The new national, multi-level, progressive jackpot game, The BIG’N, is now live and available to all NBGA member clubs. The jackpot, sold as an add-on to the National Bingo Game, has been made possible by the advent of the new Gambling Act, which makes stake retention available to licenced bingo for the first time.

The work involved in preparing the industry for this new game has been substantial and started in June 2006, when initial work began on the new software that would run and manage the games, the Jackpot Link System (JLS). Before sanctioning a suitable launch campaign the NBGA wanted to ensure that the new software and hardware that clubs would be using had progressed to such a level, that it was ready to test in situ. This position was reached in June this year, with a full programme of marketing support being formally approved on 6 July.

Upon approval, the NBGA marketing machine swung into rapid action, ensuring that all support agencies were briefed and able to progress their contribution to the launch of The BIG’N rapidly and professionally. With initial promotional materials due to be in clubs for 28 August and a full launch date set for 15 September, there remained a little over seven weeks in which to deliver the launch campaign in full. Teams were working frantically on creative, tickets, rules, in-club presentation, club point of sale, roadshows, press advertising, media buying, web sites, PR and television advertising production.

In naming the new national jackpot and devising a campaign around its launch, there were a number of messages that needed to be conveyed. Positioning the jackpot as very much part of the National Bingo Game was essential, as it is not possible to participate in the jackpot without playing the National Game. The size of the prizes on offer also needed to be reflected, in addition to this being the industry’s biggest prize. The name clearly and simply reflects both these points and introduces a notion of fun, which was built on in the promotional campaign.

Taking place in parallel with the marketing preparations were software and system tests. The introduction of new equipment, software and processes across all NBGA member clubs was a significant challenge for all involved.

Initial tests began in August, expanding the size of the test group each time, until all clubs were involved. Once all clubs were involved in tests it then became possible to test ‘as live’, in order to ascertain the integrity of all aspects of the system, working fully, including BACS runs.

continued on page 6
The National Game
Quarterly news and update from Chief Executive Paul Talboys

Looking to a better future

At long last, the Gambling Act 2005 is finally with us, for better or worse. The Budd Report kicked off what has been a long process - through numerous turns, media debates and rapid consultations. This was finally implemented on September 1 2007 after a six-year journey.

The single biggest change for the industry has been the much-awaited ability to retain stake and it is this that, in many instances, offers us the greatest opportunity to move forward. The ability to create and offer increased prize funds will, hopefully, become a key marketing tool for both the industry and individual operators. There have already been a number of operator-based launches and, of course, the headline-grabbing BIG’N.

With Wales and England now having smoking bans in place, the UK and the bingo industry is united in learning to operate under new smoke-free legislation.

The change for bingo has not been an easy one in light of the higher proportion of smokers in the existing player base. However, there is now an opportunity to encourage non-smokers, who are in a significant majority in the broader population, to re-appraise the new smoke-free bingo product. Higher prize funds will be a key message in encouraging this re-appraisal.

Summer 2007 failed to materialise quite spectacularly, with only the odd hint of summer sun. We can only hope that we avoid a severe winter, as players experience their first one smoke-free.

As this is the last issue of 2007, I would like to thank you all for your continued support, particularly in light of what has been a trying year. I hope that the industry will prosper under the new Act and look forward to continuing our work in 2008.

Bingo in the media

Media coverage in the second quarter of 2007 has seen the trend of declining coverage reversed, with substantial increases across April, May and June in comparison to the same period a year ago. A significant amount of this additional coverage has been as a result of the national news agenda focusing on the run-up to smoking bans in Wales and England, but also the industry’s increased activity with MPs in local constituencies following on from the national petition.

Number of press hits by month

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Quarter 2 total: 572 Year to date: 1,210

In all three months this quarter, the leading media sector has again been ‘nationally available media’, sustained by most publications now also having online versions of their publications. The leading regions for coverage were North West and Northern regions in April and the West Midlands in both May and June.

International Bingo Game Regional Press Office: 01438 718500
National Bingo Game National Press Team: 020 7553 3700
Annual Golf Day was a great success

Another great day was had by all the entrants competing in the 22nd Annual Bingo Association Golf Society Golf Day in July.

Two competitions were held at the Forest Pines Golf and Country Club in Lincolnshire and despite all the best efforts of the great British weather the golfers managed to complete both rounds!

David Hawkes, The BA Golf Society chairman, said: ‘The golf day continues to prove a popular event on the Bingo Association’s annual calendar and we very much hope that both new, and existing, players will join us in 2008. It really is a great day with players of all standards enjoying their golf.

‘Once again, we received wonderful support in the way of sponsorship for our 2007 event day and I would very much like to thank all of those who supplied such super prizes.’

All you need to have in order to join in next year is a golf club handicap certificate and a love for the game! Keep an eye on The Association website in the new year, when details should be announced for 2008.

Ricky gets X Factor ‘call’

Mecca Wood Green’s bingo caller Ricky Denton made it through to the last 200 of this year’s X Factor – and had the daunting task of facing fierce host Simon Cowell at the auditions at Arsenal’s Emirates Stadium!

Ricky, 47, is main stage caller at the club in Wood Green, North London, and is a true showman – members say he really commands the stage and is a born entertainer.

The bubbly character lists Cliff Richard and Elvis Presley as his inspirations, and was hoping to make it through to boot camp in the over-40s group of this year’s X Factor competition.

