Ground Shaker hits in Slough, Wigan, Penrith and Leith!

As the seismic waves caused by Ground Shaker subside, the NBGA is looking at where the promotion worked well and where improvements could be made.

Research is being carried out with customers, club managers and operators, in addition to assessing the advertising media used, in order to explore as fully as possible every aspect of this sizeable promotion.

Ground Shaker was the first promotion of its kind for the NBGA, which has traditionally used television advertising and point of sale material in clubs as its primary means of promotion. Initial comments from all involved have been very positive, especially in Slough, Penrith, Wigan and Leith! In total, 1,273 winners walked away with a share of

Members of the Bingo and National Game Associations were greeted by a London bathed in sunshine as they made their way to this year’s AGMs at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in Westminster on May 19.

A slightly revamped format saw three key political figures express their views about how the gambling industry will be shaped in the future. Minister for Gambling, Lord McIntosh of Haringey made his first address to the bingo industry since taking up the role, while Conservative MP John Greenway and Peter Dean, Chairman of the Gaming Board for Great Britain, were happy to return, having addressed the 2003 AGMs. The Pre-Legislative Scrutiny Committee’s report on the Draft Gambling Bill has re-ignited the debate about the modernisation of the country’s gambling legislation and, as Chairman of the Committee, Mr Greenway was able to give an insight into the process of the report,
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The National Game
Quarterly news and update from Chief Executive, Paul Talboys

We are already a little over half way through 2004, the first half of which has been very busy for the industry and NBGA. Admission figures for the end of 2003 were disappointing. Subsequently we have worked together to address this, through a £500,000 special game in March, revisions to ticket sales policy and, of course, our first ‘below the line’ promotion, the Ground Shaker. All of these have delivered positive results for the industry.

Having made such substantial investments in the promotion of the game so far, it is vital that we maintain our media profile and grow our business. It is clear from feedback on Ground Shaker that such promotions have a part to play in promoting bingo but it is equally clear that they cannot address all our promotional needs.

Summer is traditionally a quieter time for the industry, allowing everyone to prepare for the autumn and winter, which tend to offer better bingo weather. In anticipation of this the NBGA has already committed to two further £500,000 special games, on Sunday 24 October and Sunday 19 December, both of which will have promotional support. There will also be the opportunity to make some noise in your local markets in and around The Bingo Association’s charity week for Breakthrough Breast Cancer, Bingo for Breakthrough. May I wish you all a happy and enjoyable summer.

Bingo in the news

January, February and March are traditionally quiet months for a lot of businesses, following the holiday season madness. Although 2004 got off to a reasonable start for bingo in the news, it was quieter than we would have liked.

First quarter media coverage for 2004 shows a spread of coverage similar to previous months, but increasingly it is regional coverage in local daily papers that is keeping bingo in the news. This type of coverage is very important as it allows journalists to look at what has happened at a local level. It can also allow clubs to build relationships with their local papers.

Some regions of the country performed better than others for coverage with the West Midlands coming top in both January and February; Scotland and North West were a tie for March.

Going for gold

Gala Bingo has recently installed its 50,000th dual MCB shutter card. The cards, manufactured by Hull-based bingo and gaming systems manufacturers, ECM Systems, have proven to be a hit for all concerned and, to celebrate, David Valente, Gala’s Product Development Manager (below left), was presented with a gold-plated version.

On receiving the award, he said, ‘Reaching this target of dual card installations on a tight programme has been a tremendous achievement by the team at ECM. Gala customers have found the product very easy to operate and the aesthetic benefits of the shape and colour scheme have proven very popular. ‘With the increasing popularity of MCB, Gala has seen huge benefits in converting systems to use the dual card in over 70 per cent of its branches. In addition our Linked MCB games give a great value-for-money offer to players.’

Jim Moss, ECM’s Sales Manager (above right), commented, ‘This product has come a long way since the first installation for Gala back in 2000 and is now one of our most successful MCB products. In addition to the cards, we have designed and supplied all of the underlying technology and systems that deliver the benefits of dual-card MCB to the operator.’

Each card has two unique combinations of numbers, allowing players to participate in the popular linked MCB games between clubs. The board is comfortable to use, with translucent shutters that allow players to see the numbers they have marked.

