2007 is set to be one of the most challenging years in living memory for the bingo industry, with some of the most radical changes in 39 years taking place. Such changes should ideally present a wealth of opportunity, but due to the time frame and nature of the changes taking place they present a very real threat to the future shape of the industry.

The issues conspiring against the industry are not consumer led, but driven by legislation, both existing and new.

The industry has operated for a considerable time under an unfair tax regime that requires bingo operators to pay VAT, while other sectors of the gambling industry do not. The combined tax rate sees bingo paying one of the highest rates in the gambling industry, a burden that is increasingly difficult to bear.

If bingo is to compete fairly in the leisure and gambling market, then its level of taxation should not see it unfairly disadvantaged. This is clearly not a view that has been held by the Treasury to date, which seems determined to allow this situation to continue, despite its ultimately dire consequence for bingo operators, clubs and players.

In addition to the ongoing burden of an unfair tax regime, changes due to come into effect under the new Gambling Act will further burden the industry, while offering very little by way of the benefits initially outlined in the Budd Report of 2001. It was promised in this report that no sector would have less under the new Act than it currently has under the 1968 Gaming Act. For bingo this promise is not set to be delivered on, as increases in licence costs and removal of Section 21 games are set to increase costs of operation and reduce the scope of a crucial revenue stream, further challenging the commercial viability of many clubs.

The issues facing clubs are all set to be played out against the backdrop of a ban on smoking in public places, which was introduced in Scotland last year, in Wales earlier this month and will come into effect in England in July.

The ban was supported by the industry on the ground of the nations’ health, however, operators with clubs in Scotland are all too painfully aware of the extreme

continued on page 8
The National Game
Quarterly news and update from Chief Executive Paul Talboys

2007 is a year of change

Our traditional Mothers’ Day special game has already taken place and due to adverse weather conditions in some areas of the country we narrowly missed making our target National prize of £500,000. It is sad that we did not reach this target as it will be the last game of its kind to take place under existing/old legislation. Mothers’ Day 2008 will present us with a far broader range of promotional options, courtesy of the Gambling Act 2005.

We are already a third of the way through the year and various countdowns to change have started – countdown to new legislation, countdown to smoking ban (only England left to go) and a countdown to new national/old legislation. Mothers’ Day 2008 will present us with a far broader range of promotional options, courtesy of the Gambling Act 2005.

In readiness for a radically different and exciting new National Bingo Game post-September and for the heightened seasonal dips in admissions the industry is facing this year, some interim revisions to the National Game ticket price and prize fund and structure are due to be implemented next month. These changes will see a more logical ticket price across the week and will put more prize money back on individual club boards, by way of an increased house prize. Players are notoriously resistant to change and it is important that these changes are presented positively. This, of course, is in readiness for the use of stake retention for the first time in the UK.

The process of developing the JLS software that will enable the industry to take advantage of stake retention under the new Act, at both club and national level, is currently on schedule. We will share further details with you as soon as we can.

Meeron has now signed its agreement with leading online bingo provider, Virtue Fusion, to form Bingo Networks Alderney, (see page 17) that initially will offer operators the opportunity to develop an online bingo presence easily and securely and will then seek to explore how NBGA and Meeron members can exploit and benefit from existing relationships in an online environment.

Later this month, we also have our AGM at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in London, which I hope you will be able to attend.

Bingo in the media

The final quarter of 2006 continued the trend of Q3, showing an increase in media coverage, ending the year on a record high of 1,883 pieces. November 2006 proved to be exceptional, providing nearly double the quantity of coverage for the same month in 2005.

Press coverage arising from the new NBGA television commercials provided increased opportunities and the national final of NBGA Caller of the Year also provided additional opportunities.

The most significant difference this quarter is the increase in electronic coverage ie. stories and editorial published on websites. While there has always been a smattering of coverage arising from this area, we are finally starting to see it outstrip even regional publications as an opportunity for coverage. This trend is one that is likely to continue as a prominent feature of media coverage, as more and more people read online.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Bingo Game: key statistics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total prize money since the game began £98,072,397</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total prize money played for in 2007 until 31 January £4,620,506</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biggest games for 2006</th>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday 26 January with ticket sales of 896,752</td>
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<td>Thursday 26 October with ticket sales of 899,044</td>
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<th>Biggest game to date for 2007</th>
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<td>Saturday evening 17 February with ticket sales of £767,026</td>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>25 April</td>
<td>The Bingo Association and National Bingo Game Association AGM, Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London. Contact Donna Black: 01582 860921, <a href="mailto:donna@bingo-association.co.uk">donna@bingo-association.co.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 July</td>
<td>Ban on smoking in public places introduced in England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Bingo For Breakthrough</td>
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</tbody>
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Please remember to notify us of your events so we can include them here. Email us at bingolink@bingo-association.co.uk

Produced by Associa Ltd, North Gate, Uppingham, Rutland LE15 9PL. Tel: 01572 824600. Email: editorial@associa.co.uk

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Sharon and Gala raise cash for Comic Relief

Celebrity Sharon Osbourne helped Gala Bingo raise more than £150,000 for Comic Relief at the first Comic Relief bingo game at Surrey Quays Gala.