Before the auditions, Ricky said: ‘I love my job at Mecca, but feel I’ve been waiting all my life for this opportunity to prove that I can be up there with the best, so you can bet your boots that I’ll be giving it my all.’

While Ricky did not make it to the next round, his Mecca colleagues feel the show was the poorer for him not being present. While Ricky was disappointed, bingo and his legion of fans were relieved to know that we get to keep him.
Now in its 13th successful year, we are well into our search for the 2007 Bingo Caller of the Year, with the first four regional finals completed and two more scheduled for October in Wales and Scotland.

The second round took place in mid-August, when judges Steve Baldwin and I met to view the DVD or video presentations sent in by the top ten entrants in each of the six regions.

Steve and I were very impressed by the number of contestants who had got to grips with digital technology and sent in DVD entries, rather than VHS video. Most entries were of a very high quality and the judges had an extremely hard time whittling down the field to the regional finalists.

Each regional final is held in front of an audience of regular bingo players, plus supporters from each entrant’s club, some travelling hundreds of miles to support their favourite callers. The host clubs too compete for the award of Best Regional Final Host, won last year by the Mecca Club in Hartlepool.

The judging panel, Brett Hyrjak the current Bingo Caller of the Year; myself as the competition organiser, and Steve Baldwin of the NBGA, travelled to Mecca in Bolton; Gala in Wallsend, Newcastle; BJ’s in Kitts Green, Birmingham and Point Bingo in Bracknell. The high calibre of finalists in each region made the judging particularly difficult, but the panel did, after much deliberation, agree on the first four Regional Champions.

Our first final was the North West at Mecca in Moor Lane, Bolton. Manager Dave Barker and his superb team of staff, made a strong bid to win the best Regional Final Host award. They will be a difficult act to follow, with the club dressed with huge balloon sculptures to welcome the visiting supporters; glasses of champagne; specially printed flyers; entertainment provided by a magician and the talented Mecca Stars, plus boxes of chocolates on every table to take home.

Defending North West champion Chris McHenry (Buckingham, Middleton); Michael Burton (Mecca, Oldham); James Cummings (Gala, Burnley); Steve Linder (Mecca, Knotty Ash); Clyde Webber (Mecca, Blackpool) and Allen Musa (Buckingham, Preston) all gave a good account of themselves in the judges’ interview, then took to the stage to demonstrate their showmanship and calling skills.

The entertainment and calling of the games was near perfect, but it was Allen Musa – the master of the one-liners – who took the title and will represent the North West in London’s National Final on Sunday 25 November.

The judging team then moved on to Gala in Wallsend, Newcastle, where a great North East welcome was waiting for contestants and their supporters. Club manager Norman Fletcher and his staff could not have been more helpful. The club looked great, decorated with blue and yellow helium balloons, with bubbly and chocolates on every table, along with streamers, party poppers and masks. Guests were treated to farewell gifts of earrings for the ladies and car washing kits for the men.

BBC Look North filmed the final, with the presenter allowed up on stage to call a few numbers too. The event had been well promoted and Norman told us admissions...
were around 350 up on the usual total for the afternoon. The defending champion, Gary Wilson (Gala, Hull), was up against a complement of Mecca callers, as Jamie Butler (Mecca Sheffield); Gary Walker (Mecca, Hull); Ron Gandz (Mecca, South Shields); Blake Robson (Mecca, South Shields) and Lee McGuire (Mecca, Gateshead) gave sparkling performances, which left the players yelling for more and the judges with the difficult task of choosing the winner, but it will be Blake Robson who will carry the North East banner to London.

It was then time to head into the Midlands, to the new BJ’s club in Kitts Green, Birmingham, where Chris Ellis and his superbly professional team ensured that everything went smoothly.

Following the morning’s interview session, contestants were ready to take to the stage and the visiting supporters and Kitts Green customers couldn’t have asked for more, as the finalists showcased their talents on stage.

Defending champion Barbara Miller (Mecca, Gloucester), was joined by two other lady callers in this event, Leanne Walker (Mecca, Brierly Hill) and Kirsty Luttman (Flutters, Biggleswade) with male callers Mark Lunn (Mecca, Wednesbury Cross); Michael Edwards (Gala, Nottingham) and Sheffen Allibhai (Mecca, Ipswich) putting in dazzling calling and showmanship performances. Confronted with this line-up of great finalists, the judges were hard pressed to choose just one winner, but finally awarded the Midlands trophy to 30-year-old Mark Lunn.

Our fourth regional final was in the South, held at Point Bingo in Bracknell. Nothing was too much trouble for the host club team, under the management of Jason Batup, making the organiser’s job trouble-free. After the judges’ interview session, all of the contestants were raring to get on stage and do what they do best.

Performances were polished and well received by the audience, who were treated to a showcase of some clever and entertaining performances provided by Bobby Blount (BJ’s, Reading); George Brown (Mecca, Southend); Melanie Ceazar (Gala, Enfield); Jason Owen (Mecca, Wandsworth); Kevin Taylor (Connaught, Herne Bay) and Dawn Milton (Mecca, Harlow). This was a very close fought contest with the honours finally going to Melanie Ceazar.

There are just two more regional finals. The Welsh champion will be chosen at the Castle Club in Newport on October 19 and the Scottish title will be contested at the Carlton Club in East Kilbride on October 25. Both promise to be days of top-notch calling and entertainment.

