORTUNITY, SCORE BIG AND ATTRACT AND RETAIN PLAYERS FROM KICK-OFF UNTIL LONG AFTER THE FINAL WHISTLE.



Local markets need local solutions

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MEGA SHOOT STEALS THE SPOTLIGHT: At The World Cup with Gamified Penalties

The **World Cup brings millions of football fans** to TV screens and mobile devices, **many of whom** will be **drawn to betting**. Research by **Paysafe found** that **60% of surveyed World Cup followers plan to bet** online or through an app, **including 19%** who plan to do so **for the first time**. **That gives sportsbooks a major opportunity, but also a clear retention issue.**



Once the bet settles or a national team exits, or the tournament ends, many may have little reason to return. Soft2Bet's MEGA Shoot addresses that gap with a familiar penalty shootout format that helps operators keep those players active.

A Football-Native Engagement Layer

MEGA is Soft2Bet's Motivational Engineering Gaming Application, a standalone gamification solution for casino and sportsbook brands. **Operators can customise its engines** through rewards, bonus triggers, player segmentation, difficulty levels and campaign rules.

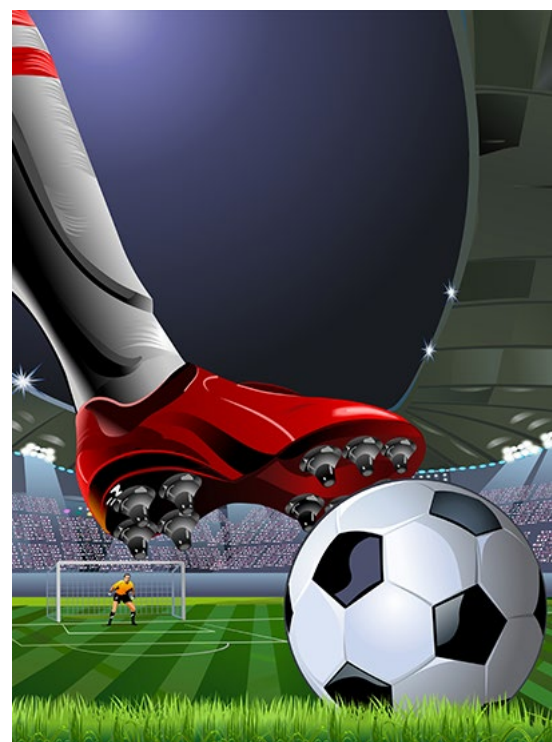
Created with the 2026 World Cup in mind, MEGA Shoot adds a head-to-head penalty game to the MEGA range. **Each MEGA Shoot match follows a penalty shootout.** **Players choose where to**

shoot, then switch roles and decide where to dive. Results appear immediately, keeping the format quick, familiar and easy to follow.

The pressure of a penalty needs little explanation, even for casual fans. A session can fit before kick-off, at half-time, between matches or after a bet has settled. It helps operators reconnect with players who came for one fixture, one team or one bet, **while keeping the experience tied to the tournament.**

Operators can connect MEGA Shoot to sportsbook and casino rewards, so players can return for another

shootout, build progress towards a reward or explore a casino offer.



New Gamification Engine



Inside MEGA Shoot's Retention Strategy

Early figures from selected *Soft2Bet* partner brands indicate that players are returning to the game.

- **13.5% uplift** in retention
- **31.9% game engagement** among active players
- **71.2% of MEGA Shoot players returned** for a second match

MEGA uses player data and behavioural science to shape challenges, progression and rewards for different groups. **Operators can tailor campaigns for first-time players** backing a national team, **lapsed players returning** for the tournament and **regular or high-value players**.

Product and CRM teams can adjust rewards, bonus

triggers, player segments and difficulty by fixture, market or campaign. **This keeps each offer connected to the match, team or tournament that brought the player in, rather than relying on a standard bonus.**

Seamless Integration, Absolute Control

MEGA Shoot engine can be added to an operator's existing casino or sportsbook platform through a single API, regardless of provider. The **current setup can stay in place without replacing core systems or changing the player journey.**

Once live, campaign settings are managed from the back office, including rewards, bonus triggers, segmentation and difficulty levels. Matchday offers, market updates, or

player-group adjustments do not require separate tech projects, so product and marketing teams can react as fixtures change, national teams advance, and player interest shifts.

The engine can also be **reused after the final, with rewards, eligibility rules and safeguards adapted to each market. Soft2Bet applies the same standards to ambassador activity, which covers advertising, responsible gaming and jurisdictional rules.**

For operators, MEGA Shoot turns a familiar football format into a campaign they can run, adapt and measure within their existing platform during the World Cup and after the final. The same engine can be refreshed for later campaigns, giving players a reason to return long after a single bet, fixture, or team's run has ended.



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MARKET OVERVIEW

The economics of acquisition are becoming hard to justify, with the cost of acquiring new players up 60 percent globally over the last three-years and churn rates also hitting record levels.

The average player now only sticks at a site for between 30 and 90 days, and estimates show that the current cost of acquiring a sportsbook bettor in mature tier-one markets is between US\$250 and US\$400 (£198-£316), while a casino player costs between US\$400 and US\$650 (£316-£514).