Sharon said: ‘I am delighted Gala Bingo invited me to be its ‘Big One’ bingo caller. I love bingo; what’s more I’m a huge supporter of Comic Relief, which plays an important role in helping transform the lives of people living with poverty and social injustice. I hope bingo lovers and those of you who are new to the game continue to help us raise as much money as possible.’

Red Nose fun went on throughout the 170 Gala Bingo clubs nationwide in the run-up to Red Nose Day on 16 March.

Russell and Brian join Mecca

Mecca Bingo has signed up leading astrologer Russell Grant and Big Brother star Brian Dowling to support its online community.

TV favourite Russell will provide an exclusive series of detailed month-by-month predictions for 2007. He has focused on the ‘numbers’ game by giving Mecca members an insight into which dates each month are the best for playing bingo and also lets them know which are their lucky numbers for that month.

In a double coup, Mecca has also announced that its new online caller is former Big Brother winner Brian Dowling, whose Irish tones will now be heard on the Mecca Bingo website.

Mecca spokesperson Lesly Hughes said: ‘Mecca is all about winners and stars and in selecting Russell and Brian to represent our online community, we’ve certainly got ourselves two stars who are both proven winners! We’re sure they’ll be hugely popular with all our members.’

Jeff leaves Crown Leisure

After more than 23 years at Crown Leisure, Jeff Fannon will be leaving the organisation this summer.

Jeff, who is Special Projects Director, said: ‘I am very proud of what we have accomplished here at Crown over the years. This is a fantastic team, which is now thoroughly bedded in, and I have no doubt that Crown will continue to go from strength to strength.’

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Corrie star meets fans at opening of new club

As first nights go, the opening on 8 March of Buckingham Bingo's new 1,100-seater club in Preston was special.

The first night bingo players already had a guest appearance by Corrie actress Wendi Peters, who plays Cilla Battersby-Brown (pictured right at the club), and three £1,000 houses to look forward to, but then one member scooped more than £17,000 as a sixth share of the night's National Game. Winner Pam Duncanson, from Garstang, had played bingo for 30 years but her biggest win had been £600.

The next day Jim ‘Bullseye’ Bowen made a guest appearance at the club's first afternoon session along with a surprise appearance at Buckingham’s other city centre club. Jim has a strong association with Buckingham, having appeared at many of its clubs with his Bullseye game, and has recently featured as the 'voice of Buckingham' on its TV and radio advertising.

The club has received a rapturous reception from its members. After her first visit, Maureen Robinson, of Ribbleton, said: ‘It’s really amazing, I’ve never seen such a lovely club – I’m going to get all my friends to come and play here!’

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Launch with the industry’s biggest-ever membership recruitment campaign, the club already has more than 14,000 members from as far as Blackburn, Chorley, Blackpool, Southport and Lancaster who are lapping up the luxury and big cash prizes at what claims to be the most modern and sumptuous bingo club in the UK. This is the first new-build club launch since the acquisition of Buckingham Bingo by Alchemy in December 2005. The club is a flat-floor design with excellent disabled access, plus secure parking for more than 300 cars.

Carlton Bingo recruits its next generation

Carlton Bingo, Scotland’s largest independent bingo operator, was inundated with potential recruits during its first recruitment fair.

In its search for candidates for its comprehensive trainee management programme, Carlton Bingo took a stand at Scotland’s Careers and Job Fair at the SECC in March. The event has been such a success that the chain is now sifting more than 30 applications to recruit a handful of trainees.

Karen Hazlett, HR Manager at Carlton Bingo, said: ‘The leisure industry is particularly competitive so standards and levels of service are hugely important to us – as are the people who deliver them. Last year’s graduate intake proved successful, with five of those trainees promoted to assistant manager within the first year.

‘The event at the SECC has been a hugely successful recruitment method for us, one we will use again. Carlton Bingo invests heavily in our trainee managers – they are the next generation. Our comprehensive trainee management programme lasts 12 months and sees recruits supported by an experienced team as they learn the business and build strong and lasting relationships with our bingo customers.’

Carlton Bingo was the first bingo company in the UK to be awarded a GamCare Certificate of Social Responsibility.

Corrie star meets fans at opening of new club

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Violet turns 100 and has a party

It was party time for Violet Craig from Merseyside when she celebrated her 100th birthday with a party at the Buckingham Bingo club in Huyton.