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2004 Diary

8 September Bingo Association Golf Day Patshull Park Hotel Golf and Country Club, Pattingham, Shropshire. Tel: 01582 860921
21-23 September International Leisure Industry Week, NEC, Birmingham Tel: 020 8232 1600 www.liw.co.uk
5-6 October G2E, Las Vegas, USA www.globalgamingexpo.com
16-23 October Bingo for Breakthrough 2004 Tel: 020 7025 2493

ACE Euro 2004 winners
Three lucky readers had their eye on the ball and have each won a fabulous ACE Euro 2004 Lion. Congratulations to Ian Scott, Crown Bingo, Redcar, Cleveland; G Parrott, Rio Bingo, Canvey Island; and Sanjay Bahanda, Mecca, Hull. A big thank you to all at ACE.

National Bingo Game: key statistics
Total Prize Money since the game began £788,077,589
Total Prize Money played for in 2003 £47,609,212
Total Prize money played for in 2004 to date £20,899,299

Biggest games for 2003
Sunday 23 November with ticket sales of 830,445
Sunday 27 April with ticket sales of 825,523

Biggest games to date for 2004
Saturday 8 May with ticket sales of 1,180,644
Saturday 17 May with ticket sales of 962,292

2E, Las Vegas, USA www.globalgamingexpo.com

Sanjay Bahanda, Mecca, Hull.

Win a fabulous ACE Euro 2004 Lion. Congratulations to Ian Scott, Crown Bingo, Redcar, Cleveland; G Parrott, Rio Bingo, Canvey Island; and Sanjay Bahanda, Mecca, Hull. A big thank you to all at ACE.

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Draft Gambling Bill reply from Government

Developments on the new Gambling Bill continue apace. The Government has responded to the report by the Joint Scrutiny Committee, taking on board the concerns expressed by many both within and outside the gaming industry over the potential for problem gambling, particularly connected with unlimited stake and prize fruit machines. There will now be three categories of casino – small, large and regional (resort) – with only resort casinos being allowed these machines. Machines in all other casinos will be up to category B in the new system (jackpots) and limited to a maximum of 80 for small casinos, and 150 for large casinos. As it requested, the Scrutiny Committee is being recalled to consider the proposed table/machine ratio of 1:5.

There will also be a ban on bingo in small casinos, with local authorities gaining greater powers to prevent casino development if they choose. Bingo played in pubs and clubs will require a licence if played for more than £1,000 in any seven-day period, rejecting the Scrutiny Committee’s recommendation that this should be increased to £2,000.

Social responsibility codes will become a factor in licence considerations and in cases where an operator has failed to comply, this could be regarded as grounds for revocation. This is the Government’s final policy statement before publication of the Bill, which is expected in the autumn.

Golfing for a good cause

This year’s Bingo Association Golf Day takes place on 8 September at Patshull Park Hotel Golf and Country Club, Pattingham, Shropshire. An annual fixture, the day has become popular with members and industry suppliers, enjoying good company and a great day’s golf.

In addition to providing opportunities for all those golf stories, the event is your chance to support the Association’s charity, Breakthrough Breast Cancer.

Entry forms have already been sent to members and former participants. If you would like to take part, further copies and details are available from Donna Black on 01582 860921.

Peter Lindsay

Members will be saddened to hear of the death on 15 June 2004 of Peter Lindsay, who operated bingo clubs over a period of about 30 years until the late 1990s. Peter was also, for very many years, a well-respected member of the Executive Committee of the Association. He leaves a wife and three sons to whom we extend our condolences.
Scottish-based Carlton Clubs, the privately owned bingo group that's one of the largest private operators in the UK, is intending to undertake a flotation on the AIM market of the London Stock Exchange in June/July to raise funds to support its growth strategy.

The group is expected to achieve a valuation of approximately £40 million.

Andy Irvine, Managing Director Scotland for international property consultants Jones Lang LaSalle and former captain of the Scottish rugby team, is to be appointed as a non-executive director of the floated company.

Carlton Clubs, formerly the bingo division of Taylor Clark plc, was acquired by the current management team in 1998 and a secondary buyout of the venture capitalist interests took place in 2002. Peter Perrins, Managing Director, said, Carlton Clubs has come a long way since we acquired the business six years ago. We’ve put in place a multi-million-pound investment programme to upgrade our bingo clubs and are creating the company’s first purpose-built, stand-alone, bingo club in Scotland at our new site in Inverness. In addition, we’ve acquired a three-acre site in Fife for a second new bingo club.