Then all six finalists will begin toning up their tonsils in readiness for the National Bingo Caller of the Year Final, being held at Mecca, Wood Green, on Sunday 25 November.

For full results of the competition and winners, visit www.nationalbingo.co.uk

**Regional finalists 2007**

**NORTH WEST REGIONAL FINAL – 19 SEPTEMBER**

- **Mecca Bingo Club, Moor Lane, Bolton**

  - Chris McHenry: Defending champion from Buckingham, Mecca, Manchester
  - Steve Linder: Mecca Knotty Ash
  - Michael Burton: Mecca, Oldham
  - James Cummings: Gala, Burnley
  - Allen Musa: Buckingham, Preston (winner)
  - Clyde Webber: Mecca, Blackpool

**NORTH EAST REGIONAL FINAL – 20 SEPTEMBER**

- **Gala Bingo Club, Middle Engine Lane, Wallsend**

  - Gary Wilson: Defending champion from the Gala Club, Hull
  - Jamie Butler: Mecca, Sheffield
  - Blake Robson: Mecca, South Shields (winner)
  - Lee McGuire: Mecca, Gateshead
  - Ron Gandz: Mecca, Leeds
  - Gary Walker: Mecca, Hull

**MIDLANDS REGIONAL FINAL – 25 SEPTEMBER**

- **BJ’s Bingo Club, Mackadow Lane, Kitts Green, Birmingham**

  - Barbara Miller: Defending champion from Mecca, Gloucester
  - Sheffen Allibhai: Mecca, Ipswich
  - Michael Edwards: Gala, Northampton
  - Mark Lunn: Mecca, Wednesbury (winner)
  - Kirsty Luttman: Flutters, Biggleswade
  - Leanne Walker: Mecca, Brierly Hill

**SOUTHERN REGIONAL FINAL – 26 SEPTEMBER**

- **Point Bingo Club, Skimped Hill Lane, Bracknell**

  - No defending champion as Brett Hyrijk is the currently the national champion and a judge

  - George Brown: Mecca, Southend
  - Melanie Ceazar: Gala, Enfield (winner)
  - Jason Owen: Mecca, Wandsworth
  - Kevin Taylor: Connaught Bingo, Herne Bay
  - Dawn Milton: Mecca, Harlow
  - Bobby Blount: Shipley’s, Reading

**WELSH REGIONAL FINAL – FRIDAY 19 OCTOBER**

- **Castle Leisure, Usk Way, Newport, Gwent**

  - Mike Broad: Defending champion from Castle Leisure, Bridgend
  - Shaun Homewood: Mecca, Swansea
  - Paul Quick: Castle, Canton, Cardiff
  - David Dean: Castle, Morriston
  - Stephen Gibson: Mecca, Wrexham
  - Will Willard: Mecca, Cwmbran

**SCOTTISH REGIONAL FINAL – THURSDAY 25 OCTOBER**

- **Carlton Bingo Club, Southgate Centre, East Kilbride**

  - No defending champion as the title-holder has left the bingo industry
  - Alan Brown: Gala, Edinburgh
  - James Cook: Mecca, Edinburgh
  - Kevin Fraser: Mecca, Drumchapel
  - Graeme Garlach: Mecca, Aberdeen

Unfortunately, the fifth Scottish finalist, Paul Currie, has had to withdraw, as he has changed clubs recently and his new club cannot guarantee that he will call the competition’s minimum average requirement of three main stage sessions each week.

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**South Regional Final Champion**

Melanie Ceazar with other finalists Jason, Dawn, Kevin, George and Bobby
This final stage of the tests ran from 3-14 September and highlighted some critical errors in the system. Up to this point the tests had all proved successful, but in the ‘as live’ situation, it was clear that number of problems needed to be addressed.

The ‘as live’ test and following launch period proved to be a trying time for clubs and a frantic time for techies and engineers as they rushed to address the problems. It was for this reason that the ‘as live’ test was planned into the launch schedule and it was essential that this be carried out in order to ensure that the system and all clubs were fully operational and ready for the national launch on 15 September. This free play period also demonstrated to players the ‘winability’ of The BIG’N, with the silver jackpot being won twice during this time.

The ability for the industry to retain stake and offer jackpot prizes through a variety of different mechanics, presents a significant opportunity for individual operators as well as the National Game. In presenting players with a more exciting bingo experience the key issues for many will be the range in size of prizes on offer and their respective winability. In working with the industry to devise the mechanic, prize fund structure and win-ability, The BIG’N has been presented and positioned as the industry headline prize, allowing bingo operators to collectively compete with and challenge the Lottery, in terms of grabbing consumer attention.

While The BIG’N is set to deliver new industry records in respect of prize value, it will only be part of the menu of games offered in-club. There is a significant opportunity for individual operators to deliver their own jackpot games, with lesser prize funds but a far greater rate of win.

This combined range will hopefully provide players with the aspirational headline prizes they hope for, while at the same time delivering the winability they want.

### Clubs get their PhD™ in bingo!

**Planet Bingo, 3rd Rock Gaming and Leisure Electronics have made an exciting addition to their portable electronic bingo terminals (EBTs) with the addition of Party Cash Bash™, their branded name for mechanised cash bingo (MCB).**

After just one year in the UK operating the PhD™ on main stage only they launched the trial of Party Cash Bash™ in May of this year at Buckingham Bradford. In June the Gambling Commission approved the system, allowing further rollouts.

