

Keep on Giving

High-profile gifts have long been a part of the casino promotional landscape, and the practice is growing in unexpected ways

By Dave Bontempo

Records were not only made to be broken, but to be feted. Gaming industry executives laud the American Gaming Association report noting that commercial gaming revenue, which includes brick-and-mortar casinos, iGaming and on-line sports betting, hit an all-time record of nearly \$53 billion in 2021.

That was more than 21 percent higher than the previous annual record in 2019. The 2021 revenues were nearly 77 percent higher than the Covid-impacted 2020.

This warrants a high-five, a champagne pop, a victory dance affirming the milestone. The industry is back, and that prompts a subsequent step, providing something that resonates with customers far more than numbers.

That's the foundation of the all-important gifting industry. It exceeds marketing initiatives by producing a visually pleasing tribute that sits in one's home, around one's neck or on a wrist. Gifts are a symbol of loyalty, a sense of belonging to one property, or of sitting in first class on an airplane. They are a vehicle to disperse recognition, the launch pad of repeat business.

And they are part of a competitive industry sector.

Companies need updated methods to deploy the personal touch to customers. They wish to quickly acknowledge a recent casino stay and, just as importantly, prevent a negative experience in a long line.

Perks often mean more to gamblers than free play or reward points they activate themselves. Gifts say the two most important words passing between casinos and customers: Thank you.

A New Look for Gifting

New Jersey-based Rymax has been a longtime operator in this niche. Rymax has thrived as an extension of a casino's marketing team. The company considers its job making a personal connection with every player on behalf of the casino, underscoring the player's sense of value.

The company also helps clients differentiate themselves from competition by serving as a player engagement manager and rewards provider. Post-pandemic optimism has overshadowed inflation, fueling the industry's economic engine.

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“Giving players a choice in what is selected makes a rewards program engaging and successful, but the rewards are just the beginning,” he adds. “The need to offer a comprehensive player loyalty program with a personalized approach is critical. This includes everything from reward options to customer service, and from order updates to quick delivery.”

The rewards have a new approach, reflecting recent turbulent times.

“In 2021, there was an enormous shift towards health and wellness for consumers,” Gordon says. “This was reflected in casino reward redemptions. Brands that redeemed well included skin care brands like Ahava, Kiehl’s and L’Occitane, personal care or massage products like nest Home Fragrances and Therabody’s Theragun, and fitness brands like Echelon and Gaiam.

“And, since a record number of people adopted pets in 2020-21, pet-centric brands such as Gen7Pets, Cuddle Clones and Enchanted Home Pet were also highly desirable. Luxury brands made a comeback in 2021, and are anticipated to remain strong throughout 2022.”

Another new twist involves employees. Gordon indicates that the Great Resignation, and the employee challenges throughout the business world, have created an even greater need for employee recognition programs.

The cost to recruit and train an employee is significant, and companies need to recruit, retain and reward employees to have a strong organization, he asserts. This challenge is even greater today because the hospitality segment has taken a huge employee hit, and the need to fill positions is greater than ever.

Although online gaming has provided instant gaming access, it does not deliver the personal touch of an individual host or loyalty program at a brick-and-mortar facility, Gordon says.

“While online gaming has had incredible success in the states where it was launched, they still lag behind the player loyalty programs that casinos deliver,” he says. “The tribal gaming industry, for instance, needs to increase the loyalty initiative and differentiate between the solitary gaming experience that online delivers and the communal experience that a casino provides.

Create themed rewards events by brand and category. Tie promotions into the entertainment at the property and the seasonality of events. Create more group rewards events to tap into the communal advantage. Players are part of the casino family.

“Almost all our clients have an online rewards site that we created that is a ‘view only’ site,” says Gordon. “What that means is that the player can

look at the products, play up to get the comp dollars or points and then go to the casino to place the order. The casino is getting the return trips and maybe an increased traffic cycle while delivering a loyalty program in their hands and top of mind.”