With some 5,000 online gambling brands now operating worldwide, competition for players is intense, forcing operators to

In this ultra-competitive and saturated market, retention has become the new battleground.

The challenge now is not simply attracting players, but keeping them engaged in a way that feels relevant, entertaining and commercially viable.

To get the expert take on this and much more, iGamingFuture invited the heads of marketing and retention at industry-leading brands: Soft2Bet, Tipico, kwiff, and new entrant Bet St George, for a one-of-a-kind discussion on the future of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and player engagement.

rethink how they approach this equation.

It's no longer about who can offer the biggest bonuses, but about who can win players' attention, trust and long-term loyalty through smarter CRM strategies and better player experiences; experiences that keep players coming back - organically.



But what does a truly player-first CRM strategy actually look like in 2026?

How should operators measure engagement and loyalty in a retention-led environment?

And are the industry's existing metrics still fit for purpose?



Lauren Harrison

SENIOR REPORTER
iGF



MATTHIAS S. KAISER
DIRECTOR MARKETING
RETENTION & CRM

Tipico



JOANNA BEATON
DIRECTOR OF
RETENTION & LOYALTY

kwiff



SARAH LAYCOCK
MANAGING DIRECTOR

Bet St George



ALEX GITSIK
CMO

Soft2Bet

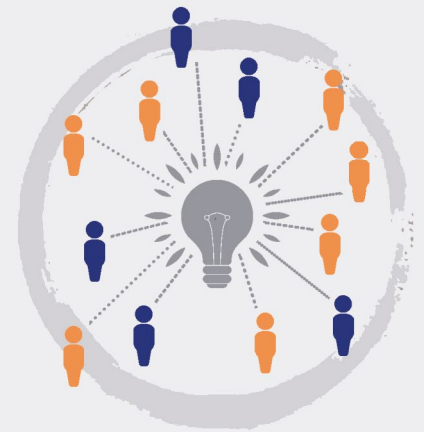
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INDUSTRY **INSIGHTS**

As the market landscape evolves and adapts to new trends, our industry has now been compelled to react accordingly.

IN THIS EDITION a panel of industry experts explore the future of CRM and player engagement. As acquisition costs rise and loyalty becomes harder to maintain, operators must rethink retention through gamification, localisation, motivational design, personalisation, data-driven strategies and next-gen technology, creating more engaging player journeys that extend beyond transactional interactions, strengthen loyalty and drive sustainable growth.

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GETTING LUCKIA: With Regulation

Regulatory frameworks are constantly evolving, and operators are under constant pressure to keep pace. For businesses operating across multiple jurisdictions, compliance has become significantly more complex, while the cost of getting it wrong can run into the millions, making clear strategy and operational control more important than ever.



Rebeca Cerdeiras Montero

HEAD OF LEGAL, COMPLIANCE
& REGULATORY AFFAIRS
Luckia

In this strict regulatory context, there is no such thing as getting lucky with compliance.

But according to Luckia's Head of Legal, Compliance & Regulatory Affairs, Rebeca Cerdeiras Montero, operators can get ahead - securing a valuable early-mover advantage - by investing in compliance from the outset.

In this top-level conflagration, *iGamingFuture* and Rebeca delve into two major new pieces of legislation affecting EU operators - the Accessibility and AI Acts.

They explore how operators can best prepare for their imminent arrival.

They also explore the shift in compliance mindset quietly taking place across the industry; before rounding-off with Rebeca's advice for how operators can strike the all-important balance between expansion and compliance - and whether those goals are even divisible anymore.

1 Regulation and compliance are often seen as limiting growth, but some forward thinkers argue that being proactive about them can help operators scale more sustainably and faster than competitors. **What are your thoughts? Can compliance be a competitive advantage?**

Compliance doesn't limit growth and can actually be a catalyst for it.

Operators who invest in compliance consistently move faster later. They get licensing approvals more quickly, they build trust with

banks and partners **and** they **keep players longer** because players feel safe.

In Spain, for example, operators who already employed responsible gambling tools and policies didn't struggle when the new rules came into force in 2020 and were able to grow and adapt easily, while others failed. That's a real competitive advantage.

Being ahead of the game in a regulatory sense also helps operators be successful in different jurisdictions as rules increase worldwide, and that's not the only advantage. As well as decreasing regulatory

risk, from sanctions and fines, it can help provide access to regulators, premium affiliates and make it easier to build strong B2B relationships.

But the key reason is that your players trust you, feel safe and therefore stay longer.

2 How can AI be practically integrated into day-to-day compliance operations to not only streamline processes but also minimise player friction and improve the overall user experience?

This is becoming more complicated as the EU AI Act has come into effect and it introduces a risk-based framework for the use of AI systems.

The act restricts certain uses of AI for analysing and predicting player behaviour and makes using it, even in terms of responsible gambling behaviour, legally risky in Europe. This is something a lot of companies are missing.

So the first point is the imperative of taking this new legislation into account, and consider how AI can be integrated alongside those rules to streamline daily operations. For example, you can use it for checking documents and verifying identity during KYC checks. But you cannot use it for behaviour analysis.