“All of this investment was funded from the company’s own internally generated revenues. But this is not the limit of our ambition. We want to continue to drive the business forward, create more jobs and grow our market share against a backdrop of increasing opportunities in the gambling sector. “This move should not be viewed as a route to exit for the directors. Having already successfully taken the business through two financial restructurings in the last six years, enabling the directors to take over control of the business, this bold step should be seen as a further commitment on our part to strengthening Carlton Clubs by widening our capital base. This is a company with a tremendous future in a dynamic sector and we want to be the team that leads it to even bigger and better things.”

Just Everything Ltd imports, exports and distributes a wide range of non-food goods, specialising in homewares, electrical goods, watches, jewellery, bedding and textiles, products for the home and garden, toys and Christmas lighting – plus much more.

The company offers a full customer service, with a nationwide team of reps available to visit bingo clubs and show new samples, since the ability to see and touch new products is always useful. Alternatively, Just Everything can send information about new lines and offers via email.

Cabinets enabling clubs to display upcoming promotions and stamper cards can also be supplied, on the condition that these units are used solely for Just Everything products. The company can also provide small orders to customers for AWP machines, as well as door giveaways and stamper cards.

With 24-hour delivery, Just Everything’s service is second to none. It will replace or credit any faulty goods, the quality and prices are extremely competitive and because the company supplies an extensive array of high street and multiple retailers, it has its finger on the pulse with regards to new lines and ideas.

When it comes to range, service, price and ability to adapt to changes in the marketplace, Just Everything Ltd is one of the leading names in bingo supply.
news

AGM 2004

Continued from Page 1

stating that while there were only 11 paragraphs on bingo alone, it dealt with many other aspects of the industry that would affect the bingo business, although he conceded that the question of whether bingo should be allowed in casinos overshadowed the rest.

Mr Greenway explained that the committee responded ‘in the only way possible’ by recommending that it should be allowed in the bigger casinos, with local authorities given the discretion to allow it in the smaller ones.

The Scrutiny Committee’s Report had thrown a lot of issues regarding the new legislation up in the air and it was hoped that Lord McIntosh would be able to shed some light as to the intentions of the DCMS. Unfortunately, it appeared that the minister had his hands tied and could only issue warnings rather than provide some direction.

The peer revealed that the Government was concerned about the current popularity of section 16 and 21 games and that they would be written into the new legislation as gaming machines. He also indicated that the current stake and prize levels of AWPs are unlikely to shoot up after the Triennial Review as inflation has been low since the last increase. Lord McIntosh also said he was unhappy at the quality of the research that had been carried out into the gambling industry and the level of problem gambling that will occur after the Gambling Bill has been passed. As a result, the DCMS is currently looking internationally for more in-depth research into the issue.

The mood was lightened during the fabulous lunch, sponsored by ECM Systems and NRMi, when Michael Finn, from dfgw, the NBGA’s advertising agency, shared some light-hearted views on marketing and the trends being seen in society today.

Following lunch Susanna Fitzgerald QC spoke about the roles that the Gambling Commission and the local authorities will play in the new gambling environment, and the fact that it is still unclear how it will all work out.

Following her presentation, the new format kicked in with Ms Fitzgerald joining John Greenway, Peter Dean and financial analyst Andrew Burnett on a panel ably chaired by Sir Peter Fry. The assembled experts answered questions from the floor, which mainly came from members worried about the possible threat of casinos offering bingo.

Burnett’s closing remarks will have given operators some hope for the as yet unclear future that lies ahead for the gambling industry. The market analyst expressed his confidence in the bingo product saying that ‘those who have invested in bingo will do very well in the future’. 
Preparations are underway for Bingo for Breakthrough 2004, which with your support will be even bigger and better than last year!

Commitment and Materials Order Forms, which should have been completed and returned by the time you are reading this, have already been sent out, along with details of the prizes and items available from The Bingo Association. If you haven’t received these forms, or if you have any queries, contact Breakthrough on 020 7025 2493.

