

COINLESS GAMING

“What system do you recommend for Slots?”

This is probably one of the questions I hear most when I visit Casino operators. I have to admit that whenever I hear this question I am glad that I represent a firm that sells just Slots, and not on-line systems. I have sold these in my old days, and I would like to take this opportunity to express my profound admiration for all those colleagues who have chosen to build their professional careers around the sale of the most difficult product in the gaming industry: on-line slot systems.

I invariably reply to this question with another question, “What do you want the system for?” Up until a year ago, the reply I would get in many medium sized Casinos, both in Europe and Latin America, had to do exclusively with accounting control. Few of these operators believed that *player tracking* would help them in their jobs, as they were convinced that their staff already knew their *star players* and needed no electronic help to identify them. And, in many cases, this was true. Often the profound knowledge staff had of their players left me bereft of arguments with which to defend *player tracking*, an application which is, however, extremely useful in large Casinos.

The main doubt that other operators had was that they did not know whether or not it was important to have a flexible configuration of progressive prizes and, especially, *mystery jackpot* networks, through an on-line system. I had no firm



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opinion in this case either. While I am quite in favour of *mystery jackpot* systems as a promotional tool, I believe that they only work when players are well-informed of the prizes on offer. I know of too many cases when clients play without even knowing that there are *mystery jackpot* prizes in the game. Obviously, a promotion that goes unnoticed is money wasted. So, in this case too, I was unable to give operators a single convinced answer to this question.

The recent arrival in Europe and Latin America of the first *coinless* (not *cashless*, as the machines continue to take notes) systems has raised a much more serious doubt among operators. It consists of operating slots without coins and the need to choose between card-based systems or ticket-based systems (*Ticket In - Ticket Out* or *TITO*).

A card-based system allows players to transfer the balance of money they have in one machine to another machine, or to the Casino cashier booth. The card, given by Casinos to clients at its own discretion, is simply an identifier associated with the balance of money residing in the database of the local gaming system. Technologically perfect... Imagine yourself playing a slot with €5,000 in the credit meter. You remove your card and the amount disappears, but don't worry, it reappears the next time you insert



the card in another machine or hand it in at the cashier booth... On the other hand, imagine yourself again playing the same machine, again with €5,000 in the credit meter. When you leave the machine, it gives you a ticket. A lovely ticket saying you are entitled to €5,000! You can either insert the ticket in the bill acceptor of another machine or take it, with a big smile on your face, to the cashier booth to cash it in, without having to place any faith in technology. A ticket is something tangible, visible, familiar, something we already handle in our day-to-day life. It is, therefore, credible and acceptable to all players, whatever their age or condition.

The detractors of the *coinless* system say that they miss the sound of coins dropping into the coin tray. While it is well known that this sound is an important encouragement to players, I believe that we Slot manufacturers are well able to design machines in which audio is not merely an accompaniment, but rather an indispensable part of the game sequence. Nowadays, audio is a fundamental ingredient in Slot games. Without the music and dialogues that accompany the experience of playing, games would lose much of the freshness and humour dispensed by modern Slots.

The growing tendency towards *coinless* systems is a great relief to me. Ever since the debate arose between the two systems, card or *TITO*, I much prefer responding to operators' questions. This

time, unlike the case of *player tracking* or *mystery jackpot*, I do have a clear preference for *TITO*. My opinion is unwavering, independently of the size of the Casino or whether the clients are locals or tourists. In any case, knowing the difficulties that can be expected whenever we try to implant a system that necessarily requires the public to change its habits, and as a man quite reticent to changing my own habits, I am still enormously glad that I don't have to make my living selling systems.

