

## What Players Really Care About

by Craig Pendleton

Players make decisions every time they head towards a casino. These decisions are based upon certain criterion, including:

- The opportunity to take more money home with them than what they started with via winning, payouts and paybacks (many don't fully understand the concept of house odds and probability and believe in lucky/hot machines and/or lucky dealers).
- An emotional feeling or attachment to a specific casino.
- A comfortable and friendly environment.
- Loyalty.
- Rewards, promos, comps, points, free offers.
- Other items they receive when spending money at the property.
- Player recognition parties, offers, bouncebacks and limited time offers.
- Amenities not offered by the competition or not offered/performed as well by the competition, such as favorite restaurants, bars, hotel rooms, a golf course, and/or showroom.
- Upcoming events, shows and promotions.
- Advocacy/word of mouth from personal influencers.
- Engagement with the casino's local charity or goodwill causes.
- The entire experience or their most recent experience.

What players don't consider when making choices are the bottom line for the casino, staffing challenges, or politics within the organization. Ultimately players only care about their current experience and emotional needs. These will determine if they return or go to the competition. The challenge for operators is to fulfill the needs of both:

*Players are the future of the business;  
no players/customers = no casino*

*Owners are the future of the business;  
no profit = no casino*

These are two opposing yet simultaneous requirements. Decisions being made must pass two tests:

1. Will this action/idea/project/promotion/reward lead to new, return, or increased frequency of visitation by the players?
2. Will this action still provide a good financial result for the owners?

This can best be accomplished with:

- Well trained staff that is customer centric in their actions: both overt (apparent) and behind the scenes (subliminal/hidden).
- A comfortable physical environment and "vibe."
- Constant change and dynamic evolution of the business to create interest leading to the first visitation and repeat visitation.
- Personalized service that speaks directly to the emotional needs of the players.
- Engagement of the players allowing them to feel that they have a voice in "their casino" and emotionally believe that it is "truly their casino." Only after this point is reached can the task of enlisting players as well as staff as advocates of the casino occur.
- Measurement systems in place and actively used to determine actual results of expenditures, investments, promotions specific to each player and player group.

Notice that better odds or return for the players is not on this list. Players will always decide which property or game that they believe is "lucky" based upon their experiences and how long their money lasted if they lost money during a specific visit. Positive movement above baseline play/visitation, valuating the actual difference and then comparing this to the increase in revenues/profits is the only true way to calculate the success of action. Operators must prioritize their actions to fulfill the needs of the players before any consideration of profitability.

Focus on what can be controlled:

**Physical:** Think room size, air quality (smoke and smells), ease of parking, cleanliness of public areas, comfort of

seating, distance to services, level of noise and lights, background sounds, and interaction areas).

**Amenities:** restaurants, bars, entertainment, rooms, and resort items (such as golf and recreation).

**Products Provided:** specific to player desires, unique items that are only offered by the casino and are viewed as signature items or the newest items available.

**Personalized Service:** training programs, measurement and reinforcement of positive behavior are the key to this.

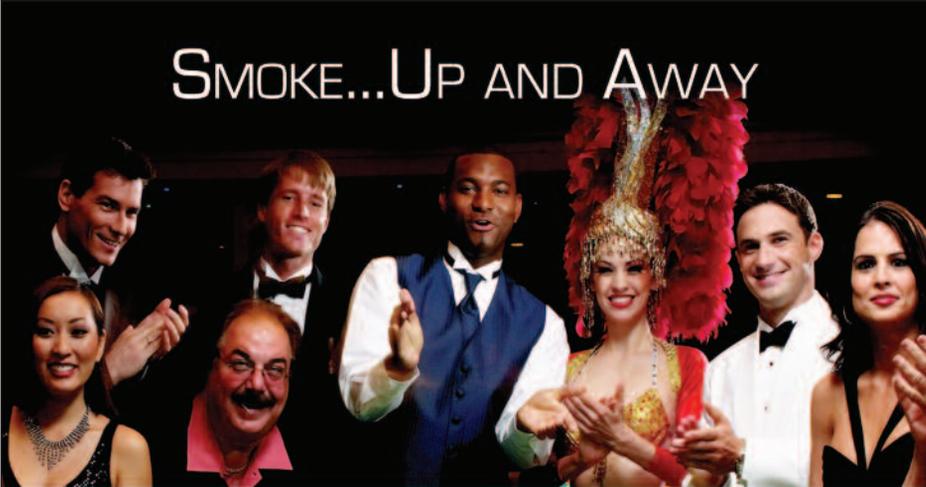
The most important element in this process is to not decide for the customer what it is they want and what they value. Ask them via one-on-one opportunities, surveys, focus groups, hosts and staff interactions. Create systems for collection of this information that values the player source and allows weighing player input accordingly to make decisions leading to the greatest return on investment.

Follow the 80/20 principle that suggests that the majority of casino revenues come from a small amount of your players. This small amount of high value players are the ones that changes and adjustments should address prior to adjustments being made for the larger, possibly more vocal but less valuable, group of remaining casino players.

From a business efficiency perspective, the casino should provide only the amount of items required to achieve the goal of attracting new players, insuring frequent visitation of existing players or increasing revenues/profits. Specific expenditures should target specific players as defined by database segmentation and true behavioral tracking.

Often the actual process of constant adjustment and changes, even if very small but meeting the needs of the players, is all that is necessary to capture, retain and engage players. ♣

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