Violet spent the day at the club enjoying free bingo, champagne and travel to and from the club in a chauffeur-driven limousine.

The avid bingo fan plays three times a week and is a popular character with staff and members. Violet said: ‘I’ve been coming to the club every Friday for more than 10 years so when the club offered to give me a party to celebrate my birthday I was delighted. I celebrated and played my favourite game at the same time.’

Ian Garner, club manager, said: ‘Violet is a popular character so we wanted to do something special to mark her big day.’
Who will be our next National Bingo Caller of the Year?

Does your club employ the best caller in the land? Does your caller have that unique blend of fun and professionalism that brings something special to every session? If so, they could be the UK’s next National Bingo Caller of the Year!

As an entrant in the competition they could bring lots of positive publicity to your club and if they take the title there is a great prize for them – and an award of £250 for the club’s manager.

Last year’s six national finalists experienced a wonderful all-expenses paid weekend in London, with their partners, taking in the sights of the city and a superb gala dinner at the luxurious Tower Hotel, overlooking London’s world famous Tower Bridge. This year’s event promises to be no less of an occasion.

Current titleholder Brett Hyrjak, from the Gala club in Bognor Regis, is preparing to take his trip of a lifetime to Los Angeles and Las Vegas, along with his £500 spending money.

To take part in this fun and exciting competition entrants only need to be a main stage caller, calling a minimum of three sessions a week. Every club that takes part in the National Bingo Game can enter up to three callers.

For full details, please refer to the entry form, a copy of which has been sent with this issue of Bingo Link. Additional copies of the form are available from the National Bingo Game website at www.nationalbingo.co.uk to download, or from Pattinson PR on 020 8310 5086, for a printed copy.

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Bingo for Breakthrough
2006 was the biggest and
best campaign yet,
raising a magnificent £651,000!
Many congratulations to all the
clubs involved for their tremendous
efforts in fundraising. Thanks to all
of you, the bingo industry has
raised more than £2.25 million for
Breakthrough since 2003.
This year’s top fundraising club
was Gala Bingo, in Croxteth,
Liverpool, which raised more than
£10,000. Sara Butlin, assistant
manager, said: ‘I think the key to
our success was that everyone in
the club got behind the cause.
The more we raised the bigger
the buzz for the staff and
members. We held numerous
activities – car washes, a pink
party and members were invited
to throw sponges at the callers
and managers in stocks. We
also held games for a signed
Everton football.’
Runner-up in the fundraising
stakes was Mecca Bingo Glasgow
Forge III, which raised £9,446.
Special congratulations also go to
Gala Bingo, Scunthorpe; and
Mecca Bingo, Carmarthen Road,
Swansea, the top fundraising
clubs by region.
And that’s not forgetting the
independents. For the fourth year
running, Quayside Bingo,
Lossiemouth, scooped the top
fundraiser per head award,
followed by a club taking part for
the first time, Crystal Bingo in
Deeside. The club’s enthusiasm
and involvement in its first year
was really impressive. The other
top regional fundraisers per head
were Gala Bingo Bognor Regis;
Mecca Bingo Swindon; and
Walkers Bingo Heckmondwike.
After such a brilliant success,
the team at Breakthrough Breast
Cancer is already planning for this
year's effort. Bingo for
Breakthrough 2007 will be
between 21 – 28 October 2007,
so book the dates in your diary
and start planning now.
Once again our favourite
celebrities will be doodling away,
creating works of art to auction on
eBay so do let us know if any
celebrities are visiting your club
and we will get a dab-a-doodle
pack out to you.
For further information on Bingo
for Breakthrough, or if you have
any ideas for this year’s campaign,
please call Lucy Anderson on
0207 025 2498 or email
bingo@breakthrough.org.uk
Three bingo workers have won an award in recognition of their bravery in stopping a would-be thief from stealing cash from their employer, Walkers Top Ten Bingo Club, in Walsall Street, Wednesbury, West Midlands.

Pint-sized Tina Fletcher, 39, who was the first to tackle the burglar, and colleagues Denise Jays and John Wilby, collected a Good Citizen Award from West Midlands Police on 1 March.

John, 68, the club’s doorman and a former police officer, had already refused entry to the man, who then slipped in through an exit door as a customer left. He headed for the office, where Tina was working on the computer, and, finding the door locked, vaulted through a small serving hatch and made for the safe.

Tina, who is 4ft 10ins tall, said: ‘I yelled for Denise, who was working on book sales in the foyer. I was scared but I just grabbed the man and tried to stop him taking the money bags out of the safe.’