Allan Simpson, general manager of Buckingham Bradford, says: ‘Of all the electronic bingo systems available to the industry, in my opinion PhD™ is the very best.’

Riva Gaming is also a convert and in June the PhD™ was launched in Cricklewood. Steve Young, operations manager of Riva Gaming, says: ‘The PhD™ is easy to operate, customer-friendly and the back-up is excellent. The addition of MCB enhances even further the contribution that this unit provides to both player satisfaction and club profitability.’

Customers and staff at the Cosmo club in Eccles are also impressed. Gary Cokes, the club manager, says: ‘Installing PhD™ has, without a doubt, helped combat the financial downturn since the recent introduction of the smoking ban.

‘The customer reaction has been fantastic, so much so that we have ordered more units and we are upgrading the system to enable us to play MCB.’

Rick van Hasselt, of 3rd Rock Gaming, has been marketing portable electronic bingo systems in the UK since their introduction in 2001. ‘I’m very pleased to be associated with 3rd Rock Gaming and Leisure Electronics. Together with our customers, we have accomplished so much in a relatively short period of time and we will continue to offer reliable and innovative products as the UK bingo industry implements changes that the 2005 Gambling Act affords it.’

Michael Douglas of Leisure Electronics added: ‘We are proud to be associated with such an innovative company as 3rd Rock Gaming. Unlike other forms of electronic bingo, PhD™ can be integrated quite seamlessly into an existing installation requiring little additional wiring and no cabinet work to your existing MCB Barriers… this truly is MCB without barriers, what’s more, standard installation and service is all part of the package.’
If it’s October, then it’s nearly time for the Global Gaming Expo – the biggest gaming show on earth. This year’s Las Vegas Expo, the seventh, will take place at the Las Vegas Convention Centre on 13, 14 and 15 November. It is expected to attract more than 17,000 gaming professionals from around the world and boasts some exciting new developments including:

- Expanded pavilions
- Eye in the sky security and surveillance pavilion
- Technology pavilion
- Daily keynotes
- Enhanced signage to get where you need to go
- Enhanced G2E comfort lounges.

Among the highlights is the session on the State of the Industry: Internet Gambling at the Crossroads on 14 November.

The list of exhibitors continues to grow every year, with the 2007 list looking very impressive. ‘G2E is – and always has been – an event designed for the industry, by the industry. That means no other event combines the unique blend of premier trade show, in-depth conference content and tailored networking opportunities to offer gaming professionals from every sector of the industry the most valuable business experience of the year,’ said Courtney Muller, group vice-president of G2E at Reed Exhibitions.

For further details visit www.globalgamingexpo.com

Can’t make Vegas?
Then book now for G2E Asia between 3 and 5 June 2008. This will be held at the Cotai Strip Convention and Exhibition Centre, the Venetian Macau, Macau SAR, People’s Republic of China.

For full details, please visit www.g2easia.com
Palatial Leisure has undergone a busy year with development and refurbishment work across its estate. And the company says that as we head rapidly towards 2008 there are no signs of the pace slowing down.

Palatial trades as Palace Bingo Clubs and Palace Casinos, and refurbishment work at the Felixstowe bingo club was just completed in time for the club’s relaunch on 27 September.

The army or workmen responsible for the new-look club have now moved on to the Salford club, where it is the next to get the full treatment.

Work is also under way in Great Yarmouth on the new £3.5m Palace Casino. The 20,000 sq ft venue is due to open at Easter 2008 and will create 70 new jobs. It will feature 13 gaming tables, automatic roulette wheels, 28 touch bet roulette screens and 20 mega jackpot slot machines. The development, next to Palace Bingo in Fullers Hill, includes two bars, a private dining suite and an a-la-carte restaurant with great views over Breydon Water.

Patrick Duffy, managing director of Palatial Leisure, said: “We want the casino to be a five star experience – we are not thinking James Bond but we want to add a little bit of West End glamour to a night out in Yarmouth that has been missing. I expect this to be the premier casino in the east of England – Yarmouth has been crying out for somewhere like this.”

It is predicted that 60 per cent of players will come from within a 30-mile radius of the casino, with the remainder made up of holidaymakers and day trippers. The casino is the final stage in a £6 million entertainment complex, following the move of the bingo club.
G2E 2007
THE EPICENTER OF BRILLIANT IDEAS

COMING NOVEMBER 13-15, 2007—LAS VEGAS CONVENTION CENTER
NOVEMBER 12, 2007—G2E TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE
NOVEMBER 11-13, 2007—NCRG CONFERENCE ON GAMBLING AND ADDICTION
PARIS LAS VEGAS RESORT AND CASINO

AN AMERICAN GAMING ASSOCIATION EVENT • ORGANIZED BY REED EXHIBITIONS
28,000+ GAMING PROFESSIONALS FROM 105 COUNTRIES • 750+ LEADING EXHIBITORS • 100+ WORLD-CLASS CONFERENCE SESSIONS
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NON-STOP LEARNING, DAILY SPECIAL EVENTS, F&B AT G2E, ALL OF VEGAS AND MORE. FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO REGISTER, VISIT WWW.GLOBALGAMINGEXPO.COM

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G2E GLOBAL  
WWW.GLOBALGAMINGEXPO.COM
Edward Thompson has to be one of the most well known names in the bingo market. Last time Bingo Link spoke with its commercial manager, Chris Garrity, ET was preparing for a facelift in its corporate identity.

