With so much discussion occurring regarding online gaming, free play, social gaming and social media as a whole, do we really understand how significant the opportunities are and what is available to us right now?

Let’s stop for a second and consider some of these facts:

- More than 500 million people now engage in gaming online.
- Humans spend three billion hours per week gaming, that’s right, three billion hours per week, and growing.
- Australia has around 15 million gamers.
- Ninety-eight per cent of Australians use the internet (93 per cent of people over 64).
- Sixty-two per cent of Australians are now using social media, with Facebook the dominant network.
- Facebook is accessed on average 20 times per week per user in Australia.

Social gaming is exploding (over 70 per cent growth in the past two years). The average age of a social gamer is between mid to late 30s, and the 50-plus demographic is experiencing some of the highest growth rates. The use of social media and social gaming is having a profound impact on our industry and represents an immediate opportunity.

While there is ongoing discussion and debate on online gambling within Australia and globally, growth in online gambling, sports betting and wagering continues. Meanwhile, Australians wanting to gamble online can and do with relative ease as highlighted in the interim Interactive Gaming Act review.

However, as an industry right now, there are significant opportunities to position us in the online space, maintain relevance, loyalty and engagement with our current member base, and develop a relationship with future generations.

GAMIFICATION

There is one word that is becoming a global phenomenon and will be as universally well-known within 12 months as social media is today: gamification. Gamification is the process of using game mechanics and thinking to engage customers.

Since the 1980s, the basic concepts and principles of the loyalty systems and programs within our industry have changed little. Gamification has the ability to fundamentally change our members’ experience, how they engage and are rewarded for visiting your venue, and your ability to develop, track and measure loyalty and retention.

LOCATION-BASED MARKETING

Another key technology is location-based marketing (LBM). LBM is a marketing technique using social media and location-based mobile check-in services, like Facebook or Foursquare, to engage, reward and communicate with customers in real time on their mobile devices. Completely underutilised at present, LBM combined with CRM can create significant competitive advantage for your venue.

SOCIAL GAMING

Social gaming needs to become an integrated part of our loyalty offering. You only have to look at the global sports betting companies, casinos and EGM manufacturers to see the significance they are placing on social gaming, developing a social gaming presence and a member base to position for the future. Social gaming is NOT gambling and is legal in Australia.
What is vital to understand is the difference between free play and social gaming. Free play solutions are delivered on the internet, more often than not independent of a social network, and many lack the gamification elements that make social gaming so popular. Social gaming, on the other hand, usually involves game apps delivered on a major social network and has significant game mechanics such as points, levels, badges, trophies, challenges, score boards, gifting, ability to engage with friends, share and post etc.

SO WHAT SHOULD YOU FOCUS ON?

The following key areas should be an immediate focus for your venue, all of which are available now:

- Create a high-quality game-based loyalty experience. Extend your loyalty programs on the web and Facebook via apps. Use gamification to engage, retain and grow members.
- Leverage multiple social media channels and social CRM to reward visitation ‘check-ins’, and allow them to share their wins with friends. Use radar marketing to offer counter offers when members check in to your competition.
- Drive the viral/networked capacity of social media, and use mainstream networks relevant to current and future members using CRM, gamification solutions and social gaming apps.
- Build a virtual membership base of social gamers via a social gaming platform integrated as a part of your loyalty offering to increase brand awareness, engagement, retention and loyalty to your venue.

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