Denise, 50, said: ‘As I arrived, Tina was still shouting from inside the office that we were being robbed. I opened the door and there she was, struggling with the chap on the floor and trying to get him to let go of the money, so I grabbed him as well. As he tried to escape, he dragged us both through the door and onto the stairs outside.’

At this point, John and two customers who had heard the commotion, managed to hold down the intruder for nearly ten minutes until the police arrived.

John said: ‘He was thrashing about and we all took a few knocks. It all felt a bit unreal afterwards but at the time we didn’t give it a second thought – we just hung onto him.’

Although all very shaken, none of the employees or the two customers who came to their assistance, Carlton Edwards and Carl Perry, were seriously hurt.

Barbara Toy, the club’s manager, said: ‘I’m proud of them. This sort of thing rarely happens but when it does it makes you realise how brave people can be. They all just acted instinctively.

‘We never considered the hatch a danger before but we’ve now fitted bars over it to make the office totally secure.’

The would-be raider received a six-month custodial sentence by West Bromwich magistrates following the incident last August.
effect this has had on player behaviour and profitability.

The impact of these Government policies is such that if they remain unaltered, up to 200 clubs will be under threat of closure, seeing many communities lose a key social facility.

Such is the significance of these combined issues that the industry, through the Bingo Association, has mounted a campaign, ‘Stop Destroying My Bingo’, which was launched on Monday, 5 March.

The consumer-focused aspect of this campaign has been spearheaded by mounting a national petition, through all member clubs, to add the weight of public opinion to the argument for change. The launch has been very successful in attracting media attention, delivering more than 35 individual radio interviews, six television opportunities and numerous stories in the press.

At the time of writing, the results of the petition were being collated, in readiness to present to Downing Street. In addition to the petition, a programme of direct government lobbying has also been implemented and is set to continue into the summer months as government departments and MPs are approached, highlighting the issues facing the industry and making further use of the petition.

As the lobbying activity continues it will be crucial that clubs participate fully and respond to requests to undertake local activity.

Combined attendance levels at the 2007 Amusement Trades Exhibition International (ATEI), International Casino Exhibition (ICE) and interactive gaming show (ICEi) hit new heights.

In total, 25,055 people from 117 nations attended the three-day event, 0.57 per cent up on 2006, comprising 13,032 ATEI-dedicated visitors, 9,662 in ICE and 2,361 in ICEi. International attendance rose by 5.3 per cent to an all-time high of 11,919, representing 47.6 per cent of the total. UK participation fell by 4.5 per cent to 12,920. Of the 117 nations represented in London, 74 enjoyed increased visitor numbers, with 43 registering record levels and 35 providing 100 visitors or more. Paraguay and the Aland Islands were represented by visitors for the first time.

The ATEI headline figure of 13,032 comprised 8,245 domestic buyers and 4,687 from outside the UK. Overall attendance was down by 13.8 per cent, in line with the 14.8 per cent drop in the number of exhibitors, some of whom took new stand positions within ICE.

ATEI raised the ratio of visitors to show trio adds up to record attendance

combined stand from 48.6 to 49.2 year-on-year. Eighty seven nations were represented, of which 30 recorded annual increases in visitor numbers, with 14 registering record attendances. Georgia was represented for the first time and the show welcomed its first visitors from Ghana since 1996 and from Namibia since 1997.

The ICE/ICEi headline figure of 12,023 comprised 9,662 ICE-dedicated buyers and 2,361 registered for ICEi and included 4,675 UK-based industry professionals and 7,232 from outside the UK. Overall attendance increased by 22.7 per cent year-on-year. One hundred and ten nations were represented, compared with 102 at the 2006 show, with visitor debuts from the Aland Islands, Angola, Paraguay and San Marino. Attendance levels rose across more than 80 countries and for every geographical region.

The 2008 show will be at London’s Earls Court Exhibition Centre on 22 to 24 January.

Figures are subject to verification by the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC).

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Last year, Parliament passed the Health Act 2006, which decided that virtually all enclosed public places and workplaces in England should become smoke-free. This legislation will be enforced in England from 6am on 1 July; smoke-free legislation will be introduced in Northern Ireland on 30 April and Wales joined Scotland as a smoke-free zone on 2 April.

The main purpose of the legislation is to protect employees and the public from the effects of second-hand smoke. Second-hand smoke can cause a range of serious medical conditions including heart disease, lung cancer, sudden infant death syndrome and asthma attacks. There is no risk-free level of exposure to second-hand smoke.

The introduction of smoke-free environments will reduce the risks to health from exposure to second-hand smoke and recognise a person’s right to be protected from harm and enjoy smoke-free air. It will also increase the benefits of smoke-free places for people trying to stop smoking.