Fundraising Packs will be sent out over the coming weeks, once Breakthrough has received Commitment Forms. The pack is filled with helpful hints and ideas on how to make the most of your fundraising at your club. Free fundraising materials will be delivered to participating clubs by mid-September, with prizes and items ordered from The Bingo Association being delivered later in September or early October. These items should be displayed in a prominent place in your club to let customers know that Bingo for Breakthrough is coming soon and will be taking place in your club.

Last year saw staff and customers all getting into the spirit of Bingo for Breakthrough. But remember the following important aspects of fundraising:

Planning
Plan your events early and make sure you have a back-up plan for outdoor events in case of rain.

Communicate
Tell all staff and members about the events you have planned and encourage them to get involved.

Have fun!
If you have any questions about Bingo for Breakthrough and how to get involved, please call Breakthrough on 020 7025 2493.

CALLING ALL BINGO OPERATORS

TOP TEN BINGO ARE LOOKING TO ACQUIRE BINGO CLUBS IF YOU WANT TO SELL!!

CONTACT: - BRUCE ROBERTS OR ALAN WESTON
TEL: 01727 850793
Lee Ellsmore, from Top Ten Bingo in Porth, South Wales, raised over £5,000 for children in hospital with leukaemia by running the London Marathon – but ended up needing medical treatment himself.

The father of two was inspired to enter by his own daughter, Jordanna, aged three, who was diagnosed with leukaemia last year. He said: ‘I’ve never done anything like this before. It’s the first time I’ve attempted anything remotely physical. But once I floated the idea and realised how much support I could get, I just had to get on with it.’

Assistant Manager Lee, 24, finished the race in agony, with inflamed knees and ankles and spent most of the following day in hospital. He added, ‘Those were the most painful six and a half hours of my life! My knees packed in after seven miles. I kept running for another six but had to walk the last 13. The final four miles were thoroughly miserable but there was no way I could give up and let everyone down.

‘In the end, it was all worth it. What I went through was nothing compared with the treatments kids like Jordanna have to endure in hospital.’

After starting with a target of £2,000 in February, Lee found he had sponsorship worth nearly £3,000 by the time of the marathon in April. Generous colleagues and members at his own club and the other 22 clubs in the Top Ten group were so impressed with his determination to finish the run, despite his injuries, they continued fundraising until the end of May, helping to make a total of £4,400. This amount was added to cash raised by friends and family, enabling Lee to hand over a cheque for the sum of £5,200 to the charity Children with Leukaemia.
Ground Shaker hits in Slough, Wigan, Penrith and Leith!

Continued from Page 1

£1,430,000. However, the excitement and anticipation of sharing this prize fund appears to be a key aspect of the promotion’s success, particularly with customers.

Thanks to the support and hard work of Network Resource Management, the NBGA brought together, live, for the first time, 512 clubs. This industry ‘first’ was hugely significant in delivering excitement to the event, which was technically a prize draw. The atmosphere in the participating clubs was amazing. Not only was the draw live, but participants had their own set of the club numbers in their hand to be able to mark off each number called, allowing customers to participate fully and actively in the draw.

While the results of a full analysis are yet to come, individual clubs and operators will be able to assess the impact of each weekly draw during the promotion. Top level initial analysis from the NBGA shows that there was a significant lift in business each and every Saturday during the promotion, with the biggest occurring on the final week for the £1 million draw. In the first three weeks, week one saw the biggest lift, although the good weather during weeks two and three will have had an impact.

The full analysis will be interesting and is likely to give the industry an indication of whether or not there should be a Ground Shaker 2.

Newest addition to Mecca Bingo

Glasgow’s latest bingo club, Mecca Bingo at Fort Retail Park, opened its doors on Thursday evening, 22 April, to a full house of over 500 eager bingo players.

Paul Usher, aka The Bill’s Des Taviner and Brookside’s Barry Grant, welcomed old and new members to join in the celebrations and even called the first game of bingo. The crowds were entertained by an array of stilts walkers, celebrity lookalikes the Mecca Stars and an Elvis tribute.

Lots of lucky bingo winners went home with smiles on their faces and three delighted members also carried off holidays for two to Amsterdam, Barcelona and Dublin.

The club’s General Manager, John Dyson, said, ‘The opening night was fantastic. We were all overwhelmed by the response of our members, who are delighted with the new club. The entertainment was a big hit with everyone – especially the ladies, who couldn’t get enough of Paul!’