The new logo reflects the changes that have been brought about in this long-established company, which now nicely blends traditional values and experience with the latest technology and methods. The logo more closely reflects the company’s approach to business and nowhere has the change been greater than in the approach to sourcing promotional product.

Chris Garrity said: ‘About two years ago we changed our strategy with regard to sourcing of products and decided to go directly to the Far East to put together our own ranges, including the all-important Christmas one, which would be exclusive to us and our customers. ‘Our most popular items have proved to be the traditional products to which we have added our own designs, such as cookie jars, moneyboxes, fibre optic houses and giant Christmas stockings. This has proved to be a highly successful strategy for us with many of our customers ordering as early as May this year.

‘We also add value to many of our products with a bespoke packaging service where we are able to package items together and personalise them for our customers’ needs. With the start to the Christmas season we have had so far, we are looking forward to this being our busiest yet.’

What was one of the most anticipated movies of summer, featuring Springfield’s leading family? Doh! The Simpsons – The Movie, of course!

Having provided a UK-based home for a wide range of Simpsons licensed merchandise in 2006, leading industry supplier PMS International has retained the licence for these internationally-renowned, wise-cracking TV characters. The Simpsons are in good company, joining a stable of licences that includes Shrek The Third, Scooby Doo, Nintendo, Postman Pat and Basil Brush.

PMS started 35 years ago as a wholesaler specialising in prizes for bingo and costal amusement arcades. From this humble beginning it quickly became the leading importer of plush and amusement-related merchandise in the UK.

The company’s ability to respond to market changes rapidly, through close monitoring of consumer trends, meant that it was always able to provide its wholesale customers with leading quality merchandise that was right on the trend. This remains a key reason for its continued success and expansion.

Based in Basildon, Essex, PMS also has a large showroom in Manchester and offices in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Shenzhen in China and New York.
That ‘pink’ time of year is here again and Bingo For Breakthrough 2007 is upon us. We hope you are all raring to go. In fact, some clubs have already started fundraising in advance of Bingo for Breakthrough Week from 21 to 28 October.

Gala clubs in the North East region raised £10,500 through a game of It’s a Knockout, and the Mecca Bingo car challenge raised a staggering £39,000 through a highly original nationwide game of pass the parcel.

If any clubs still need additional fundraising materials, such as Midge the Cheeky Monkey and the sought-after Pink Ribbon dabbers, please phone Lucy Anderson at Breakthrough on 020 7025 2403 or email bingo@breakthrough.org.uk.

Celebrity Dab a Doodles from, clockwise top left: Sarah Cox; Andrew (Freddie) Flintoff; Lorraine Kelly; and Penny Lancaster.

This year’s response to our celebrity Dab a Doodle campaign has been great, with many well-known faces including Penny Lancaster, Lorraine Kelly, England cricketer Andrew Flintoff and Radio 1 DJ Sara Cox, picking up a dabber and giving vent to their creative talents. You can see all this year’s doodles on the Charity Auction area of eBay and can support Bingo for Breakthrough Week by bidding for your favourites – you may even get lucky and make the winning bid. Log onto www.breakthrough.org.uk/doodles from 21 to 28 October.

Whatever you are doing for Bingo for Breakthrough week, from skydives to bed pushes, talent shows to auctions, send Breakthrough your fabulous pink photos and most of all, have fun!
Legislation update

Now that the Gambling Act is finally with us, Bingo Association public affairs activity is focusing strongly on taxation issues. The industry is once again making its case for the removal of VAT from bingo game participation fees, in order to treat bingo consistently with other gambling products.

Bingo is such a positive influence in the lives of many people, a point that has been presented to MPs. With this in mind, the Association has continued to make the point that ‘bingo is different’, focusing particularly on the positive contribution that it makes, with charity.

By the time Parliament rose for the summer recess, 82 MPs had signed one or both Early Day Motions (EDMs) calling for support for the bingo industry. In addition, several MPs tabled parliamentary questions regarding the tax situation for bingo, demonstrating a wide base of support across all the main parties.

The Association has met the new Minister responsible for gambling at the DCMS, Gerry Sutcliffe, new Opposition spokesperson on gambling Tobias Ellwood, and is in discussions with new Treasury Minister Angela Eagle. As a result of a question asked by Eric Illsley, MP for Barnsley East, to Gordon Brown, the industry is also due to meet the Prime Minister when Parliament returns.

Member clubs are being encouraged to continue with local MP visits, to demonstrate first hand the positive influence bingo has in the lives of its players. In the approach to the Association’s annual fundraising week, Bingo for Breakthrough – in aid of Breakthrough Breast Cancer – all MPs will be invited to offer support by taking part and visiting clubs.

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

CONSULTATIONS ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

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The Bingo Association appoints new public affairs agency

The bingo industry has faced a considerable number of issues in recent years, particularly those of taxation, the burden of regulation and the new Gambling Act, as underlined by the industry’s national petition ‘Stop Destroying My Bingo’. The Bingo Association has appointed Open Road, a corporate communications and public affairs consultancy based in London, to provide strategic and senior support in delivering the Association’s increasingly broad public affairs work.

The agency was founded earlier this year and will work closely with the Bingo Association to raise the industry’s profile and underline the significant role bingo plays at community level. Together, they will also be looking at an education programme offering practical advice to local authorities grappling with new responsibilities under the Gambling Act.

