

VIRTUAL IS VITAL

Having successfully introduced virtual games, the industry now needs to increase its range to increase its customer base, says **Vangelis Kalloudis** of Intralot

It's been a while since the sports betting and lottery industries started to enrich their portfolio to appeal to a younger demographic and expand their customer base. One of their successful gambits was to introduce virtual games, which have been widely embraced, to the mix.

Virtual betting plays a 'sports betting gamification' role and, in many cases, is even a pre-school for new sports bettors, or a fresh proposition for lottery fans. A different approach to numerical games, virtuals bring a more entertaining touch to gameplay because participation is based mainly on luck rather than knowledge. Consequently, they've proved to be a great tool for acquiring new and less casual players, creating incremental revenue for operators that's significant enough for virtual games to take the form of a new vertical in product portfolios, side by side with sports betting, lottery and casino games.

Customer retention is just as important as customer acquisition, and because the cost of acquiring a customer is on the rise, developing solid customer retention strategies though personalised content enhancement is becoming more and more important. Retaining customers is not well served by a 'one size fits all' approach. Operators need to define their target audience and select the right content for it, taking player experiences and local market requirements into consideration.

One example is the very important casino audience, which the virtual games industry has identified as an important one to attract, acquire and retain. But how? Via on-

demand virtual game propositions, available in both retail and digital environments. These allow players to participate in ad hoc events on request, either online or via retail touchpoints (eg self-service terminals), replicating the thrill and excitement of the real thing.

On-demand virtual games have been introduced in the US in racinos (establishments combining race tracks with casinos). These offerings allow players to bet on recorded horse races, enhancing the thrill and build-up to instant gratification. This fast and easy method of participation has turned out to be very appealing to casino/slot players, who are typically attracted to chip elements and roulette-style selections.

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This does not mean, however, that we should be limited to casino-themed propositions. On-demand virtual games are still viewed as the industry's 'infants' and there's still much to learn about their capabilities and potential. Racing games were the first to be used in on-demand virtual games, but many sports will surely follow, because initial signs clearly indicate ample room for growth. Furthermore, the impressive fashion in which this category has increased the virtual games customer base means it's sure to be expanded.

The category is new and far from saturated, which is exactly why the virtual punter's face is still changing shape. Operators should keep enriching their portfolios with innovative and diverse virtual game propositions and, so long as they are beautifully delivered, these will definitely continue to attract and retain punters of different sports and segments.

So far, virtual games continue to surprise us with their content, flexibility and ability to target different player segments by leveraging new technologies. Because of their omnichannel character, Intralot's virtual betting propositions enhance gamification and loyalty. They range across a series of player touchpoints, including self-service terminals, desktops and mobile sales channels, all working together to create intriguing entertainment experiences for diverse and ever-changing gaming fans.

Vangelis Kalloudis is the racing and virtual betting product manager in the products and services division at Intralot. With extensive gaming industry experience in product management, sales and analysis roles, he has a master's in financial, actuarial mathematics and statistics, a bachelor's degree in applied mathematics, a product innovation award and two international gaming patents.

