

Double duty

Incorporation of “second screens” can help keep players at slot machines, drive up casino revenue

SPONSORED BY:



By Steve Arel | Contributing writer,
KioskMarketplace.com

Every time players turn their attention away from a slot machine – to go order a drink from the bar, to find a TV to check sports scores or to peck on their phone to update social media sites – those units sit idle. And idle machines aren’t generating revenue.

Though the casino industry is expected to generate more than \$100 billion this year in the United States alone, according to Global Industry Analysts, it faces stiff competition for players’ undeterred interest. Much of that interest involves things that can be found or accessed through players’ cell phones.



So a handful of companies are working with casinos, trying to persuade them to make so-called second screens – an accompanying tablet- or phone-sized device attached to the side of the machine – in constant plain view of the player.

“In general, the industry has been slow to embrace many technological changes,” said Dr. David Schwartz, director of the Center for Gaming Research at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas. “Potentially, they could make a difference.”

Despite the sluggish adoption rates, those familiar with the industry say they believe companion screens can help keep players anchored at the slots for longer periods of time, feeding them with money as they feed their other interests. The key will be ensuring the displays feature compelling content.

“If the customers aren’t attracted to the main product – the slot experience – adding second screens won’t make much of a difference,” Schwartz said.

Here are three ways the deployment of second screens at slot machines can increase casino revenue by enabling players to stay put.

Additional entertainment

While the slot machine might be the main attraction for many casino-goers, they often crave multiple forms of entertainment. Casinos have recognized the need by expanding their offerings to include concerts and other on-site events.



Realizing the diverse interests that exist among players, second screens typically function in much the same way their smart phones do, except they're not burning through the players' data plans. Those screens, equipped with audio jacks so players can listen in without being disturbed or distracted by surrounding machine buzzers and floor chatter, can offer radio through the Internet and stream TV programs and events. They even can partake in additional betting opportunities with fantasy sports or virtual slots.

"When major events take place, they tend to leave the machines and go to those events," said Grace Vasa, chief executive officer for Juke Slot, developers of a second-screen application for the casino industry. "For casinos to be successful, they have to get away from expecting players to sit at the slot machine all day without any other outside world interactions."

The products being deployed by Juke Slot feature card readers where regular clientele can swipe loyalty cards to build points in the casino's rewards program or tap into special offers while they are on the floor. Players also can order food and drinks and pay by running their credit or debit card through the reader.

With the card readers in place, the second screens possess the capability to double as an ATM when players need more money for the slots. A player inserts his or her debit/credit card and designates how much money is needed. The screen then prints a ticket that is recognizable by the slot machine.

"This feature allows the customer to continue to playing without needing to get up if they run out of money," Vasa said. "As soon as a player leaves their gaming chair, the chances of them returning are reduced. One distraction leads to another."

Attracting younger players

Younger players – and to a great extent, experienced players who have embraced technology – have established themselves as multi-taskers. To them, second screens fill a potential void.

"Younger players want more," Vasa said. "They don't want to feel they're missing anything. If they can do things like gamble and contribute to their social networks, they won't be."

Casinos are introducing a series of new slots branded with subjects younger players recognize and basing wagers on games with which they are familiar, like Angry Birds, for example. Retooling games also can introduce a level of skill to one's odds of winning and allow gamers to connect online through the setup and compete against friends and others. The companion device allows players to converse throughout the contest.

About the sponsor:

Juke Slot develops self-service tablet kiosks and handheld mobile devices that are designed to facilitate faster service and provide entertainment for consumers in the casino, hospitality and restaurant industries. The company's software application can be customizable to meet customers' needs.

Many of the applications available on the second screen aren't new, Vasa said. Companies like Juke Slot bring them together into a customizable solution to enhance the gaming experience.

Enticing and keeping younger players in the casino means they need to be engaged; not simply have a screen in place seemingly for show, Schwartz said.

"The real question is whether the content on the second screen will be as interesting or personalized as what the player already has on her phone," he said. "If it is, then the second screen would help. If not, it's just another screen."

Dispatch feature

Machines that go down or suffer some sort of functionality hiccup aren't always known unless a player speaks up or staff happens upon the unit. That's particularly critical as operators constantly look for ways to trim expenses and capitalize on revenue-generating opportunities.

Some casinos rely on lights shining atop machines to notify technicians of units needing fixes. But in the expanse of a room with a thousand or more slots and an array of other lights going off, the repair light isn't always immediately seen.

Secondary units connected wirelessly to the slot machine are designed to send a message to the repair team about a problem. The notifications even can be programmed to prioritize issues on the floor, based on management's focus. The system also tracks the time from when a notification is sent to the time when the issue is resolved.

Problems that go untouched for lengthy periods can be escalated by the application to technical staff supervisors.

"Casinos are trying to stay alive, and there are so many of them opening," Vasa said. "They're under pressure to generate revenue and increase it. So they're trying to bring innovation to the floor."