Another useful implementation is for anti-money laundering and regulatory reporting. AI can

monitor transactions and generate regulatory reports automatically. And this saves hours of human work and reduces errors.

Lastly, it's really helpful from a compliance perspective in terms of summarising new regulations, communicating the nuances and updating our documentation and policy guidelines.

3 With the EU Accessibility Act fast approaching, what should operators be doing right now to prepare and could accessibility become as big a differentiator as responsible gaming in shaping player trust going forward?

Most operators are not prepared, and in my opinion this is a strategic error. The EU Accessibility Act is real and the timeline is now. Operators not treating this as an imperative are missing the early-mover opportunity.





Right now, operators need to audit their platforms, apps and software and policies against accessibility standards. Changes should also be tested first-hand by people with disabilities, not just automated checks. And you need to train staff.

Training is the most important element for me. If employees also understand what's changed and what you can offer, it starts to become a differentiator, like responsible gambling.

The operators who build genuine accessibility now will own the trust position for years. And it actually makes commercial sense. Around 15-20 percent of people in the EU live with some form of disability. That's a huge sector of the market that's been ignored.

4 In fast-moving markets, how can operators strike the right balance between maintaining strict compliance and still achieving ambitious commercial and player acquisition goals?

These two goals are not opposite. We just need to stop treating them like they are.

The problem is not the goals, it's the structure. When compliance and commercial teams work separately with different priorities, conflict is inevitable. This needs to change. Instead of marketing and commercial doing a project, then asking for compliance input at the end, we need to be part of the conversation from the start.

iGaming is heavily regulated,



not just by EU-wide frameworks, but also by strict national rules. Every country has its own requirements, which must be factored in from the start.

When entering a new market, the question shouldn't be 'commercial vs compliance', but rather: can we build a sustainable business here and how do we do it properly?

In practice, that comes down to three things.

First, having the right technology and tools. You need systems that allow you to adapt quickly to different regulatory environments without rebuilding everything from scratch each time.

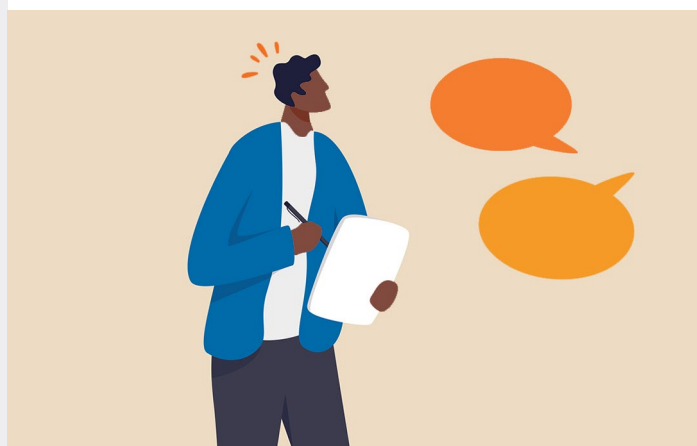
Second, being proactive rather than reactive. You need to understand where regulation is heading, not just where it is today, so you can

anticipate changes instead of constantly catching up.

And **third, being transparent with leadership about the real cost of entering a market properly.**

Compliance is not a hidden constraint that appears later. It's part of the investment decision from the start.

In my opinion, the **operators winning today in highly regulated markets**, like Spain, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden **understand one thing: investing in compliance is the same as investing in growth.**



Rebeca's insights are particularly timely as EU operators enter a period of significant legal change, with both the Accessibility and AI Acts coming into force **and increasing pressure on operators**. She **believes many are still unprepared** for these changes - a **mistake. But one that can still be corrected if operators act quickly.**



Rebeca's advice is clear and strategic. In regulated markets, compliance is no longer a constraint, but a driver of growth.

In her view, **"investing in compliance is investing in growth"**, because the **operators who move early gain an advantage - securing faster market access, building stronger partnerships and earning long-term player trust.**

More broadly, **Rebeca highlights the wider shift still underway across compliance and legal departments** in the industry: **compliance is moving away from a siloed function to a company-wide responsibility, embedded in all departments and understood as a precondition for success.**



As player expectations continue to evolve, what do you see as a truly player-first CRM strategy? What does this look like in 2026? And how must the industry restructure its approach to deliver this?

JOANNA

Player expectations are vastly different now from what they have been in the past.

That's certainly from what I've seen over the length of my career.

Currently, I think the iGaming industry doesn't truly take a player-first approach. We just think we do.

What we're actually doing is taking a very sophisticated player-targeted approach, meaning that we approach it from the angle of: "How do we extract the most value from all of our players?"



But it is becoming increasingly difficult to extract value in the ways that we used to. Now we need to pivot and meet players where they are to sustain the relationship long term.

To effectively restructure and achieve this, teams need to work more closely together and present a unified approach that genuinely focuses on putting player interests first.

The more regulation increases, the more important this becomes. What does this look like? It means no more constant bonus email campaigns trying to lead players where we want them to go, but instead accommodating their wants and needs.