The new venue boasts club-class seating for over 500 people and a licensed bar and café serving a selection of snacks and light meals.

Summer competition

Hopefully, we will see a lot more of the sun in the coming weeks, so PMS International has provided some ‘summer fun’ prizes for 12 lucky Bingo Link readers to win! Up for grabs this issue are:

A rechargeable screw driver for those doing a little outdoor DIY

A folding lightweight chair with drinks holder for those who prefer to just relax in the sunshine

And 10 pen radios for those who need to work in the sun but want to listen to summer tunes

For your chance to win a prize, please complete the Bingo Link competition entry form or put your club name, address and your name on a postcard, and send it to:

PMS Summer Fun Competition
Bingo Link
Laxham House
75 High Street North
Dunstable
Bedfordshire
LU6 1JF

All entries must be received by 13 August 2004. Winners will be notified in writing and announced in the next issue of Bingo Link.
Entries for this year’s competition have closed and the top 10 callers in each region are currently preparing their video entries. Each will be vying to show the judges that they have the talent, personality and professionalism to carry off a place in the regional finals.

Five contestants from each region, plus last year’s regional winner, will battle it out for a place in the National Final. The competition to find Britain’s best bingo caller is one of the most exciting events in the world of bingo. The National Winner receives a trophy and a holiday for two in Los Angeles and Las Vegas, with £500 spending money. He or she also becomes an ambassador for the bingo industry during their year of office.

The five Regional Finals begin in late September and will for the first time see an award given to the club that is deemed by the competition judges to host the best Regional Final event.

Regional Finals 2004
Wales: 22 September
Mecca in Swansea, home club of the current Caller of the Year, Mike Vyse, will host the Welsh Regional Final and Manager Richard Burke Lloyd and staff are looking forward to the event.

Midlands: 23 September
Shipley’s Club at Weoley Castle in Birmingham has only been open since May, so Manager Andrew Zebeneka and his staff are determined to make this an occasion to remember. Host Phil Groom is a previous title holder. South: 24 September
Manager Rob Black and staff at Gala Milton Keynes will be making a strong bid for the best Regional Final prize, giving all involved a great day.

North: 30 September
Paradise Island Club Liverpool will be the host in the North. Manager Fred Barlow is confident that he and his staff will put on a great show, which is sure to put them in the running.

Scotland: 1 October
Our last Regional Final will be at Carlton in East Kilbride. The Scottish Regional Final is always a tremendous occasion and Gary McDonald club manager, promises us that this year will be no different.

The five regional winners will then go forward to this year’s National Final, held in London over the weekend of 27/28 November. Finalists and their guests will attend a superb dinner, hosted by the judges, at the Tower Thistle Hotel with its views of Tower Bridge and the Tower of London. The next morning, finalists will be whisked off to the National Final venue where the judging will begin in earnest. Good luck to all of this year’s entrants.

For further details, contact Gloria Pattinson at Pattinson PR Ltd on 020 8310 5086, or email gloria@pattinsonpr.co.uk

The current title holder, Mike Vyse, being presented with the trophy at last year’s final.
New Marketing Director for Gala Group

Gala Group has appointed Kate Howe as its new Marketing Director. Kate, 36, joined Gala, which is based in Nottingham, on 14 June from AMV BBDO, the UK’s largest advertising agency, and was previously Managing Director of Leo Burnett. She said, ‘This is a tremendously exciting time to be joining the industry and especially Gala. This is a very strong company – well positioned to deal with the opportunities and challenges that are likely to result from gambling deregulation.’

Gala Group Sales and Marketing Director, Richard Sowerby, said, ‘I’m delighted that Kate is joining the marketing team. She brings with her a broad range of communications skills and senior management expertise. Her in-depth retail experience will be an asset to Gala’s 166 bingo clubs and 30 casinos. Kate is recognised as a brand builder and maintainer. She will add real value to the department.’

A night to remember

Gala Bingo provided customers with a night to remember at the opening of its new club in Botchergate, Carlisle in April.

