

RESPONSIBLE GAMING: Vulnerabilities, problems and underage gambling, Casinos and other gambling venues

In many parts of the world the gambling industry is being urged to develop responsible gaming programmes to minimise the impact of problem gambling on individuals and communities. This pressure has come from governments, regulators, from the industry, individuals and the communities themselves.

More and more games have become faster in the past years. More and more games have been introduced and many games are to be found on the Internet these days. Besides new services are being offered via mobile phones and inter-active TV. What does this

mean? More problem gamblers? And what about lotteries, always being viewed as soft forms of gambling with few negative aspects? In the old days gambling was more or less a regional or maybe even local activity. Even nowadays it still is! Look at the visitors of most of the Casinos you

find all over the world. In most cases they come from a place within 1 hour at the most. But you can find new possibilities these days: the airline companies that have introduced gambling in the air, children casino toys, the Hard Rock Casino, and the Internet with more



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Mr Remmers during the 2005 EASG Conference in Malmö, Sweden

than 2000 gambling sites at the moment. Even on the political level, the "No Pokies Party" in South Australia.

Would that mean that we are leaving the local / regional market behind? Is this the start of globalisation? In fact the world is already global. Think of: telecommunication, information (Internet), finance, tourism, shopping and of course gambling and betting.

If you are a frequent visitor of conferences on gambling and gaming, you definitely have noticed that operators, including the lottery organisations, talk about social responsibility and problem gambling and a responsible gaming policy.

What is responsible gaming and what about social responsibility? In fact, it means having policies and practices to prevent and reduce the harm that could be caused by gambling. There are treatment specialists that tell us that abstinence is the only solution: stop gambling and never start again. However, most of us are able to control our own behaviour, including controlled gaming / gambling. And if not, we are able to try and learn how to get there.

In the October 1996 (almost 10 years ago) edition of a North American gaming magazine, the front-page article stated that: *"Problem Gambling was the Gaming Industry's ball & chain - that problem gaming more than any other issue threatens the growth of the industry"*.



Assissa Consultancy Europe Directives during their visit of ICE-2006: Ynze Remmers, Pieter Remmers and Rob d'Hondt

It is well-known that a small percentage of gamblers have difficulty controlling their gambling expenditure and suffer adversely. Problem gamblers can be expected wherever there is gambling and particularly where there is high intensity gambling. Whilst the primary responsibility for controlling gambling expenditure rests with the gambler, the gaming industry is increasingly accepting that it has a lesser, but still important responsibility to put measures in place to minimise the likelihood of their customers developing gambling problems, and to assist those who develop problems. The gaming industry is not unusual in this. The providers of all consumer products and services have an obligation to provide their product or service in a manner that is safe and minimises the potential for harm. They are expected to provide a foolproof product.

Any industry that fails to provide consumer protection is increasingly liable to not only governmental intervention, but also possible litigation. Where a part of the gambling industry fails to voluntarily introduce an effective responsible gambling regime, it should not be surprised when the government regulator imposes a regime upon it.



Members of the G4: Pieter Remmers, Thomas Nilsson, Paul Symond and Rob Wootton

Responsible gambling is a catch-all over term that covers:

- Consumer protection information, such as information about the random nature of gaming machine wins and warnings that excessive gambling may cause harm

- Measures to reduce the incidence of problem gambling, these include

- limiting access by young people to gambling, restrictions of the provision of alcohol to customers, as well as controls on the availability of credit for gambling

- Programmes to assist problem gamblers and their families, which would include counselling services, self-exclusion possibilities and training of gaming staff.



The gambling dollar or euro has always been highly mobile. Gamblers respond to local prohibitions, restrictions and inefficiencies by moving to a jurisdiction or a form of gambling that is available across the border, in a back alley, through the post or the Internet. They can travel by car or bus or train or plane to Las Vegas or Monte Carlo or Vienna. They can buy tickets in the Spanish National Lottery by post. Governments have long been aware of the mobility of gambling. Some jurisdictions throughout the world are moving to liberalise and modernise their gambling laws to reduce the loss of their gaming expenditure elsewhere. The challenge of Internet-based gaming or mobile phone betting continues to bother governments, as they struggle to find ways to control tax or ban it.



The development of a responsible gaming regime is a necessary and inevitable part of the evolution of the gaming industry. Whilst responsible gambling may at first appear to be another onerous level of restrictions for the industry, over time it will come to be recognized as a necessary element in a healthy and sustainable gaming industry.

That means that the international gambling industry needs to be proactive rather than reactive.

Frank Fahrenkopf Jr., president of the American Gaming Association got it right when he said that "dealing with problem gambling is not only the right thing to do, it is also good business sense".

G4, the Global Gambling Guidance Group, aims to minimise the impact of problem gambling by designing an accreditation programme that sets the international benchmark for responsible gaming. It provides a model for the gambling industry and an opportunity for companies to demonstrate how seriously they take the concerns of everyone involved.

If needed and wanted they could be of help or contact the author of this article.