In the short term, the key issues on which the agency will be working include the industry’s response to the publication of the Prevalence Study, as well as the Bingo Association’s engagement with the government on the issue of double taxation.

Bingo Association chairman Sir Peter Fry commented: ‘A key element of our work with Open Road will also be to show how the industry is moving on and modernising. The positive contribution that we make to local communities will be a key theme underpinning all our public facing work from this point onwards.’

Open Road director Victoria Tate commented that part of the agency’s role would be to ‘stress the fact that bingo is an important social activity rather than hard gambling’. She added: ‘Together with the Association, we will be working hard to defend it as an important element in the fabric of our society.’

Carlton manager takes on Nessie

Christine Wright, manager of Carlton Bingo, Fife Leisure Park has dusted down her running shoes to take part in a challenge of a lifetime. She will run the Baxters Loch Ness Marathon – all 26 miles of it – this month to raise money for the British Heart Foundation.

Christine originally joined Carlton as a part time member of staff 16 years ago. She took to bingo and its players in such a big way that she moved into management and now heads up the stunning club at Fife Leisure Park. Christine, who always has a warm welcome for players and guests at the club, said: ‘Bingo players have such big hearts that I am sure with their support I will be spurred on to complete the course. The British Heart Foundation is such a worthy cause and I am sure we will make them proud.’

Christine and her team have made a large, gold, heart-shaped collection tin, reflecting the cause and the fact that bingo players have hearts of gold.
Leigh Nissim, Managing Director of St Minver (UK), reflects on a year of changes.

What a year 2007 has been for the bingo industry – the smoking ban, the Gambling Act, the growth of online bingo and taxation. Any one of these changes in isolation would be enough to alter the shape of the sector – but all together? Unstoppable.

Managing a company that is at the forefront of online bingo, awareness and understanding of the smoking ban taking place in both land and online bingo is essential. While no-one currently has precise figures for the percentage of customers shared by both forms of bingo, they share a great many other aspects, as broader changes taking place impact on each in differing ways. The common thread at present is change.

Technology has made online bingo possible and its advance continues to deliver an ever-evolving product. Initially perceived as a threat by traditional land-based bingo, this view has changed for many. Rather than being a competing product, online has offered many land-based operators a new channel through which to sell their product, to both existing players in existing markets and new players in new markets.

The smoking ban has presented a very real issue for club bingo, but an opportunity for online as a significant number of committed smokers have sought out a means by which they can play and still smoke. For those bingo brands operating in both markets this has been able to be managed more readily than by those not presently online.

While in the longer term the ban also creates an opportunity for club bingo to present its product to the huge number of non-smokers, it is the transition period from smoking to non-smoking that will be a key issue. For those club operators with no online offering, entering the market could be a significant step in retaining player revenues and helping to offset losses resulting from decreased admissions from smokers.

To understand why players are going to spend more online, it’s important to analyse their playing.

### Online

Who’s who in

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The balls are up in the air!
### online bingo?

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### KEY COMPANIES IN ONLINE BINGO

- **virtuefusion.com**: Virtue Fusion
- **Bonanza Networks**: Bingo Networks Alderney
- **Parlay Group.com**: Parlay Entertainment
- **St Minver**: St Minver
- **iThegamingnetwork.com**: The Gaming Network
- **playtech.com**: Playtech
- **chartwellgames.com**: Chartwell Technology Inc
- **bingotek.com**: BingoTek
- **Gamesyscorporate.com**: Gamesys
- **aquadgaming.com**: Aqua Gaming
- **bbnetwork.co.uk**: Better Bingo Network

This guide is not a definitive list of bingo sites but aims to show key sites and indicate the software on which they operate. Information is correct to the best of our knowledge but please notify us of any omissions or errors.

online bingo? habits. Many cite the flexibility of online bingo as appealing, which is understandable when considering the consumer demographics: women with children are the most likely to play online. Being able to multi-task, doing other things at the same time as playing, is vital for them. Online bingo enables players to do the cleaning, watch their children and smoke – all while still enjoying the game and chat facilities.

In recent years there has been much speculation as to what the impact of the Gambling Act would be for online bingo. In 2001 when plans to revise gambling legislation began, online gaming activity was very much in its infancy and, as such, not initially in the spotlight. In the subsequent six years it has grown substantially and, in doing so, attracted even more attention from legislators and regulators. Many site operators initially set up servers offshore in order to minimise the impact of constraints imposed by UK authorities. While the servers were offshore, promotional activity was very much onshore. A key change following the implementation of the Gambling Act has been that only those gaming sites operating in government-approved (White List) regions may advertise in the UK. This change has made it essential for any UK-based brand wishing to enter into a white label agreement with an online gaming provider, must ensure that the games to be offered are hosted in a White List region. If this is not the case then the brand owner and gaming site operator may not promote the site in the UK.

As online gaming activity continues to grow and attracts greater attention, it is possible that aspects of the Gambling Act relating to online gaming may be revised, bringing with them greater regulatory requirements for those wishing to promote their products and services in the UK. In selecting an online gaming operator to work with, it will be essential that the operator keeps abreast of such developments and operates at a ‘best practice’ level. Online gaming has not escaped the impact of the new act, despite being offshore and, as the industry evolves and matures, there will increasingly be a need for informed, co-operative dialogue with authorities.