In England, more than three out of four people do not smoke and...
news

challenge ahead

nearly three quarters of those who do smoke say that they want to give up. However, only 51 per cent of people currently report their workplace as being completely smoke-free. This figure is lower for workplaces as being completely smoke-free. This figure is lower for people in routine and manual jobs.

The five sets of regulations, which cover premises and enforcement, signage, exemptions, vehicles and penalties can be viewed by visiting www.smokefreeengland.co.uk/thefacts

Throughout April guidance on these regulations will be issued widely to businesses across the country to help them to prepare for the new laws.

In England the new legislation will cover virtually all enclosed and substantially enclosed public places and workplaces. It will therefore directly affect you as a bingo hall operator, as well as all other businesses across the country such as shops, offices, factories, pubs, restaurants, public transport, and work vehicles that are used by more than one person.

Indoor workplace smoking rooms will not be allowed so anyone wishing to smoke will have to go outside instead.

From 1 July 2007, all smoke-free premises and vehicles will also be required to display no-smoking signs. Specific details on signage and specifications for where signs will need to be displayed are included in the guidance.

No-smoking signs are also being made freely available from the Department of Health.

Anyone who does not comply with the legislation may be liable to a fine or prosecution if found smoking in a smoke-free place or vehicle, failing to display a no-smoking sign, or allowing smoking in a smoke-free place or vehicle.

There are other measures that you may wish to consider to support the introduction of smoke-free law in your workplace. We suggest you consider developing a written policy to communicate the new law and its implications to your employees. Many businesses view the introduction of the legislation as an opportunity to diversify and develop their business. If you wish to provide outdoor areas for smoking, be sure that you discuss your plans with your local council to make sure you understand what the planning, building and licensing requirements may be.

In England there are 3.7 million businesses that will need to go smoke-free – this is no small undertaking. Enforcement officers from local councils will work closely with businesses to build compliance through education, advice and support. As the deadline nears for implementation of the legislation, we urge all businesses to prepare and seek further information from smokefreeengland.co.uk or advice from their local council.

Further information for businesses
To download guidance and order resources and signage, businesses should visit www.smokefreeengland.co.uk/resources or call the Smokefree England Information Line on 0800 169 169 7.

The Smokefree England Information Line can also answer basic questions relating to the legislation.

Help for smokers
You may also wish to provide your employees with details of the range of excellent free support available from the NHS. The NHS Smoking Helpline, on 0800 169 0 169, can offer practical advice and information on how to stop smoking, provide details of your local NHS Stop Smoking Service and discuss other support available.

Take to the Green with the BA golf day

The Bingo Association golf day has become increasingly popular and is always very enthusiastically enjoyed by those who attend and participate – regardless of their handicap!

The 2007 event will take place on Wednesday 4 July, at Forest Pines Golf and Country Club Hotel, North Lincolnshire.

A leisurely day starts with a nine-hole morning competition for the Nesfield Trophy, followed by a light lunch of soup and sandwiches, after which there is an 18-hole afternoon competition for the Maygay Cup. The day continues with a four-course dinner, concluding with the prize presentations.

There are numerous prizes to be won throughout the day and the Association’s golfing society is very grateful for the continued support of all those who sponsor prizes and make donations to the raffle table. The day is open to members and their guests, of all standards. We can accommodate individual players, but why not enter a team of four from your club? It would be great to have a bigger turnout by the ladies this year too.

Golfing society members may remember that we have visited Forest Pines before and experienced one of our most challenging weather days yet! Since our last visit, Forest Pines has undergone a £10 million refurbishment and promises sumptuous relaxation. Details of the hotel and facilities can be found at www.forestpines.co.uk.

The entry fee for the day is £95, including VAT, and we have an allocation of rooms for the night of 4 July at Forest Pines at £89, including VAT, on a B&B basis. This offer will close on 4 June. Entry forms will be going out to all BA members shortly and further copies and details are available from Donna Black, tel: 01582 860921 or email: donna@bingo-association.co.uk

PIC: SHUTTERSTOCK; CHRISTINE MOSS
Legislation update

Although the pace of consultations has finally slowed to a more manageable speed, the Bingo Association’s efforts in response to the Gambling Act and the smoking ban have entered a new phase, working to ensure that the unique nature of bingo and its status as a soft gaming product, is reflected in the way it is regulated and taxed.

The news from Scotland nearly one year on from the smoking ban is not good. Admissions and profitability are both down and the industry needs action on the part of Government to enable it to fight back (see Stop Destroying My Bingo, pages 1 and 3).

Bingo has been caught up in the negative publicity generated by casino policy, meaning that the Government is reluctant to take what would have otherwise been optional uncontroversial decisions affecting its future. With the ban being introduced earlier this month in Wales and shortly due to be extended to include England, the industry cannot afford the Government to sit on its hands over key issues that will be vital to the industry’s future.