MATTHIAS

Generally, I agree with Joanna. But it's important to add that we need to consider the entire player journey.

And **that includes all the highs and lows players experience in regulated markets.**

CRM doesn't live in a silo.

It is every communication and process that goes out to the consumer. It all reflects our brand and their experiences, but too often departments act unilaterally, forgetting they are creating a single impression.

The best strategy for improving the customer experience is understanding this and having all departments working together - tech, product, marketing, UX - it all needs to be tied together.

ALEX

The hot topic for this year is AI and automation of CRM flows and campaigns.

The focus is on reducing manual operational processes within CRM and scaling automation as much as possible.

Every CRM platform - whether managed in-house or through an external provider - is looking at how to optimise automated journeys and

move closer to fully automated player lifecycle campaigns across multiple markets.

Moving forward from this, the next stage of CRM is better segmentation, with more sophisticated identification of players and behaviours.



SARAH

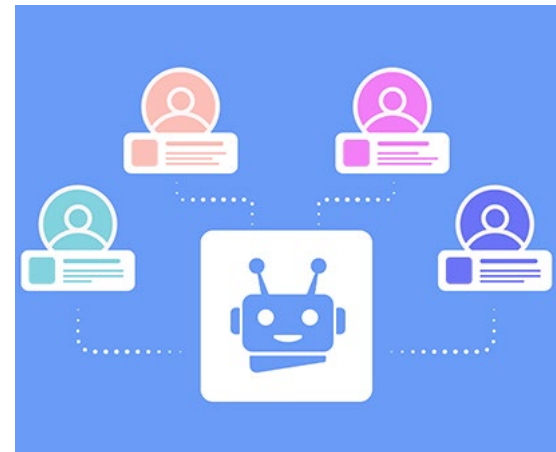
I think everyone has already nailed it.

I just want to add that for us, it's about leading with entertainment.

We're trying to take our customers on a journey of entertainment, while making sure they're being responsible.



Player churn is at record levels. How can operators move beyond transactional messaging to create emotionally engaging and entertainment-led player journeys that build loyalty?



JOANNA

The reality is that **bonuses don't do it anymore**. I've always been a **strong advocate for personalisation** in CRM and marketing, **but in 2026 that needs to go much further, especially with the evolution of AI**.

We're **already using AI very effectively** for compliance and safer gambling measures, **so there's a huge opportunity to apply those same insights to understanding player engagement and overall player health**.

The goal should be to **make players feel like they have a one-to-one relationship with you, rather than feeling like part of a mass marketing campaign**.

SARAH

We are a new company, so **we're very keen to get this area right**.

As an industry, I think we've sort of trained players to expect transactions and bonuses, which is helping cause churn.

At *Bet St George*, we want to **change this and reduce churn through entertainment**, not incentives.

Players have become **desensitised to bonuses, free spins and constant offers**.

We want our **players to come back for entertainment, not** because we're pulling them back with **freebies**.

In a practical sense, this looks like more attention to the consumer journey, gamification and personalisation that is based on behaviour and celebrates milestones that aren't total stakes. **Social events, mini-challenges and tournaments all help build community**.

The **key takeaway is that loyalty isn't built through incentives, but through rewarding people for enjoyment and building a culture around that**.

This is **fostered through personalised products and celebrating individual moments, but also** by making sure you are **taking care of the player long term and building trust** as part of the journey.

MATTHIAS

Creating a one-to-one experience moving forward is key.

At *Tipico*, we have a really big **player database** as we're the largest operator in the German market.

For us, it's really about **identifying the core player journeys and the key milestones in those journeys, then ensuring we engage with the consumer at the right time.**

We **also want to** be able to **surprise them with new developments.**

Going back to the high churn levels you mentioned, from Tipico's standpoint, we're not experiencing this; our retention rates are actually at a record high.

Over the last decade, **we've continuously improved retention rates not only for our VIPs, but also for casual players.**

So I think it is **important to note** that **churn depends on the brand and the market situation.**

We've done a lot of things right with predictive and data science models; for example, predicting when player churn is likely and using retention models that help identify which players to give bonuses to.

For me, **bonuses are still important, but they're only part of the puzzle. It's about other metrics too.** Relying on **heavy bonusing isn't a sustainable CRM strategy.**

ALEX

Eventually, I think every operator wants to move away from bonus-driven mechanisms and towards a more entertainment-based ecosystem.



This is the main shift we are seeing and it looks like engagement through missions, leaderboards and progression-based systems.

Gamification and motivational design are becoming central to engagement. How can operators embed these frameworks into their core CRM strategy, rather than treating them as add-ons?

ALEX

If we're looking at **traditional CRM**, we segment by value, activity and demographics. This is necessary and important, but probably no longer sufficient.

If you want to **differentiate yourself** in today's market, you need to provide extra value and this is why gamification is valuable.

At *Soft2Bet*, our strategy so far has been to add to the classic segmentation framework, building a new motivational layer that includes progression rewards, achievements, competitions, loyalty and so on.



We currently have a five-tier gamification system.

It leads players through a career as a pro football player, starting as a beginner, amateur, professional and going all the way to world-class legend. This segmentation via behaviour allows us to communicate with different players accordingly.