The evening got underway with the early session offering three £1,000 prizes for a full house. The cabaret featured the country’s best show band, Alpha Connection, plus Stars in their Eyes-style soundalikes. Mark Simm, the club’s General Manager, said, ‘The opening night was a spectacular success, with everyone eager to see what the new club looked liked. With so much entertainment on offer and such great prizes, everyone had an unforgettable evening.’

Gala has invested £2.5m in the new club, which seats 936 people, features comfort cooling, disabled facilities and a no-smoking area, as well as a large bar and diner area.

Address & Membership Services

Q Services provide highly effective computer solutions to help your business not only save money but dramatically increase your customer base.

Q-Services have been providing address related services and software to the Bingo industry for the past 7 years. With our underlying knowledge of membership requirements, we have created products that focus on the core values of your business; helping you to retain, improve and attract new members.

- **Address cleaning** - Validates post codes, produces consistent & accurate addresses, maximises mailsort discounts & confirms the name details at an address.
- **De-Dupe** - Identifies duplicates and close-matches, using the address, name and date of birth.
- **Post-code mailing** - You select the post code you wish to target and we obtain voters roll information to match. By using the de-Dupe service we can remove your current customers from this post code and then process the mailing to those remaining.
- **Mailing** - Mail your customers for free. Postage discounts on mailsort can equal the cost of handling!
- **Database Profiling** - Analysis using postcodes, Mosaic, Financial Mosaic & Touchpoint profile codes.
- **Swipe based membership system** - Comprehensive analysis of visits and member’s information.
- **Stock control** - Ideal for club stock requirements. Easy to install, setup and use.

For more information on how Q-Services can help you, contact Simon Kemp on 07850 333987 or E-mail simonk@qservices.co.uk

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Touch screen gaming from nrm i
Global Gaming Expo (G2E) is the only gaming trade show and conference by the industry and for the industry. Organized jointly by the American Gaming Association (AGA) and Reed Exhibitions, it’s the premier event for the worldwide gaming-entertainment industry.

Join us on 5-7 October, 2004 in Las Vegas for a dynamic show floor and conference, with the G2E Training & Development Institute on 4 October, 2004. Also new this year are F&B at G2E, a culinary marketplace, and the Design & Décor Pavilion. There are also exciting keynotes and special events plus networking opportunities galore.

Emmy Award-winning talk-show host Larry King will lead a panel of industry experts, including Frank J Fahrenkopf Jr, President and CEO of the American Gaming Association, discussing the state of the industry.

G2E is the place to see what’s new and exciting and preview the latest technology from around the world at the New Product Showcase; surf the internet or check your email at the multi-station Cyber Café; there’s also a Product Demo Theater plus a Networking Lounge – a great place to meet colleagues from around the globe. Visitors to G2E will be entered in a draw to win a four-day Carnival Cruise worth $2,000.

See all of the leading manufacturers and suppliers of bingo paper, Class II electronic games, dabbers, printed tickets and other products related to the bingo and charitable gaming industries at the Bingo Pavilion. Conference sessions include Class II: Regulations & Updates; Effective Techniques: Marketing & Promotion; Top Priorities: The Importance of Customer Service; Your Hall: Through Your Players’ Eyes; Service with a Smile: Dealing with Difficult Customers; The New Bingo: Tradition and Technology.

Don’t miss the other Pavilions: Design & Décor, F&B, Security & Surveillance, Interactive Gaming. There are opportunities to visit a number of facilities, including the largest slot machine manufacturing facility in Las Vegas, for an insider’s view of a full line of reel-spinning and video slot products as they are made. Enjoy F&B up close on a tour of premier restaurants such as Fiamma, Pearl, Seablue, and Wolfgang Puck. You’ll also see what’s involved in ensuring operations run smoothly as you visit the loading dock, bakery, room service facilities and costumes/laundry area. The tour ends with a visit to the exclusive Mansion Casino and Cirque Theater. Observe surveillance operators as they patrol Stratosphere Casino with the latest equipment, searching for suspicious activity, and see how sensitive areas are protected day to day.

Play golf at Troon Golf’s Revere Golf Club and enjoy special rates for G2E attendees and exhibitors. For more details visit www.globalgamingexpo.com. Register by 20 September to enjoy Early Bird and group discounts to the show and conference. Special international packages are available.

