

Casino Marketing Innovation

By Steve Karoul

The casino industry today has often been referred to as a “copy cat” industry where one good, new idea seems to get copied by everyone in the industry as rapidly as possible. Sometimes it is just the competitive nature of the casino industry today and sometimes it is just pure complacency. Why don't we see a lot more innovation in the gaming industry compared to other industries? Obviously one reason is both the high cost of R&D combined with the high cost of getting a new product approved in each gaming jurisdiction. However, here I am referring to casino marketing ideas and not new gaming equipment. New, creative casino marketing ideas seem to be getting scarcer and scarcer instead of more prevalent.

Never-the-less, there is one product to come to market that was shown to a few select individuals at the International Casino Exposition (ICE) in London this past year. That new innovative product is called the Digi Playcard. It was developed by Allan Howard and his partner in China. They applied for patents in both the United States and in China and for a patent priority under the IPCT in 151 other countries around the world. Their patent application was finally published in both China and the United States in December 2006. Since then, Allan has been considering various marketing options for his new product. Most significantly, because of its ‘game-play’ features, it has great casino marketing potential.

The Digi Playcard looks like a credit card, only thicker, but upon closer examination one can see that it is quite unique and appealing. It is fully electronic and at first glance it immediately reminds you of a mini-slot machine with its miniature LCD screen, PLAY and HOLD buttons and vibrant graphics. It is also often described as an electronic scratch card or Instant Ticket. It contains electronic components, i.e. a chip, EPROM, battery and LCD and can also accommodate a solar cell, sound chip or a timer for different applications. Allan Howard states, “*Over the past thirty years billions of scratch cards have been sold, but printing technology has reached its limits. The public's appetite for paper tickets has become jaded*”. It is for this reason that the innovative Digi Playcard was developed.



Intriguing? What is even more intriguing are the various options for developing some really great casino marketing promotions that specifically target mass market customers that may have an interest in playing your slot machines. The card is high quality and fun and enjoyable to play. It offers the same level of excitement as found from playing on a real slot machine.

Most importantly for casino marketing executives it contains *two* games – The Accumulator game and the Bonus game. This means that for the first time they have the chance of giving their customers *two opportunities* to respond to a promotion. For the Accumulator Game portion, all you do is press the Play button to start the reels spinning and you keep pressing the Hold button to stop the reels and view the combination of symbols similar to those in a slot machine. At the end of the last play, after all of the spins have been used, the LCD will display the total score of the points accumulated, which you can match up to the reward levels posted on the front of the card, or on the card packaging. This will equate to whatever prize levels or actual prizes that the sponsoring casino or racino may want to offer to participants.

In addition, the LCD will flash another message that states “Claim your prize” and “Your bonus icons” and three new icon symbols will flash onto the screen. The icons represent the second game on the Digi Playcard. This is the Bonus Game where the patron receives a second chance to win a prize. The difference between the Accumulator Game and the Bonus Game is that, in the first, the patron can tell immediately by the total number of points showing on the card what prize he has just won, but on the Bonus Game the patron must bring his or her card to the casino or racino to view a monitor to find out what prize they have won. The host casino or racino posts five symbols each day and the patron only has to match three of them to win a prize. This gives the patron a reason to return daily.

The real incentive to the casino or racino is that the winners must visit the property to claim either prize. The casino or the racino sets the odds in advance which enable them

to develop a promotion that will fit whatever budget they want to dedicate to this clever marketing promotion. It is a win-win promotion for everyone. In addition, it is also possible to develop local partners to co-participate in the promotion and offer additional prizes associated with the icon symbol combinations. The Digi Playcard is extremely flexible when it comes to promotions and can even be programmed to control the payout odds.



Digi Playcards advise that they will help you to personalize your promotion. You can custom print the packaging for direct mail and include additional advertising or marketing promotional discounts or other incentive offers to bring players into your property. We all know that the first challenge in casino marketing is to get the customers through the doors and the Digi Playcard will definitely help do that. Once inside the doors, most players will almost always take an additional chance on the real slot machines. Therefore, the Digi Playcard as a casino marketing promotion is extremely cost effective since the actual cost of the cards is less than \$2.50 each. Many casinos still give away \$10 or \$20 in quarters or free play plus food coupons to entice patrons to walk through the doors of their casinos. The Digi Playcard seems like much better value and a much better casino marketing promotional item.

The casino controls every aspect of the promotion from the graphics on the card, the prize pool odds, the promotional budget and all other marketing costs. The casino even has the ability to control the timing and may offer double bonus points or other clever ideas to help drive business to the casino during slow or off peak times of the day or the week.

The intriguing part of the promotion is that many customers will keep bringing their Digi Playcard back to the casino frequently to check the Icon symbol monitors to see if they have won a prize for that visit.

Casino marketing innovation is still alive and well and surfacing its head as the new Digi Playcard. This is something new, something exciting and something that casino customers will enjoy playing. Therefore, as a copy cat industry, it won't be long before we start to see many different promotions utilizing this innovative new marketing tool. The big question for many casino operators will be to decide whether they want to be one of the first to offer their customers something new and exciting or fall into the copy cat syndrome and wait until their competitors do it first. You decide. Good luck.

If anyone would like additional information, please send me an E-mail with your contact information and I will send you the Electronic Digi Playcard power point presentation along with Allan Howard's direct contact information.

Steve Karoul is one of the top casino marketing consultants in the world today with almost 30 years of experience with the best casinos both within the U.S. and internationally. Steve has lived in numerous countries and has conducted casino marketing activities in over 80 countries around the world. He is a contributing writer to several different major casino publications often injecting his own hands on experiences. Steve can be reached at Tel. (1-860) 536-1828 or by E-mail: skaroul@comcast.net or www.euroasiacasino.com