We also run classic CRM campaigns alongside this. The goal, ultimately, is retention. But when using tools like gamification, the focus shifts towards building longer-term habits and a more balanced approach between traditional CRM and motivational design within the product itself.



JOANNA

Okay, so *kwiff's* USP is gamification in sports.

We have a couple of features and we're doing things differently from any other operator in this respect.

Our Supercharge function aims to gamify sports betting: it can randomly supercharge a bet. Will you get a boost, won't you get a boost? Our users love this feature.



Gamification is extremely important in helping satisfy players and give them something outside of the traditional betting sphere, especially with the current demographic, who are more focused on the moment than long-tail engagement.

Players nowadays expect something fast and a quick turnaround, and they want to be satisfied in that moment, so I think it is essential for all operators to have some level of gamification going forward.

Players might not expect gamification at every site, but operators who don't have it are missing the opportunity to appeal to a huge chunk of the market.

Players might still sign-up, but you'll have a higher churn rate, because they'll soon look elsewhere.

SARAH

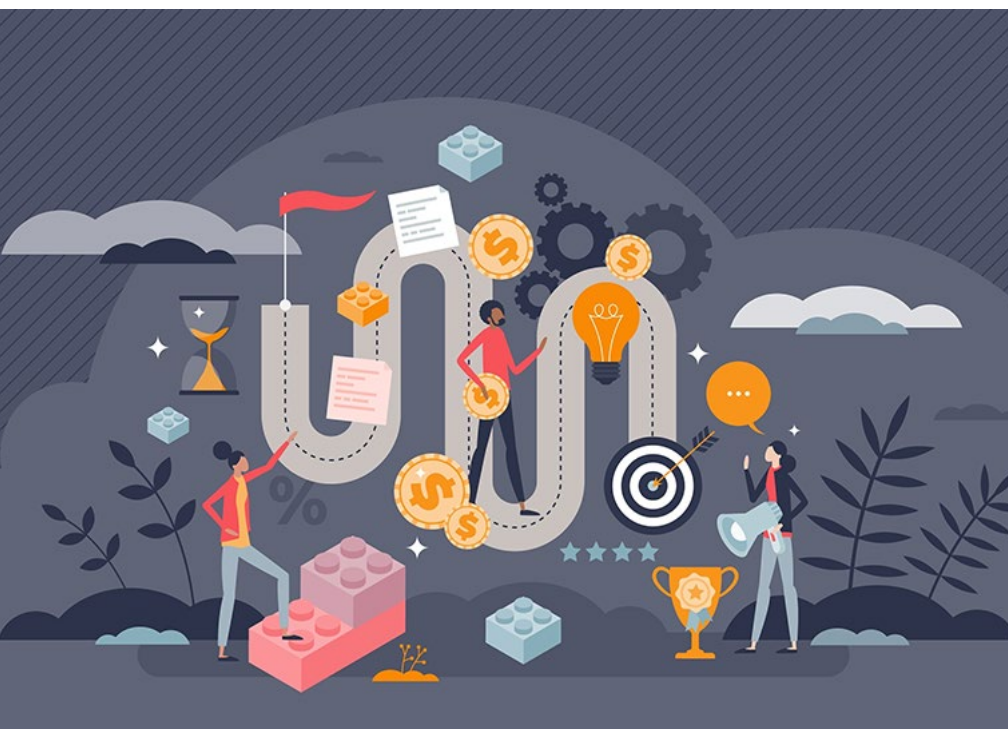
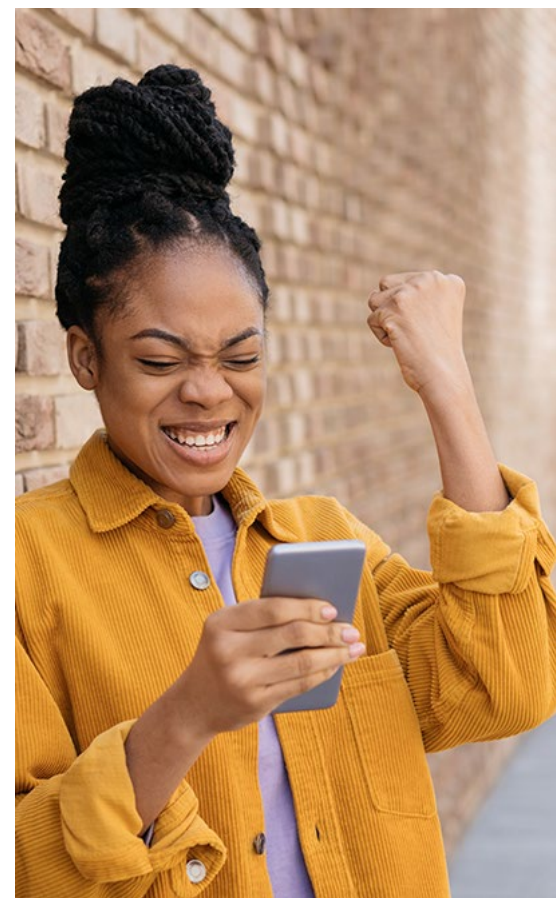
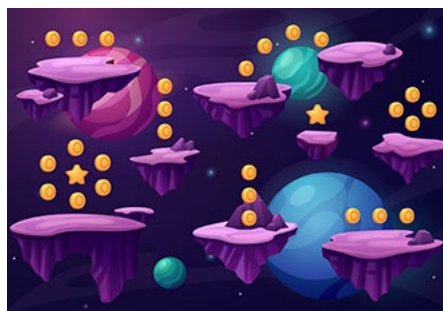
As a new brand, I think it's still quite early for us at the moment in terms of gamification and motivational frameworks.