For licensing information, please contact sales@parlaygroup.com or +44 (0) 779.930.5571

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www.parlaygroup.com
Online gambling activity is already starting to see a substantial increase in its revenues, even before deregulation of the UK gambling sector has arrived. In recent months both trade and consumer press have seen a number of articles exploring this fairly new market development and the subject has even made an appearance in the City pages, via reports on William Hill’s performance. Expansion of the non-land-locked gaming industry is starting to gather pace and is primarily delivered to consumers via their computers or hand-held communications tools, such as personal digital assistants, hand-held PCs or mobile phones. While programming capability has long since been able to handle the complexity of games and devices that are capable of handling such sizeable applications have been with us for a while, the key issue holding things back has remained ‘connectivity’. Domestic internet users on standard telephone dial-up internet connections suffer both as a result of slow data transfer speeds and loss of connection. Hand-held devices have also faced similar problems through wireless connectivity.

Making the connection

While the connectivity issue is slowly improving, as more domestic users take up broadband access, it remains one of the main challenges in providing bingo over the internet. Unlike bingo halls where players can be seen and see one another, internet bingo players are connecting to a central game from remote locations and loss of connection can render a player invisible. If players in a club do not have tickets for the next game they are able to alert staff who can see where the players are located in the club and ensure that they receive what they need, namely tickets, in order to play. If virtual players lose their connection they become invisible to the operator who then has no means of identifying them as wanting to play.

Despite this, the number of people who want to play games over the internet is constantly growing, due to increases in the number of people with internet access, improvements in the quality of connection and a very significant change in the way that people view their computers and mobile devices. Younger generations have grown up with mobile phones and portable games as a means of entertainment and therefore view computers not only as tools for work, but tools for leisure. This view is slowly moving up through the generations, with ever-increasing numbers of people online for leisure. Due to the issues of potential player ‘invisibility’, Parlay has developed a method of operating bingo on the internet that ensures fair play and maximum uptime for the players. To achieve this, games are played in an instant browser-based game or in a download version. Instant versions allow for quick access to the games and easy upgrades and enhancements, enabling players to use the newest version of the game immediately from the website. Download versions allow the player to install the games directly to their computer, with a link on their desktop. These games can also be provided for installation on a CD that can be handed out in land-based clubs or mailed to customers. As computer and internet connections get better, instant games are becoming more popular. However, CDs are a very effective marketing tool.

In your hands

In addition to the more ‘traditional’ internet games, wireless gaming, through mobile and hand-held devices, is becoming very popular. Providing bingo on smaller devices proves more of a challenge, due to the restriction of the screen size, but it is still possible to display four game cards. However, secondary games and AWPs, like slots, videopoker and table games, are more easily viewed on such devices and are becoming more popular.

Increasing consumer acceptance of playing games on mobile devices, particularly phones, provides a very good development opportunity for new and existing online game operators. Smaller games on mobile devices can be offered to complement the main bingo product, in much the same way that machines are provided in land-based clubs. If customers are with you for one product, it can be very easy and profitable to introduce relevant offerings that are complementary.

The latest development for a lot of online games has been the ability to link to wide-area, progressive networks, in a similar way to linked MCB and linked bingo, which offer large jackpot games nightly or weekly. This has enabled online operators to develop their product offering in a similar way to land-based operators, expanding the range and variety of games available. Many sites have a link connecting to the jackpot game just before game time, allowing players to see the size of the prize. This development in online bingo follows in the footsteps of the online casino sites, many of which have been offering huge progressive jackpots for a number of years and have found them to be a great promotional tool.

As the UK becomes increasingly broadband enabled, mobile phone ownership nears saturation and consumer acceptance of mobile and online leisure gaming grows, opportunities in the online gaming market will explode. Anticipated deregulation can only serve to hasten this development.

For more information about Parlay Entertainment Limited, visit the website at www.parlaygroup.com

As consumer acceptance of mobile and online leisure gaming grows, opportunities in the online gaming market will explode
Innovation is what you need

Gaming machines are often regarded as the bingo hall’s best investments. They work long hours, deliver customer satisfaction and they never complain. Lately, there has been a spark of innovation in the AWP manufacturing businesses as games designers continue to push back the boundaries.

