

G2E: Cashless gaming, smoke-free casinos and eye-catching cabinets

By Andrew Klebanow - October 13, 2021



G2E Las Vegas concluded last week and by most measures, the conference was very successful. Observationally, the tradeshow was well attended. Noticeably absent were attendees and vendors from Asia and some European nations due to continued travel restrictions. Nonetheless, domestic casino operators took this opportunity to venture out, visit Las Vegas and get back to business.

Health and Safety Protocols

G2E was the first US gaming conference to implement strict Covid-19 health and safety protocols. All attendees had to provide proof of vaccination prior to retrieving their credentials and entering the trade show floor. Show organizers informed all registered attendees on the process prior to the start of the conference, which in turn allowed many to upload their vaccine information onto the CLEAR identification platform. Upon arrival, attendees only had to display the QR code on their mobile devices, receive wristbands, and they were then free to enter the conference. The enrollment process was simple and vaccine verification at the show took seconds.

Mask mandates were required throughout the conference but there was little visible enforcement. Rather, attendees knew the protocols, and everyone respected them. Of course, at the end of each day, attendees migrated to any number of cocktail receptions where masks were not required.

The Trade Show

Observationally, there was probably 40 percent less floor space rented, due in large part to the absence of most international vendors. Nonetheless, there was a lot to see. All of the major U.S. gaming machine manufacturers introduced new game cabinets, as the pandemic highlighted the importance of eye-catching cabinet design. The pandemic forced operators to reconfigure their gaming floors, reduce gaming machine capacity and increase the separation of players. This in turn led to the creation of more four-machine carousels rather than traditional linear-designed slot floors. To attract players' attention, manufacturers introduced more dramatic cabinets. Slot cabinets are the eye candy that attract players to a particular game, and tall cabinets, curved monitors, and lighting get players' attention. Once seated, graphics, sound, and animation are the primary tools to engage with players. Finally, game titles and game math keep players at the machine. With these new slot floor configurations, game cabinets have become far more important to attract players, and every manufacturer stepped up their game.

Konami displayed their new Dimension series cabinets. IGT introduced their Peak 65 and DiamondRS cabinets, and Aristocrat displayed their Neptune cabinet. Scientific Games introduced their Landmark stepper series and the Kascada dual-screen video cabinet. New electronic table games were also introduced including Interblock's Pulse Arena and Sci Games' Quartz series. One can expect to see these products introduced in Asian casinos as their business rebounds.

Another product innovation on display but not yet seen in Asia are historic horse racing (HHR) machines. These are electronic gaming devices whose game math is predicated on the results of past horse races. These devices were recently introduced in Virginia and Kentucky where traditional RNG gaming devices are prohibited, and most manufacturers now offer their most popular game titles and game cabinets on HHR systems. New Hampshire is expected to permit these electronic gaming devices at sixteen locations, beginning in 2022.

Topics

Two topics appeared to dominate the conversation during the conference. The first is the industry's migration to cashless gaming. The pandemic forced manufacturers to accelerate the development of these products and operators to invest in them, and they are quickly gaining acceptance with players. Another topic is cigarette smoking in casinos. The American Nonsmokers Rights Foundation held a press conference at the start of the trade show and made a concerted plea to operators and state governments to implement smoking bans in their casinos. They were supported by dozens of employees who are forced to work in smoking environments. Several states still exempt casinos from indoor smoking bans and the pandemic has put that issue into sharp focus.



Nevada, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Mississippi, and Indiana are several states that continue to allow patrons to remove their masks and smoke in their casinos during the pandemic.

Perhaps the best takeaway from the four-day event is that it is possible to hold a trade show during this pandemic that ensures the health and safety of attendees. Conference organizers did an outstanding job developing health and safety protocols, and effectively communicated them to attendees.

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