But we are already looking at how we can build that into our core CRM journey, the

overall player experience, how it would be implemented consistently, et cetera.

We want to encourage players to come back by providing a sense of progression over time, so it's about working out a system that rewards participation, not just spending.

We also want to ensure we do so in a safe environment that allows players to engage.



But, as I said, it's still early days.



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MATTHIAS

Gamification has become somewhat of a **buzzword**, just like **AI** nowadays - it's just something everybody has to have and it means something different to everybody.

In reality, gamification is not something customers think about and they are no longer surprised by it. It's something customers expect, even if they don't know the term.

At the basic level, it's something that extends their lifetime value or session length by motivating them to do a certain action.

When it's done well, it also plays into how the whole brand and product are perceived.



I think **some companies** just put gamification on top of their **existing marketing strategy** or **CRM strategy** and that doesn't work well.

In this respect, newer brands have it easier as they can build it into the conversion cycles and embed it from the start.

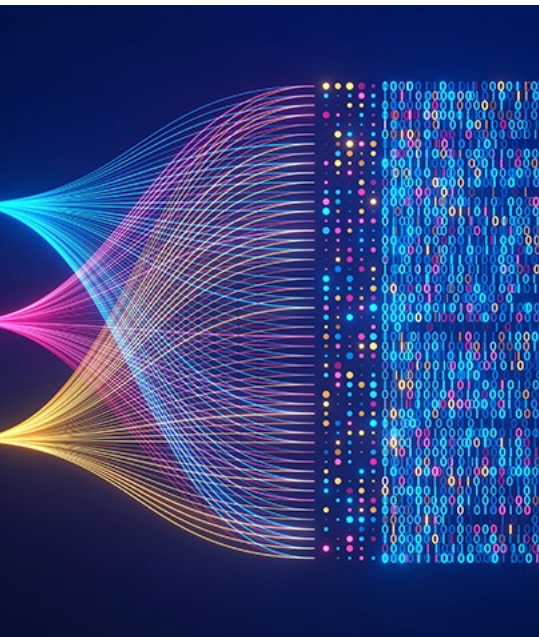
Longstanding brands need to undergo a **mindset change** and actually **test** how adding the **new layer** works with the existing conversion cycle.

You might need to **adapt** or **throw out** some **older models, systems** or **strategies** if they don't run alongside each other.

Doing gamification well is really about **zooming out**. Getting the strategy right across all the channels, across all the **cycles** and **rethinking** and **remapping everything**. If it isn't embedded well, it will simply feel like a **puzzle piece that doesn't fit**.



What are the best ways of measuring success for engagement and loyalty? Do we need new metrics or are current retention metrics still fit-for-purpose?



MATTHIAS

Our industry is already incredibly complex.

We have so many different KPIs to monitor already.

I believe the monetary KPIs will always stay at the core. It's why it is called the bottom line.

But we also need to go a level deeper than the metrics that we are looking at right now.

Often we look at churn, but what we need to understand is why a customer churns. We need to understand the behaviours in greater detail.

I think the most important data in this area comes from churn prediction models.

We need to understand why once valuable customers leave and ask if we can increase long-term value from existing customers. We also need to know if a customer who could have been more valuable has left us. We need to close this loop!

Responsible gambling metrics can be useful. What every operator needs to remember is that quickly burning through players makes no sense as a long-term strategy.

JOANNA

We like to have lots of metrics and overcomplicate things for ourselves, but revenue metrics will always remain central.

And in the next few years there should be some interesting developments in "Player Health Metrics", as I mentioned before.

These capture areas like how long a player takes to return verification documents or how long they continue betting before taking a

timeout. Do we need an intervention before that? These sorts of measurements could become more important from an engagement standpoint.

But the core revenue metrics will always stay the same.

That said, I think to focus on engagement, as marketers, we need to shift our focus away from open rates, click-through rates and bonus spend. Our focus should be on softer measures that are indicative of player health and whether that player is going to keep playing with us for a longer time.

SARAH

As a newer brand entering the market, we do have to focus on financial metrics.



The reality is, they will always be there.

But we are also looking at moving towards the new KPIs focused on quality of engagement, such as active days, rates of organic return and changes in how play stabilises over time. We also want to include health metrics and we look at the engagement rates for the events and content we put out.

In terms of our relationship with players, it is important to build trust and experience by looking at why players churn and making space for that type of feedback.

ALEX

We can look at as many new metrics as we like, but we'll always come back to the bottom line: the value of the players, the deposit and average spend.

