



Marcus Prater earlier this year took over the reins as executive director of the Association of Gaming Equipment Manufacturers (AGEM). A longtime industry marketing veteran, Prater has set his sights on taking the gaming supplier trade group to the next level. Since Prater's involvement, the group has grown by 17 members to 48 members, and has expanded its international influence. Prater spoke recently with *Slot Manager* Editor Marian Green about his goals and priorities for AGEM.

MARCUS PRATER

ON A ROLL

A re-energized AGEM locks up new members, takes on new challenges

What is the mission of AGEM?

Prater: The mission of AGEM is simply to tackle any issue that's of importance to global gaming suppliers. And that runs the gamut from legislative and expansion issues to certainly regulatory issues, which are very important to our members, responsible gaming and quirky issues that may not affect our 48 members but may be relevant to a handful of our members.

How important an issue has responsible gaming become?

Prater: It's going to grow in importance. [For instance] in certain markets up in Canada, they're starting to require that responsible gaming be embedded in the software of the machines, so we want to part of that process... because any type of software coding and software engineering is a very involved process and we want to understand the requirements and how to get them done in an efficient way.

Do you envision AGEM as more of a proactive or reactive organization?

Prater: Part of why I really wanted to pursue this opportunity was I was Bally's representative on the board of AGEM for eight-plus years, and frankly I got frustrated by the reactive nature of the group. My job is to identify issues ahead of time. I'm a student of the industry. I'm up on what's going on, and so I think I'll be able to do that in such a way to get out ahead of issues.

What are some current issues you're working on?

Prater: One example is a taxation issue in Pennsylvania where the rules as they're written out there say that if our companies send slot machine techs into the state to repair machines, those slot techs are subject to a personal state income tax levied by the state of Pennsylvania. If our CEOs go out there for meetings, they are subject to a personal income tax. And while that has grown in favor [as it relates to] professional athletes for example, it's not very practical for our industry, where, essentially, the bulk of the burden would fall on slot techs and working people who are trying to keep the machines and the

technology running. So we're involved in trying to get some relief in that area. These are things that are not super sexy to the outsider, but to our members, they're very important. [Another more visible issue is] we're combining our efforts as companies to host events at trade shows where our members had historically always tried to have a monopoly on our customers by hosting their own events. Essentially [the combined events] save our member companies money and make it easier for our customers to not be pulled in eight million different directions. I don't want to be known as the organization that throws parties, but the spirit of cooperation that we've been able to generate among the members to do these things will pay off when more important issues come up down the line.

Will you be working closely with the Gaming Standards Association?

Prater: I would say we are. I've already had lunch with Peter DeRaedt, and we pledged to work together where there are some common interests. What server-based gaming ultimately becomes will affect all suppliers, all trade organizations, all regulators, so definitely our paths will cross. We're not in the standards business, but regulatory issues often are driven by new technology, and we want to work closer and be more involved in the regulatory process so that line will blur.

Talk about AGEM's involvement in educational and training needs.

Prater: We've pledged \$300,000 over three years to fund a slot technician program at the College of Southern Nevada, and we've had conversations with CSN's in Atlantic City. These issues, again, benefit our members because there's often a shortage of knowledgeable technicians, and, as the technology gets more complicated and more advanced, you can't just get some guy who worked on motors at a car shop. Our equipment, at least on the slot and system side of things, is pretty darned advanced, and we need a program that lets the labor pool keep up with engineering advancements. **SlotManager**