

All together now

G2E event will celebrate gaming suppliers' spirit of cooperation and their desire to thank their customers in a big way



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As September approaches, those of us in Las Vegas don't get to experience the typical seasonal shift toward autumn. While temperatures are dipping elsewhere, we still live in a triple-digit world. As the leaves are getting ready to change on trees all over the country, our palm trees look, well, the same as they always do. And while the kick-off of football season prompts excited anticipation on campuses and in pro stadiums from coast to coast, we have the prospect of another two-win season from UNLV.

For the member companies of the Association of Gaming Equipment Manufacturers (AGEM), September also means the countdown clock for the Global Gaming Expo (G2E) just started ticking a lot louder. Some may view G2E as simply just the gaming trade show that takes place every November in Las Vegas, but for the typical global gaming supplier, it represents the zenith of a very comprehensive product development cycle as well as a company-wide effort that touches every department within its organization.

Using the slot machine companies as an example, the timing of G2E creates a hard deadline that hovers over the heads of game developers and engineers like a nagging mother-in-law. The deadline clock pretty much started ticking the day after G2E concluded last year. The idea is to get new products ready for display at G2E every year and hope that what's displayed on the trade show floor is also ready for whatever regulatory submissions are required. G2E also represents a chance to show off futuristic technology that may or may not ever make it to a casino floor.

Because G2E draws tens of thousands of gaming professionals from throughout the world, it also represents a chance to catch up with old friends and current colleagues, many of whom don't get to come to Las

Vegas that often. And those old friends and current colleagues also can be described as "customers" for those displaying their wares on the show floor. After all, the G2E is a business event meant ultimately to generate revenue and offset the cost of displaying at the show. The big slot companies all spend well north of \$1 million for less than 19 hours of exhibition time – that's a cost of business of more than \$50,000 per hour.

Of course, time with customers extends beyond the show floor. G2E parties have become legendary over the years, and the big companies have typically spent outrageous amounts of money and energy trying to outdo their competition. When I was in charge of the marketing department at Bally Technologies, our G2E parties were all tied to different slot titles and included a private Ray Charles concert, a Playboy Mansion party that included lots of Bunnies and dual 757 jet service from Las Vegas, a Saturday Night Live event featuring Lorne Michaels, Dan Aykroyd, Kevin Nealon and the SNL band and Pamela Anderson riding through the Palms casino on the back of a motorcycle en route to a pool party.

Impressive events to be sure, but what definitive value did Bally really receive and what impact did these big events have on customers? From a product launch standpoint, only Playboy proved to be a strong game among those titles. Those were memorable nights and good business relationships were forged, but there was certainly a blurring together with other events taking place all over town.

When I took over as executive director of AGEM in March of this year, one key goal was to foster a spirit of cooperation among our members that would pay off when a significant event occurred where all of the global suppliers needed to band together. Figuring it would be easiest to start with getting members to agree on cocktail parties, AGEM this spring

hosted common receptions at the NIGA trade show in San Diego, the Canadian Gaming Summit in Montreal and the Southern Gaming Summit in Biloxi. Right before your eyes you saw IGT and Bally nuzzling each other, WMS and Aristocrat hugging, JCM and MEI holding hands and FutureLogic and TransAct smooching in the corner. OK, so that's a stretch, but there were no fisticuffs; AGEM-member companies saved money by not having to host their own events; everyone was smiling; and our collective customers were thrilled.

With that in mind, I'm pleased to announce the beginning of a new era at G2E, with AGEM and Gold Members Aristocrat, Bally, IGT, Konami and WMS hosting "A Celebration of Gaming" on Tuesday night, Nov. 18 at the Orleans Arena. This invitation-only event will include all of the customers of AGEM members and will feature food, fun, drinks and Grammy Award-winning headliner Kenny Loggins. There will not be any other parties or events hosted by AGEM members that night, guaranteeing for the first time that our customers – the casino executives, slot directors, table game managers, IT decision-makers and everyone else who interacts with our member companies – will not have to make a choice about which event to attend.

In the last five months, AGEM has added more than 20 new members and has significantly expanded its membership base – now totaling more than 50 – to include Austrian Gaming Industries (Novomatic), based in Austria; Casino Technology, based in Bulgaria; and Octavian International and TCSJohnHuxley, both based in the United Kingdom.

While AGEM has much to accomplish here in North America, there's no question an international presence is in the best interests of the organization and our member companies. With "The Celebration of Gaming" party at G2E, we will truly take the spirit of cooperation among gaming suppliers – and our ability to recognize and thank our customers – to all-new levels. **CJ**