The Association has met with Richard Caborn, DCMS Minister, to discuss issues arising from the Gambling Act. This has been followed up by discussions with his officials to progress the opportunity for new games in bingo clubs. In addition, meetings have also been held with Treasury officials to discuss the impact of the smoking ban in Scotland, and the issues surrounding removal of VAT from participation fees. The Government has indicated it may be extending this anomaly to include online games charging for participation, a proposal the Association has strongly rejected. In practice, it is unlikely to be levied, since online gaming operators will almost certainly remain offshore.

In addition, the Association has also met with John Healey, Treasury Minister, to press the case for removal of VAT on all participation fees, since bingo is the only major gambling activity to be subject to this tax. It made a formal budget submission, setting out the arguments for removal, which is likely to be revenue-neutral for the Government if it succeeds in avoiding the closure of almost 200 clubs predicted when the smoking ban becomes UK-wide.

The issues raised in these meetings will also be reinforced by the player petition and subsequent activity within constituencies in the run-up to local elections. It is important that the industry builds momentum behind its case, publicly through the petition and media coverage and more directly through lobbying throughout the spring and summer. By the time you read this, the industry will know the contents of Mr Brown’s budget, but whether this is positive or negative in relation to the specific tax issue, there still remain several other issues for bingo that must not creep back.

For further information, visit the Bingo Association website at www.bingo-association.co.uk

CONSULTATIONS ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

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Continued growth at G2E

As the UK hurtles towards implementation of new gambling legislation this September, it will be interesting to see if the government’s expectations of industry growth and problem-free expansion are met. With a considerable amount of legislative detail still yet to be confirmed, the picture of a UK gambling industry post-September 2007 is anything other than clear.

While the leading UK-based shows – ATEI, ICE and ICEi – showed an overall increase in attendance this year, ATEI saw a drop in both visitors and exhibitors (see page 13 of this issue). It will be interesting to see if this mood is reflected at G2E 2007, scheduled to take place on 13, 14 and 15 November in Las Vegas, at The Convention Centre.

G2E 2006 in November, reported its sixth successive year of growth, attracting a record 26,644 visitors from 105 countries – seven per cent up on 2005.

The event, organised by Reed Exhibitions and the American Gaming Association (AGA), has continued to grow year on year in all aspects, seeing 15 per cent growth in exhibitors and a 19 per cent increase in floor space.

Frank J Fahrenkopf Jnr, president and CEO of AGA, said: ‘Since we held the first G2E in 2001, the event always has been created by the industry, for the industry. That promise cannot be found elsewhere and its value is evident by our ongoing ability to attract increased participation from the international gaming industry – both attendees and exhibitors – each and every year.’

Such has been the success of G2E, that in 2006 the organisers took over The Asian Gaming Expo and Conference, re-branding it as G2E Asia. This show gets its first outing on 13 June for two days at the Macau Tower and Convention Centre, in Macau, China.

While cultures of east and west have moved a little closer over the past 20 years, there remain some fundamental divides. Having a show catering to the Asia/Pacific rim will provide exhibitors with an environment tailored to that market.

However, it remains to be seen if this new co-branded show will dent the attendance record of its American counterpart.

G2E 2007 is shaping up nicely, with a promising and expanding list of exhibitors. However, it would appear that the Bingo Pavilion has been dropped for 2007, in favour of a Franchise Pavilion. It is also interesting to note that as with the 2006 show, food and beverage offerings become ever more important.

For further details, visit www.globalgamingexpo.com and follow the appropriate links.
The online bingo market continues to gather pace, with many more land-based operators open to the possibility of extending their business into the online environment.

Those operators who have had an online presence for some time are increasingly experiencing the benefits of providing existing customers with a new way in which to play bingo with them and in exploiting their brand and reputation online with a whole new audience.

To the uninitiated, online bingo may seem a million miles away from club bingo, especially to those not familiar with the internet and online world. In reality, there are a great many parallels. While the method of delivery may be very different, player behaviour and expectations are very similar, making experience of land-based bingo a very valuable asset.

Initially, the barriers to entry in the online world were considerable, especially in terms of IT knowledge and start-up costs. While entry costs have fallen greatly with the advent of networks and various options, for many the barriers of IT knowledge and experience of the online market remain. In reality, for most, these barriers are perceived to be far greater than they actually need be.

In order to enable all operators, regardless of size and online experience, to access the potential benefits of extending their business online, Meeron, the commercial arm of the National Bingo Game Association, has created the Bonanza Bingo Network, through a joint venture with leading online bingo provider, Virtue Fusion. Virtue Fusion has been involved with online gaming, including bingo, for seven years and brings with it considerable expertise in both technical infrastructure and operation and online marketing/retention.