Gordon says Rymax measures the effect of its programs with a deep dive analyzing redemptions by category, brand, price point and seasonality. The company has an eclectic portfolio of clients that include financial companies, pharmaceutical companies, manufacturing companies, telecommunication companies and more.

“We can provide insight into what is motivating people by geographic and psychographic factors,” he says. “And we are direct with the top manufacturers, so we are privy to product roadmaps that ensure that we are always delivering the latest products.”

The Player Boutique

This is an excellent time for the gifting industry, according to Rob Bone, senior vice president of global systems for Light & Wonder. He considers the market poised to keep growing with conveniences for property operators and customers introduced by Player Boutique, a signature product in this realm.

“Player Boutique is the latest innovative loyalty marketing and gift fulfillment program available at the gaming machine, kiosk, or via an online microsite accessible by tablet, phone or PC,” he asserts. “This solution offers the world of Amazon and Best Buy products that can be shipped to valuable players in lightning-quick time via Amazon Prime. Player Boutique is the future of integrated casino gifting.”

Player Boutique eliminates inventory risk, waiting in line, item storage and cleanup, loss of time on device, event redemption staffing, unboxing of products and setup, and issuing rain checks to unhappy guests, he adds.

“The entire experience for the property administrators is seamless,” Bone says. “A web-based portal allows admins to work with an account manager from Light & Wonder, and our Amazon business partners to enter promotional information and build catalogs.

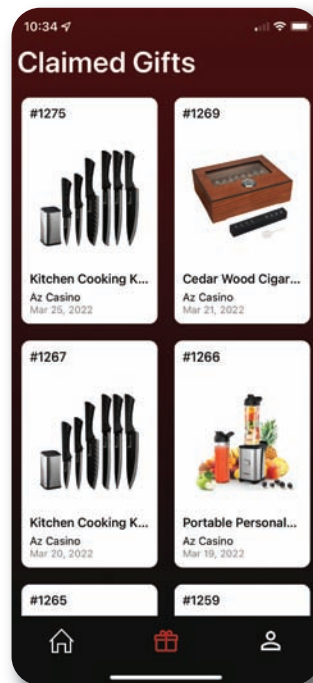
“The system is thoughtfully designed to even allow the operator to enter a marketing collateral deadline date so that product catalogs can be created and checked with time to submit images for direct mail and email.”

Bone touts advantages in people being able to ship larger items to the address they indicate rather than carry bulky items to their cars.

The company has substantial volume in OLED TVs, vacuums, bikes, and pool chairs. The convenience of having these items ship to the home of the player is unparalleled, not to mention the speed (average delivery

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time is 1.73 days, according to Bone).

“Of course, you will always have the purses, electronics (our Best Buy integration makes this a great option for operators) that players have a great response to, and we have the Amazon range of inventory,” he indicates. “This year we are introducing a new Tribal Vendor solution for our clients. This allows our clients to integrate their local tribal vendor into the platform, allowing them to act as a third party to participate as a Player Boutique product supplier.”

Last winter, the company debuted its first iteration of Player Boutique LIVE, an on-site gift solution which allows clients to create an on-site holiday ballroom-style event. Player Boutique LIVE merges the world of having gifts display onsite for players to touch and feel, while maintaining the convenience of shipping the actual items to the home or the address they indicate.

“Employee Boutique allows human resources teams at any property to leverage our microsite solution to award employees for employment anniversaries, birthdays and other milestone events,” Bone says. “This year we are excited to work on an Uber integration, which will drive business to the casino and safely home.

“Many of our clients also have a concert or live entertainment venue, and to this end we are working on a ticketing integration, to allow the redemption and yielding of event tickets at the gaming machine, kiosk, or microsite.”

Bill Bachman, L&W’s director of consulting and gifting services, believes the sector has provided an adventure. “I have a sign in my office from Walt Disney that has always given me inspiration,” he says. “It reads, ‘It is kind of fun to do the impossible.’ I looked at this sign every day for the three years we worked on developing this solution. Player Boutique makes the impossible possible.”