It is what it is.

What I would say is that we obviously need to measure new activities as they emerge, but this doesn't have to be based on long-term behaviour.

Events or short time periods, such as 30-days, are enough



for predictive behavioural analysis to work, providing insight into life cycles, player value, churn scores and bonus efficiency.

SETTING THE SCENE: Strategies Behind Immense Gambling Ads

Living in Malta in 2015, I knew the name *Videoslots* long before I knew the iGaming industry. At the time, I was working in hospitality, but the brand had already worked its way into my awareness, writes Lauren Harrison.

That awareness came via a small fan that plugged into my phone's charging port. In Malta's relentless 35-degree-plus summer heat, it felt like a lifesaver and a genius freebie.

More than a decade later, having spent most of it working in iGaming myself, I now understand why someone fresh off the boat already knew the name of a betting brand. Behind that recognition was a carefully executed marketing strategy designed to build familiarity. And it was clearly working.

In the following interview, *iGamingFuture* and Marco Trucco takes us behind the scenes of some of the company's most successful marketing campaigns, explaining how humour, bold branding and AI-assisted production helped transform the performance of brands like *Mr Vegas* and *Videoslots*.

He'll also delve into the decision-making and risk-taking behind the strategy.

1 With acquisition costs rising across regulated markets, how important is brand storytelling and high-impact creative in helping operators stand out in an increasingly competitive advertising landscape?

When I first started at *Immense*, we were running

a couple of TV ads, but they were very generic: a player sat on a couch, exclaiming as they won, and then there were brand slogans with familiar messaging like 'Vegas in your pocket'.

The challenge was that *Mr Vegas* needed to feel distinctive, especially given the similarity of its name to competitors. The brand was doing fine as we were

coming out of COVID, but our advertising didn't feature much storytelling or creative impact.

We decided to do a TV campaign because I believe that is where you have space to create something that resonates. We developed a much bolder creative concept centred around a flamboyant *Mr Vegas*, an Elvis-inspired character with



Marco Trucco

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER
Immense Group

strong visual and audio cues.

The **campaign leaned heavily into personality, humour and recognisable branding**, rather than generic product messaging. **The impact was immediate. Compared with our previous campaigns**, the new ads generated three to four times the traffic with the same media budget.

Based on this, we extended the campaign and focused on other sports and personalities. **For our second stage, we created two ads**, one dart-focused and one more generally entertainment-focused. **The dart version outperformed the standard version.**

Last year, we also sponsored *Big Brother* and it was a breakthrough, providing six-weeks of intense exposure that really amplified the brand. **We created a song and sound bite.**

The social media reaction was fantastic, with users on Reddit, X, YouTube and others commenting on our ads, creating memes and discussing us. People were even saying they wanted *Mr Vegas* in *Big Brother* because his personality outranked the competitors.

The takeaway is that **storytelling and high-impact creative can dramatically increase brand exposure and**

recognition, especially in saturated markets. **The effect it had for us is demonstrable.**

2 Your recent AI-assisted TV campaign shows how technology is changing advertising production. **How do you see AI transforming marketing creativity, production costs and campaign scalability for iGaming operators?**

Traditionally, TV advertising has been expensive and high risk. A proper campaign can cost anywhere from £150,000 to over £500,000, especially when involving celebrities, complex sets or a premium production team.

Once an ad is filmed, making changes or creating new versions typically requires major additional investment. There are also usage fees for actors and other things that add up.

If a campaign underperforms, operators are often forced to either continue spending behind weak performance or scrap a costly production altogether. It's a costly commitment and if you get it wrong, you cannot just launch another campaign straight after.

We recently launched an AI-generated TV campaign for *Videoslots* in Sweden and it was a leap of faith, but within

a few weeks of **seeing what the agency, *Armstrong Film*, could do, we knew the quality was there to create production-level content.**

One of the biggest challenges with this campaign was capturing the subtle human expressions and nuances we wanted to include, **because again we used humour for impact, so emotion and timing were key.** It took thousands of prompts and iterations to get everything right, as these are not easy concepts to explain.

The main benefits of using AI were that we could go back and tweak things, produce different language versions with ease and re-use elements without paying new production or actor fees.

The project was still cheaper than a regular TV production - not as cheap as a banner ad or radio campaign, so it is still quite expensive - but costs will go down over time.

Overall, I think **AI will reduce the gap between operators, allow for more experimentation and increase advertising output, which is great as it provides room for brands to get really creative and brings tier two and three operators into the TV advertising game - traditionally the domain of tier one brands.**



3

Many operators struggle to differentiate their brands beyond bonuses and

promotions. **How can creative marketing and brand identity become a stronger competitive advantage in regulated markets?**

Bonuses and promotions are no longer as relevant for acquisition as they used to be, especially in highly regulated markets where there are rules around wagering requirements, cross-selling and when bonuses can be given.