The joint venture company, Bingo Networks Alderney, has been established to manage the Bonanza Bingo Network, which is available exclusively to NBGA, Bingo Association and Meeron member companies. Bingo Networks Alderney offers three service level packages that allow operators to start their online bingo business with the network at a level appropriate for them:

**Bronze (entry level)**
Provides operators with a basic templated branded website (pictured above), which then allows players to register with that operator and play games on the Bonanza Bingo gaming site, which is part of the Bonanza Network.

**Silver (intermediate)**
Provides operators with a branded gaming site (skinned) that allows players to register with the operator and play games on its branded gaming site, which is part of the Bonanza Network.

**Gold (established online bingo operators)**
Provides operators with a branded gaming site (skinned) that allows players to register with the operator and play games on their branded gaming site, which has its own chat room. This site is also part of the Bonanza Network.

All the service packages offer the added benefit of a greater level of influence over the running of the network, through an online review group and the fact that Bingo Networks Alderney is 51 per cent owned by Meeron, providing further comfort with regard to operation of the network. Introductory online workshops are also offered free of charge, providing key information on the basics of marketing and running online bingo with the Bonanza Network.

Bingo Networks Alderney, through its owners, has a thorough understanding of both the land-based and online business models. As such it is in an ideal position to work with existing land based operators, helping them enter the online market with a business partner who understands all aspects of their business – land and online.

Several operators have already signed up with the Bonanza Bingo Network and are working with developers to build their sites ready for launch later this month.

If you would like further information on the Bonanza Bingo Network or want to discuss any aspect of taking your business online, please contact Steve Baldwin on 01582 860915 or email info@meeron.com
### Who's who in online bingo?

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### KEY COMPANIES IN ONLINE BINGO

- ckyhufusion.com Virtue Fusion
- Bingo Networks Bingo Networks Alderney
- Netfory Group.com Parlay Entertainment
- miniminer.com ST Minver
- tmingamingnetwork.com The Gaming Network
- playtech.com Playtech
- frithegaming.com Microgaming, Technology Inc
- mgames.com Microgaming
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Why jackpots have rocketed

Jackpot fever! It’s the only way to describe last year’s astounding growth of online bingo prizes. In 2006 alone, the size and frequency of big bingo jackpots nearly doubled industry-wide. These days, it’s not uncommon to see progressive jackpots regularly paying out £30,000 to £60,000, with some prizes topping £100,000 – unheard of just a few years ago.

It begs the question: Do the skyrocketing prizes provide a true reflection of industry growth? Can it all be attributed to massive increases in player liquidity? Are operators loosening their purse strings in an effort to create buzz in an increasingly crowded marketplace?

Industry experts report that in most cases the increase in jumbo jackpots is part of the market’s natural progression, especially in the UK where there’s been a massive upsizing in player liquidity over the past year. ‘Obviously, the more people playing, the more cards sold, thus the bigger the jackpots,’ says Phil Fraser, founder of WhichBingo.com, a leading portal for online bingo.

Yet Fraser doesn’t deny that plenty of massive prizes are loss leaders funded through the marketing budgets of sites that are under constant pressure to create a buzz for themselves. ‘A key to any online gambling business is to get the attention of players by running jackpots and promotions that are shocking or might seem outrageous,’ says Stuart Gordon, president of BingoMania.com. ‘You need to draw attention and big jackpots are sometimes a strategic marketing expense to get people talking.’

What surveys say

But do huge prizes really reel in the players? Phil Fraser thinks so. Results from an on-going player survey at his site indicate that the top two things players look for when considering new bingo sites are sign-up bonuses and prizes.

It also pays to build and maintain trust, says Leigh Nissim, managing director of St. Minver (UK), a leading operator of branded bingo sites such as VirginBingo.com.

‘You can offer headline jackpots with unrealistic odds of winning but if they are never won players are apt to go to a site where they have a better chance at winning a smaller prize. Besides, big jackpots might get players through the door, but trust and customer service are what keep them playing at your site.’

St. Minver commissioned its own research in 2006 and asked 2,700 players to rank in order of importance their reasons for preferring a site. Jackpots were ranked fourth, after ease of deposit and withdrawal, trust and customer service.

‘Yes, people do want to win big prizes,’ says Nissim. ‘But it’s more important to them where they deposit their funds and whether they have a good customer experience. That is over and above headline prizes.’

Stuart Gordon agrees that jackpots are key, but adds they’re just one part of a site’s overall value proposition. ‘We’re not just trying to reel in people by only pushing the biggest jackpots. We’re trying to show them we’re different from the rest. We have a great community that’s not just about bingo and chat, but also about social networking. We’re trying to differentiate ourselves from other operators and really provide a unique experience.’