InfiGifts, Infinite Possibilities

Az Husain, the CEO of Casino Science, believes a new age has emerged in the gifting industries. For the operator, they include storage, major shipping costs, and the need for staffing and returns. For the player, challenges include long lines, limited inventory, rain checks when items run out, and

limited tiering, resulting in high-level players receiving the same benefits of lower-tiered gamblers.

“During the pandemic, many of these challenges were amplified as operators struggled to deliver gifting events safely without long lines and crowded gift pickup venues,” he says. “Casinos also dealt with staffing shortages that exacerbated the challenges required in delivering staff-heavy gift events.”

Casino Science developed InfiGifts to address challenges associated with traditional gift giving. InfiGifts is an app-based continuity gifting and promotion solution that allows players to select and claim gift rewards directly from their smartphones, Husain says. InfiGifts does the following:

- Eliminates gift logistics, storage, and staffing requirements
- Eliminates lines and stock-outs
- Allows for better product selection
- Creates tiered gift rewards
- Reduces overall gifting costs

“Players download InfiGifts onto their smartphone from the App Store or the Google Play Store,” Husain explains. “Players add their participating casino by scanning the casino QR code. The app loads the available gifting promotions for the casino. The player enters the player card number and confirms the delivery address. The gift is then delivered directly to the player’s home. The entire gift claiming process is complete in less than a minute and the player can return to gaming.”

The app features geofencing technology that requires the player to claim the gift at the property. The incremental trip visit is still captured, and the gift is delivered directly to the player’s home address.

InfiGifts handles all of the tracking and customer support for claimed gifts through the app. Players can see the gifts they have claimed and the current shipping/delivery status. They can also chat with a support analyst to help them address shipping problems.

Benefits for the player experience:

- There are no lines for players to stand in—claiming a gift takes less than 60 seconds and then players return to gambling
- The player can select from a wide variety of gifts, including different colors and sizes
- Higher-value players can receive higher-value gifts, engendering better loyalty with guests
- Gifts never run out of stock

Casino Science is working with TransAct to enable InfiGift QR codes to be available on printed vouchers via the TransAct Epicentral system. Casino Science is also working with Acres Manufacturing to provide triggered events for play and earn promotions that are delivered from the Foundation player development system, with a printed QR code produced from a TransAct printed voucher.

Further integration with TransAct’s Epicentral product will enable casino marketing teams to provide gifts to targeted patrons in a quick and flexible way while they play.

The technology also can be integrated into existing app experiences to enable a completely touchless gifting experience in the casino’s own app.

Network Payoff

Everi selected Payouts Network—a provider of innovative rewards technology that gives businesses and service providers more speed, flexibility and control—to power new enhanced, in-the-moment loyalty rewards to their casino operator customers.

Leveraging the Payouts Networks PayNow Platform, Everi will enable its casino customers to surprise casino patrons with new and unexpected rewards, such as tickets to shows and sporting events, excursions, and an exciting range of “off-property” experiences. The expanded offers will enable new opportunities for casino patron engagement, increasing the value and importance of loyalty programs.

With the Payouts Network “Instant Payouts” solution, Everi’s casino customers will be able to send payments and rewards to their patrons almost instantaneously, without physical interaction and without requiring recipients to share sensitive bank account details.

Throughout the industry, suppliers have matched old and new trends to cultivate customer satisfaction. The age-old trend is that gifts make customers feel appreciated. The new trend is the seamless delivery process.

Together, this helps operators navigate the consumer world beyond dollars and cents.

FREE BETS ARE BASIC. YOUR PLAYERS’ EXPERIENCE SHOULDN’T BE.

Make your gaming site stand out with a player loyalty program that motivates.



REWARDS THAT MOTIVATE. BRANDS THAT INSPIRE.

Contact Rymax today to boost engagement and repeat play.

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