Mick Blanche, of machine distributor Crown Direct, said, ‘The manufacturers are trying to get their heads around the bingo market and develop games specially for the sector.’ He believes that one of the most impressive machines at the moment is Mazooma’s Monopoly Arena with its high visibility plasma screen. ‘It has taken the bingo market by storm. The brand of the game is very well known worldwide. People know they can play the board game and so perceive that they can play the game.’

Make it simple

Blanche believes that many of the bingo operators want something that looks good and is simple to play.

‘The original Party Time from Astra started that trend. The success of a machine isn’t always just down to what it takes in the cash box because a machine can also bring people into the gaming area. Something sexy like a Party Time Arena or a Monopoly Plasma provides a ‘wow’ factor strong enough for customers to go and investigate, pulling players back into the gaming areas again.’

According to Blanche, Vivid Gaming has had particular success with its new Easyslay random machines, designed especially for the arcade and bingo markets. This range of games was inspired by the success of Vivid’s random club range, which continues to perform outstandingly in the bingo halls.

The new type of games use simple casino game styles which are truly random in nature and appeal to casual and core players, as well as lapsed. Vivid Gaming’s Director of Sales, Nik Novak, explained: ‘These games have an excellent pedigree with the format of our club range transferring well into the £25 market. Random machines are becoming more popular with site owners and players alike. Every player has an equal chance of winning. The games within our new Easyslay random range can be sited individually but if grouped together the Easyslay top boxes and infill accessories turn the games into a striking attraction.’

One of this year’s big innovations in machine design is the emergence of Section 21 machines, which have been developed to attract some of the phenomenal custom enjoyed by the FOBTs in betting shops.

One of the industry’s most successful innovators, Astra Games, has been looking at this concept. Its striking Prize Roulette game is based on traditional roulette but gives the player the option of playing on up to four roulette tables over five terminals. It’s an interesting and significantly different style of game to the AWP, an exciting prospect that has been designed to energise the gaming floor mix. It has been hugely successful in arcades under S16 of the Lotteries Act and the company is looking to adapt it under S21.

Astra’s Director of Sales and Marketing, Simon McCarthy, said, ‘Prize Roulette opens up a whole new avenue of gaming. It’s a fantastic way of attracting new players as people are familiar with the roulette game and the random element means they are not fearful of predator activity. It’s exciting, enjoyable and easy to play.’

An eye on the prize

Of course the true bread and butter of the gaming section is the traditional £25 AWP and there is plenty to choose from at the moment. Electrocoin’s strong XO brand has been transferred to two high-activity games designed for the bingo market. XO Reels and XO Club are considered by the manufacturer to perfectly complement its machines already sited in bingo halls around the country.

Barcrest’s latest bingo AWP Stax of Cash is extremely visually arresting considering it is a single player machine. Director of Sales Barry Knowles said, ‘It gives a different presentation of a winning streak by using an animated set of flat reels to feed the cash stacks within the top feature. This is combined with a funky audio score to maximise the game’s attractiveness and playability.’

Maygay has launched Vegas Slots, a casino-style game in a classic, round-top chrome cabinet consisting of three base reels and a simple feature game. Commercial Manager Martyn Jones said, ‘We are really proud of our new tech game. With its striking audiovisual package and feature-rich game play, Vegas Slots provides casino-style entertainment and cashbox to the biggest bingo hall or the smallest arcade.’

Bell-Fruit Games currently has two very different products for the bingo market. Casino Crazy Fruits has been performing better than ever since its relaunch as Casino Crazy Fruits Gold. The new product retains all the elements that made this machine such a favourite but it’s now in a stylish gold cabinet, with deregulation ready alpha equipment.

The firm’s other ground-breaking AWP is Casino Trick Shot, which made its debut in April. Maria Kidulis of Bell-Fruit Games said, ‘Players use the unique “Shoot Pool” button to position the cue and make a shot on the video pool game. The “power bar” indicates the strength of shot.’

As well as innovation in the gaming arena, bingo operators have also been looking at other machines to increase revenue. One such product doing the business is Nova Net’s bingo-themed SWP Skill Ball Bingo, distributed by TCS Funtime. The distributor’s Managing Director, Simon Barff, said, ‘The most exciting part of this product’s success in the bingo halls is that the income being generated appears to be from new machine players as standard AWP takings don’t appear to be affected.’

It is clear that the gaming machine market has a lot more variety and vibrancy than it has had in many years. It’s just the problem of choice!
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