You **still need bonuses, players aren't choosing brands solely because of their identity.**

Our goal as a mid-sized operator is not necessarily to become the biggest brand

in the market, **but to earn a place in the customer's 'consideration set'.**

Players often hold multiple accounts and regularly look for new casinos to try. In that moment, **familiarity and trust matter more than simply offering the largest bonus.** We are **not talking about top-of-mind recognition,** as that is expensive. **Instead, familiarity and a sense of legitimacy are generated through brand building,** such as advertising and sponsorships **that help build trust and get your brand out there.**

Ultimately, I think it is a mix of **bonuses, trust and brand identity that ensures you're in the consideration set for players and brands that cultivate a brand presence and more likely to stand out.**

4

As mobile continues to dominate player behaviour, **what should operators be focusing on when launching new apps or mobile-first experiences to improve acquisition, engagement and retention?**

Immense is a bit behind on the whole app movement. We have a very good mobile site that converts well and players love it, but to date, we've **only launched a specific app in Sweden** and that happened just a few weeks ago.

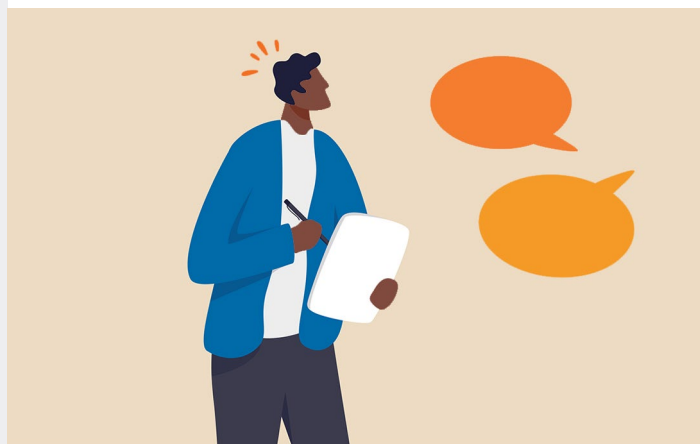
I'm **excited about this** because the app store will be a **new acquisition channel and importantly it's one of the only channels unlicensed operators cannot offer due to the protections and gatekeeping offered by**



Google Play or Apple's App Store.

Aside from that, **app players generally have higher levels of engagement** - less friction, things are more user-friendly and easier to operate - **leading to lower levels of churn.**

As our app is new and only live in Sweden, we have yet to capture these benefits, but we're in a very good position to improve our market share. We'll be rolling out our app across all our markets this year and we're excited for the uplift ahead.



Marketing often leverages storytelling to build emotional connection and create brand recognition, so it's no surprise that the campaigns that resonate most are often the ones built around humour and strong personalities.



In this honest and revealing interview, **Marco takes us behind-the-scenes, sharing how leaning into a bold brand personality in advertising helped *Mr Vegas* achieve three to four times more traffic** and almost got *Videoslots* voted onto *Big Brother*.

He also discusses the company's "leap of faith" into **AI-assisted TV production in Sweden** - a decision resulting in greater flexibility, scalability and reduced production costs - **leading Marco to believe that AI can help democratise high-quality advertising for smaller operators.**

Marco's insights are candid and invigorating, and a timely reminder that **when it comes to creative marketing, sometimes the right decision is following your gut and not shying away from being bold,** trying new concepts or experimenting with new tech.



EDITOR'S CONCLUSION

What has become clear throughout this discussion is that the era of relying on bonuses and transactional CRM is over. Today's players are increasingly desensitised to promotional incentives - and far more driven by experiences.

As Sarah says, **loyalty is no longer built through repeated bonus campaigns, but through rewarding enjoyment and building a culture around it.** And **whether or not consumers use the term "gamification"**, they know good entertainment - and they expect it.

But **successfully implementing this** requires more than simply bolting on new mechanics to existing systems. It **demand a redesign and remapping of the player journey.**

ACROSS THE BOARD, THERE WAS ALSO CONSENSUS THAT THE FUTURE OF CRM LIES IN PERSONALISED, ENGAGING AND EMOTIONALLY RESONANT EXPERIENCES CREATED THROUGH GAMIFICATION, BEHAVIOURAL PERSONALISATION, AI-DRIVEN JOURNEYS AND COMMUNITY-LED ENGAGEMENT - OR IDEALLY A CAREFULLY TARGETED BLEND OF ALL THE ABOVE.



For Matthias, **this means operators need to zoom out and guarantee that new mechanics and engagement frameworks are integrated across all channels and stages of the consumer lifecycle.** It also means **rethinking how teams collaborate**, because **if engagement mechanics are not embedded thoroughly**, they **risk feeling like "a part of the puzzle that doesn't fit"**.

This **discussion** has ultimately **returned to a familiar tension between new thinking and old ways.**

WHILE ALL THE EXPERTS ACKNOWLEDGE THE NEED FOR SOFTER, MORE NUANCED ENGAGEMENT METRICS, THE INDUSTRY BY AND LARGE STILL OPERATES WITHIN FRAMEWORKS DESIGNED TO MEASURE AND OPTIMISE PROFIT, BRINGING US FULL CIRCLE BACK TO JOANNA'S OPENING QUESTION: DO WE EVER REALLY PUT PLAYER INTERESTS FIRST OR SIMPLY TELL OURSELVES WE DO?



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