SLOTTING INTO PLACE

The online slots sector is undergoing a shift from quantity to quality. **Robin Hutchison** spoke to Play'n Go, Nolimit City, and Yggdrasil at IGB's first slots forum to discuss how suppliers are adapting.

One thing the online casino industry is not short of is content, with hundreds if not thousands of games available to operators. But the sector is undergoing a shift from quantity to quality, which is forcing suppliers to up their game when it comes to the mechanics, graphics, and soundtracks they use in their latest titles. This is just one trend impacting the likes of Play'n Go, Nolimit City and Yggdrasil, who took part in the *iGaming Business* Slots Roundtable ahead of this year's EiG conference in Berlin.

Featuring Johan Tornqvist, group chief executive and founder of Play'n Go, Jonas Tegman, founder of Nolimit City and Krzysztof Opalka, head of front-end development and operations at Yggdrasil, the executives also discussed other factors shaping the sector. From the challenges of mobile development to the death of Flash, as well as omni-channel and bespoke content, the trio offered their thoughts and opinions on where the industry is headed, and how suppliers and operators can adapt and capitalise.

Quality control

Perhaps the biggest market force at present is the shift away from quantity of games to quality, particularly on mobile. Despite the issue of consistency of quality, operators have always still taken a supplier's full portfolio of games. But now they are selecting only the best, and in some cases stripping game lobbies of sub-quality titles. Tegman says the move from quantity to quality has been happening for some time now, and suggests smaller suppliers are better equipped to drive the sector forwards.

"Operators are already asking for more selective content today than they were a few years ago. We are seeing new companies and start-ups that can actually build high-quality games, so it is changing and it will continue to do so," he adds.

Mobile is now very much the dominant platform players use to access games, so the challenge is to improve on quality, despite device limitations. The size of the screen real estate is an obvious one, as it the movement between portrait and landscape modes. Throw in other hurdles such as computing power, mobile data, and the fact developers

JONAS TEGMAN,
NOLIMIT CITY

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CITY

JOHAN TORNQVIST,
PLAY'N GO

PLAY'n GO

have to build their games in web browser instead of native applications, and it is clear to see why suppliers are faced with a number of headaches.

Ready for the challenge

However, Opalka says they are ready for the challenge and can improve quality by looking more closely at what native app developers are doing. "Most of the content users consume on mobile comes from native applications, but we as gambling suppliers are limited to mobile browsers, which makes it harder to deliver high-quality content. But we should still try to mimic the native experience with high-definition graphics, very good sound quality, and an intuitive user interface."

The shift from Flash to HTML5 is helping by allowing suppliers to push the limits. But is Flash now a redundant development platform, or are suppliers still using it to churn out games? Play'n Go used Flash last year, but Tornqvist says that is about to change. "Flash has been going down for quite some time. We have long production times for our games to keep the quality high, so that is why it is left in our pipeline still, but it is moving out of there. So in 2017 we won't be producing any Flash titles."

Working side by side

Omni-channel has been an industry buzzword for some time now, but questions remain over whether operators and suppliers have cracked the code. Omni-channel is about more than just offering games across all devices and platforms – retail, mobile, tablet, Android and iOS – it is about delivering a consistent experience to the player. This means promotions, bonuses, marketing, and branding must work hand in hand with games to ensure a seamless journey for the end user.

"Players want to start playing on mobile, and then switch to desktop when they reach their home," says Opalka. "So it should be a familiar environment for them. We see from our studies that more and more players are migrating between channels."

And while there isn't a lot suppliers can do when it comes to helping operators deploy their overall omni-channel strategies, they can focus on designing and building acquisition and retention features into their games, such as tournaments, missions, rewards and trophy rooms. Tornqvist says it is something Play'n Go has been doing for some time now.

"We are looking into ways of helping operators shape their offerings around omni-channel. We are providing them with engagement APIs for the client side and with achievements and live data feeds for the back end. And tying this all together to make the experience better is something we are working hard on," he adds.

The online casino industry has been on an incredible upwards growth trajectory of late, which looks set to continue now that suppliers are really dialling in on mobile and taking things to the next level with HTML5. The sector still has plenty of room to grow, and by adapting to the shift from quantity to quality, and making the most of other emerging trends, operators and suppliers will continue to reap the rewards.

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