Nonetheless, he says BingoMania.com awarded more than 90 million dollars (USD) in winnings in 2006, which was a 25 per cent increase over 2005.

Life-changing prizes

Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of working in online gaming is the chance to see how big wins can change lives. In November 2006, Virgin Bingo (part of the St. Minver network) awarded more than £91,000 to a 63-year-old Stockport woman. Her stake was only £3.

‘Hardly slept last night, I’m so excited!’ she wrote on VirginBingo.com. ‘I’m going to buy a new car, I’ve been able to help my family out at Christmas and I can now help my daughter with her wedding plans for next year. I still can’t believe it!’

St. Minver’s progressive jackpot aptly named ‘The Giant’ was modelled to pay out about once a month. ‘We take a small portion of every ticket sold across all of our UK sites and put it towards the jackpot,’ says Leigh Nissim. ‘November’s big prize had been building for nine weeks, but within two weeks we had another one go for £32,000.’

Guaranteed games

While progressive jackpots such as ‘The Giant’ are incredibly popular, what really gets players excited are one-off jackpot games that guarantee when a big prize will be won. These guaranteed games, which often promise prizes from £5,000 to £15,000 and up, are usually loss leaders for operators.

Paul Leggett, Director of Professional Services for bingo software developer Parlay Entertainment, explains: ‘Operators will sometimes take a loss on one big game, in order to attract people to the site. But that is often balanced by holding a bit more of the rake than they normally would in the games surrounding the big game. It tends to balance out in the end.’

The year ahead

If bingo prizes soared in 2006, what can we expect for 2007? For St. Minver, it’s full speed ahead. Nissim reports that the company plans to pool the liquidity of its UK, Spanish, Swedish and Norwegian bingo networks to create a mega euro jackpot, available in all streams. The jackpot is anticipated to pay out a quarter of a million euros (roughly $325,000 USD) each month and will be run across all St. Minver sites.

Parlay’s Leggett also has a bullish outlook. ‘It’s going to be even bigger than last year,’ he says. ‘There is still a lot of opportunity. Every day there are more online bingo players, and I don’t think that trend is going to stop. Even the US continues to grow regardless of obstacles like the new legislation. And as the markets grow, large jackpots and other prizes will grow with it.’
Mecca Bingo has won the 2006 online Bingo Site of the Year award.

WhichBingo.com, the internet's largest bingo directory, has been running its Site of the Year award since 2003. For the 2006 awards, in recognition of the recent explosion in UK online bingo, it ran its first UK-only Site of the Year award, launched to recognise excellence and decided by players, who voted on sites during December 2006.

The award is the first of its kind in UK online bingo and received an enormous amount of votes, with results tight throughout the voting period.

When all the votes were counted the winner was Mecca Bingo, operating on Virtue Fusion software. The runner-up was Gala Bingo, operating on its in-house software. Voting was not dominated by land-based brands, with the remainder of the top ten being drawn from exclusively online bingo operators.

The award will be offered again this year, with voting taking place throughout December 2007.

For more information, visit www.whichbingo.co.uk

Better Bingo from Crown Bingo Network

In order to more accurately reflect its overall business, the Crown Bingo Network has renamed itself the Better Bingo Network, as part of a re-branding exercise.

The newly named Better Bingo Network will consist of the three current sites – Simply Bingo, Bingo Loopy and Crown Bingo – and several more in the coming months.

Managing director Dan Smyth said: ‘With our network expanding so quickly and so many more sites coming on board we felt that the Crown Bingo brand did not best explain what we are doing.

“We believe our network can offer partners a better deal than any competitor, both in terms of the online bingo experience but also in terms of what we can deliver to our partners. Our record of customer retention and maximising the returns on activity demonstrates why we genuinely feel we are a better bingo network.’

The change in network name also comes at a time when the company claims to be able to offer partners access to the world of online bingo in record time. New partner sites joining the Better Bingo Network will have access to a wealth of marketing support and resources. Smyth said: ‘We’ve been doing this a long time now and have a wealth of expertise when it comes to launching and marketing websites. We work closely with our partners to ensure they reach their potential and are on-hand every step of the way.’

Details of the Better Bingo Network can be found at www.bbnetwork.co.uk
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Bingo club senior management

BL 19   2/4/07  10:31 am  Page 1
WARNING: INGO
could seriously improve your business

Ingo is a new electronic bingo terminal from ECM which is so much fun to use that it will help existing customers spend more on bingo, and encourage new members into your no-smoking club. Ingo delivers extra sales on stage games, protects the prize board and gives players more opportunities to spend during MCB intervals.

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*Available from July 2007

For more information contact
ECM's sales team on 01964 672000
sales@ecmsys.co.uk
www.ecmsys.co.uk