While all these developments have wrought substantial change for club and online bingo, there is still a great deal to play for, but the rules must be adhered to.

St Minver operates online bingo for a broad range of UK-based clients, including land-based bingo operators.
Online bingo: powered by celebrity?

Tyler Schwartz of Parlay Entertainment Group considers how today's big entertainment stars are playing such a big part in publicising online bingo

In today’s hyper-competitive world of online bingo marketing, how can one e-bingo site stand apart from the rest? The answer, it seems, is in the stars. But don’t look to the sky for inspiration – I’m referring to stars of the celebrity, not celestial, variety.

From billboards through magazines to television, celebrities are everywhere touting the benefits of bingo. First out of the gate in 2005 was former Atomic Kitten Kerry Katona as the face of Bingos.co.uk. Today, the likes of Sharon Osbourne (right), Katie Price and Irish model Glenda Gilson (below) are lending their names, faces and credibility to the game.

Such endorsements (even from C-list celebs) don’t come cheap. Kerry Katona was said to have earned £500,000 for her work with Bingos.co.uk and Gala’s agreement with Sharon Osbourne reportedly set it back a seven figure sum.

Are the stars worth the dough they demand? Do celebs really help reel in bingo players? We put these questions to a few star-powered bingo sites.

Rehab Bingo.com is Ireland’s leading online bingo website, thus Glenda Gilson, Ireland’s leading model and television personality, was a natural choice for the face of the brand.

Irene Gahan, Marketing Manager for Rehab Bingo.com, suggests that Glenda was chosen because she embodies the message of the Rehab brand.

“Rehab Bingo.com raises money for people with disabilities and Glenda has a strong history of charitable work. Plus, our players love the fact that she is a personality and a face they can identify with. They respond well to someone they know or see portrayed in a positive light in the media.”

As the face and voice of Rehab Bingo.com, Glenda Gilson calls the balls in the Irish room and her image is used throughout the site. Rehab has also splashed Glenda’s image across the press, web banner ads, site merchandise and outdoor advertising.

But has Glenda’s slim figure led to fat financial figures for Rehab Bingo.com? ‘It’s hard to measure,’ said Gahan. ‘It’s very difficult to put actual numbers around using a celebrity. I can tell you that a celebrity endorsement is only as good as the marketing campaign built around it. And it is certainly beneficial to have a ‘face’ that people can identify with. But it’s hard to quantify exact figures.’

Nonetheless, wagering at Rehab Bingo has more than doubled since Gilson became the site’s spokesmodel.

At Virgin Bingo.com the celebrity card is played a bit differently. Instead of selecting a single celeb to front its brand, Virgin promotes a continuous roster of stars making guest appearances in the bingo chat room.

‘For Virgin, it’s about offering additional entertainment and content to the site,’ said Paul Munro, Virgin’s bingo manager. ‘We don’t really use celebrities to endorse our product; we use them to provide an entertainment feature for our players.’

Virgin’s line-up has included musician Peter Andre, chef Anthony Worrall Thompson and a whole host of Big Brother stars popping in to chat. ‘Our brand provides us with the opportunity to attract people who wouldn’t normally do something like this unless they were paid a significant amount of money,’ said Munro.

‘Celebrity power is an essential element for Virgin. It’s a core part of our brand and in terms of our gaming sector, we want to build a larger entertainment package and capture a bigger slice of a player’s time than simple game play. Celebrities will certainly play a role in that.’

As for future celebrity appearances, players can look forward to company founder and CEO Richard Branson himself (above) popping in to chat some time soon.

While Munro couldn’t cite specific figures regarding celebrity appearances boosting site revenue, he is confident that star power has added to the overall appeal of Virgin’s bingo offer. ‘It provides an opportunity for everyone to get excited about participating in the game – and that’s what it’s all about,’ he said.

Over at Gala Bingo, the UK’s largest bingo operator, Sharon Osbourne is being used to embody the values of the group’s online offering, using Mrs O in television adverts as well as throughout the site. While Gala has made heavy use of Sharon throughout 2007 there has been no clear indication whether the relationship will continue after this year.

According to Dominic Mansour at Bingos.co.uk, even if Gala doesn’t renew Sharon’s contract, she will likely become permanently linked to the Gala organisation in the eyes of the public and in the press. Such was the case when Bingos.co.uk dropped Kerry Katona as their spokesperson after a tumultuous two-year endorsement deal.

‘We believe the main benefit was earning the trust of both our players and suppliers,’ said Mansour. ‘Being endorsed by someone, who at that time was at the peak of their celebrity, reflected very well on our brand and helped us build brand value. Even when Kerry received some negative press, it only raised her profile to our advantage.’

Parlay Entertainment is a leading bingo software developer and provides online bingo software for many sites including Rehab Bingo, Virgin Bingo and Bingos.co.uk
The online bingo market has evolved quite rapidly, as is the case with a lot of online businesses. Bingo is now an established online leisure activity, with a significant number of operators competing in an increasingly crowded market. As this market moves forward and matures, successful sites will need greater flexibility in addressing the perennial problem of player desire for headline prizes combined with ‘winability’. Bingo Link caught up with Al Haig-Thomas, of leading online bingo software provider, Virtue Fusion, and put this issue to him.

