

■ SUPPLIERS STEP UP WITH ANOTHER IMPRESSIVE G2E

By Marcus Prater

Another G2E has come and gone, but the blur of activity will keep us all engaged for many months to come. Meeting after meeting, old friends, new faces, late nights, early mornings and the kind of hand shaking that only takes place on the presidential campaign trail—it all adds up to a three-day business blitz unlike anything else we experience in the gaming industry.

Oh, and along with all of that wandering around chatting with people, there's also a trade show going on with companies displaying new products. Yes, don't forget about the products. Once again G2E turned into the ultimate showroom, with gaming suppliers, led by the big slot companies, displaying an array of creativity, innovation and technology we haven't seen since, well, the last G2E.

For those who have been around the industry for awhile, tracking the evolution of product creativity on display at the big Las Vegas trade show

is a head-shaking experience, whether it's slots, tables, mobile or whatever product line that catches your fancy. We were wowed by what was on the floor in 2000, impressed by new video slots that made everyone instantly think reel-spinners were a dying breed. We were awed by what was on the floor in 2005, with all of those celebrities running around pitching licensed slot titles. We were surprised last year by the heavy R&D commitment by the suppliers during a recession, predicting, incorrectly, that such a display would prompt casinos all over the world to open their checkbooks and turn 2011 into a very good year for suppliers.

If we were wowed by what we saw back in 2000, then this year was a Megabucks-sized wow. Others have pointed it out since the show ended, but what was on display at the Sands Expo and Convention Center makes nearly every slot floor in the U.S. look tired and boring. The



blending of basic slot concepts, arcade games and Xbox-style gaming has never been more evident. From iPhone-type flicking your finger on the screen to play bonus-round Skee-Ball at the Bally booth, to the Big Buck Hunter Pro® shooting game at the IGT booth and all booths in between, a classic 3-reel slot like Blazing 7s seems so Liberty Bell-ish, even though it still can be found in virtually every casino in the country.

How long it takes for slot floors to truly look like the floor at G2E is the great unknown, even if the economy was firing on all cylinders. Limited capital spending will keep casinos from turning over their floors in huge numbers, but the pace of player acceptance could very well be a limiting factor as well. I don't see the little old lady who loves her Blazing 7s using a plastic rifle to blast away in an animated hunting environment any time soon, but there will be plenty of others who can't pass up a new entertainment experience.

Speaking of a new experience, G2E moved to the Sands this year after a decade at the Las Vegas Convention Center, and Reed Exhibitions in particular deserves credit for the smooth transition. Both vendors and visitors spoke highly of the new venue and the new floor layout.

For the Association of Gaming Equipment Manufacturers (AGEM), the show was very active as we continue to move through what has been a very productive year. On Monday of the show week, we hosted nearly 50 people for a meeting of suppliers and the newly formed Ohio Casino Control Commission. With casinos opening in Ohio as early as spring of next year, the suppliers were there to understand the regulatory and licensing framework and how the commission plans to get everything up and running in a matter of months.

On Tuesday night, AGEM welcomed a clear night amid a rainy forecast and hosted the largest industry party ever, with nearly 4,200 people attending the Appreciation Celebration 2011 customer event covering an expansive 5 acres at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Beach Club.

On Wednesday night, AGEM sponsored the high-end Chairman's

Reception event at the Paiza Club at The Venetian, featuring appearances by the CEOs of Aristocrat, Bally, IGT, Konami and WMS, who on a typical day, spend their energy trying to beat the business crap out of each other, but on this night sipped wine and munched on Kobe beef. Slot machine patriarch Len Ainsworth and Las Vegas Sands Chairman and CEO Sheldon Adelson were there as well, along with a stimulating mix of other CEOs and gaming movers and shakers.

On Thursday morning, AGEM hosted a breakfast for 40 consisting of Mexico gaming operators and suppliers who have a strong interest in that market. Ever since the casino fire tragedy in Monterrey, the Mexico gaming market has been in turmoil as the government tries to reassert its authority by closing casinos and confiscating machines.

On Thursday afternoon, the show closed and the monster displays that collectively cost tens of millions of dollars to construct started to come down. The crowd filed out, buoyed by who and what they saw and stimulated by the new opportunities that emerged over the course of the previous three days.



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