For many businesses wishing to move into online bingo joining a network has been the most viable option, if only initially. When it comes to joining a network, traditionally there have been only two choices – networked or stand-alone. This has proved to be less than ideal, since players want big prizes and ‘winability’, objectives that can end up being mutually exclusive. This is an issue that land-based operators are very familiar with and in seeking to reach an optimal solution have been both creative and co-operative. The result has been a range of games, offering scale of prize money and winability, delivered through a variety of games played in house, across differently sized linked networks of clubs and, ultimately, the National Bingo Game. In the online world similarly networked games do offer bigger prizes, but in turn are hard to win, leading to the type of alienation experienced by Lotto players after prolonged playing with nothing to show for their efforts. Conversely, smaller stand-alone rooms offer prizes that are more accessible but lack the excitement of networked alternatives. The land-based solution of offering a range of games, which collectively address both issues, is the way forward online.

This flexible approach to online bingo network activity is something that Virtue Fusion has been offering its customers, as they develop their own online businesses. VF has introduced linked games to its network, enabling operators to offer players a room that provides both stand-alone games, and at regular intervals, large, linked games.

The importance of providing the right mix of games to the players comes down to improved player retention. Big games are marketable events that can be communicated to existing players. Put simply, they form a reason to come back to your site. Bingo players play for 90 minutes a session on average, lose around £4 and visit on average 15 times per month. With the cost of acquiring a new online customer estimated to be around £75 and rising, operators need to be sure they do all that they can to retain them.

Carlton Bingo welcomes Moray politicians

Carlton Bingo in Buckie recently welcomed Moray MP Angus Robertson and local councillor Gordon McDonald, to discuss concerns about current levels of taxation on bingo playing and other industry issues.

After meeting with Carlton Bingo’s operations director Brian King, the pair went on to meet players at the busy Friday night session.

Brian King said: ‘The bingo industry is facing its toughest challenges in light of the implementation of the smoking ban and the taxation regulation. What is frustrating is that there is no parity across other sectors of the gaming industry. Bingo continues to be singled out and is subjected to a 15 per cent tax of gross profits and VAT of 17.5 per cent. Mr Robertson’s and Councillor McDonald’s visit will help raise awareness of the issues facing the bingo industry.

‘It’s a popular pastime and attracts many loyal followers. However, they are not, and can never be, taken for granted and at Carlton we’re determined to see that our players get a fair deal and a fun night out.”

Speaking about the evening Mr Robertson commented: “Bingo is an important social night for many people where they can meet up with friends and have a bit of fun. ‘In the grand scheme of things bingo tax provides only a very small amount of revenue to the government but it has a big impact on bingo players and operators.”
**BINGO ASSISTANT MANAGER**

WE ARE SEEKING TO RECRUIT AN EXPERIENCED BINGO ASSISTANT MANAGER, ALREADY WORKING WITHIN THE INDUSTRY.

PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATES SHOULD BE SELF-MOTIVATED, RESOURCEFUL, AUTHORITATIVE, SHOW LEADERSHIP/TEAM BUILDING ABILITY, HAVE ENTHUSIASM AND A POSITIVE ATTITUDE WITH A CAN-DO APPROACH AND KNOWLEDGE OF ADMINISTRATION, BOOKSALES SYSTEMS AND CASHLINE.

TO APPLY, PLEASE SEND CV WITH COVERING LETTER, STATING CURRENT SALARY DETAILS TO:

MARK SYMONDS, OPERATIONS DIRECTOR,
BINGO@THE DELUXE, DELUXE LEISURE CENTRE,
OPPOSITE BEACH CAR PARK, PELHAM PLACE,
HASTINGS, EAST SUSSEX, TN34 3AD

TEL: 01424 443 866 / MOBILE 07850 897 758

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**ASSISTANT MANAGER VACANCY**

**Salary: £17K - £22K depending on experience**

Majestic Bingo is a division within The Noble Organisation.

We are looking to recruit an experienced assistant manager who can make an immediate impact at this busy South Shields bingo club.

The successful candidate will be able to demonstrate operational experience, marketing expertise, a keen eye for customer service but above all a desire to help contribute to admission growth.

All applicants must have a current S19 certificate / Personal License.

If you believe you have the personality and positive attitude to add value to our South Shields bingo club then please send a letter of application outlining the skills you would bring to this position, along with a full CV to:

Martin Lagar, Operations Manager, The Noble Organisation, 362B Dukesway, Team Valley Trading Estate, Gateshead, NE11 0PZ or by email to: martinlagar@resortsliving.co.uk.

Closing date 1st November

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**SELDIS COOPER**

**MANAGER/ASSISTANT MANAGER**

An exciting opportunity has arisen at one of our clubs.

We are looking for a dynamic, enthusiastic, self-motivated person to join the Management team as a Manager/Assistant Manager.

Preferably the individual should hold a Section 19, Fink Certificate (or Personal Management Licence) possess a good all-round knowledge of the Bingo Industry, have excellent Customer Service skills, be a good communicator at all levels and understand the need to be results-focused.

You may also be expected to attend courses and travel to other clubs in the group to help with your development so flexibility and mobility would also be desirable.

If you are interested in this rewarding position please apply in writing to:

Miss LJ Thomas
Staff Development Manager
Seldis Cooper
Globe Bingo Club
Wellington Road
Donnington
Telford, Shropshire
TF2 8JS

Closing dates for applications: Friday 2nd November 2007

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Ingo is the ONLY electronic bingo terminal that can connect to your existing MCB coin mechanisms.

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