



Train Your Customers

In tough times, it's more important than ever

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Casinos have all spent very significant dollars getting customers in the door, providing them with a comfortable and pleasant environment, and offering them multiple opportunities to spend their money. Naturally, the major customer spending opportunity is gaming, and customers have arrived to play. Once they have arrived, in the vast majority of cases, they are left on their own to learn how to play.

Very significant casino dollars also are spent on an ongoing basis training staff to serve these customers. Everyone with guest service contact is trained in guest service, satisfaction and security. All staff members also are regularly trained to perform their job functions, to understand company policies and procedures, and to properly deal with regulatory compliance such as safety, money laundering and other requirements. Casino dollars also are wisely invested in consultants on sensible game protection and game management.

This is all necessary and sound business practice. These costs are greatly magnified with employee turnover thus the additional training of managers in effective leadership so as to reduce the turnover cost.

But where are the customers in this effort? Are they not the most important people in the casino? Is it just expected that they look at a gaming opportunity and know how to play? Most players do want action and want to know what to do. Intimidation blocks them from trying to learn a new game or even a new electronic gaming device/slot. Players have the willingness and the money, but do

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Carl Wilson

not want to appear stupid in front of dealers and other players. They certainly do not want to lose their money by doing something wrong simply because they are naïve. When they do, they feel bad about themselves and resent the casino.

This happens minute by minute and not just at the craps table. How many times a day does a dealer have to kindly tell an arriving player, in front of other players, that they must play a minimum of \$25, not the \$10 they placed because they did not know about the minimum bet sign? Is not everyone slightly embarrassed? Is the player happy? How many times a day does a player not split aces on a blackjack table because he is a beginning player, wanting to have fun, socialize a little, and yet gets embarrassed when others point out that he just played foolishly? Does the new table games player know they can use their player's card for points on a table and not only for slot play?

I frequently observe casino customers cruising the pit and glancing at the various game signs and can see the curiosity in their eyes. I have asked them why they aren't playing. Not all, but many do respond that they have watched and "just haven't figured it out." I talked with a couple in a southern California casino watching a Three Card Poker game with two players at the table. They said that the game looked interesting. When asked why they don't play, they said that they "didn't know how they win" and they asked me if I knew "What is pair plus?" I asked what game looks like the most fun to them and they both said that all the cards and sorting that they see in Pai Gow looks exciting, but again, they said they didn't know what was really going on. When I mentioned that the dealer would help them sort, even with other players there, they were pleased, but then asked, "Well, what is the bonus all about?"

Zig Zigler wrote "You can get everything in life you want, if you help enough other people get what they want." As a casino, isn't this a worthy goal? Casino customers want to know how to play your table and other games. They may want to know what the money line means in the sports book, or what a parlay is. Their friends at home seem to know. Their friends had a good time playing baccarat and craps and roulette and blackjack and even won some money on a multibonus penny slot.

Give customers the help they need

Why do casinos not train these customers who just want to have the casino experience that their friends and neighbors and others around them seem to enjoy? There is a lot of potential lost revenue and lost goodwill when customers are embarrassed, their self-confidence is lost, and they dropped money through a simple lack of basic game play knowledge. Not only is potential revenue lost through a lack of play, but it is also lost through a slowdown at the game when these incidents occur.

Can classes at 10 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, instruction cards on the tables, and aware floor staff help all of these people at 9:30 on a Friday night? Your customer who sees players at the Three Card Poker table having fun and winning every so often is lost. They see the crowd around the craps table having fun and they feel left out. They put \$10 in a penny slot and two spins later they have 50 cents left and wonder what just happened. Will they remain your customer for long? A lot of money was spent to get them in your door and a lot of money was spent training your staff, but generally little, if anything, was invested in training that customer.

I have been there and have done that. At various casinos and even race tracks, I have been embarrassed, lost my money through ignorance, and developed resentment toward operators. I have tried to learn by observing

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and reading an instruction card, which is all you can do when there is a player at a game. That combination can work, but it takes a lot of observation. No one is generally comfortable with that.

Now with all the new games appearing throughout the pit, how can you entice players to the table? Signs beckon Card Craps and Roulette, 3-5-7, 21 to the River, 21st Century Hardways, Ultimate Texas Hold'em, Four Card Poker, Crazy 4 Poker, etc., along with the standard newer games of Let It Ride, Three Card Poker, Baccarat, Mini Pai Gow, Caribbean Stud, and others. Casinos pay for these many of these games and pay to train dealers, pit supervision and security, yet they rely on some instruction cards on the corner of the table to teach customers how to play the game.

One customer training solution is video. Quality to the point video is concise and effective. It is easily branded and segmented so users can just get the information they want. Naturally casinos do not present strategy, but how to double down, or play the pass line or take the odds, or pair plus, for example can be presented not only in guest rooms, but also right on the casino floor.

Poker has become so popular that most casinos have greatly added to their poker floor space. Players think they know how to play from watching hours of television and probably reading a book or buying a DVD or

learning "online," but may not have learned the basics of play such as big and small blinds, buying in, 'all in' pot segregation, bad beat, etc. Video can be effective here too in keeping games moving and eliminating intimidation.

Just today, and as one impetus to writing this article, I was at a casino in Las Vegas and witnessed a person watching how to play video on a casino floor touch screen. As I got closer I noticed that the viewer was a dealer. When I asked him about the video, he said he was refreshing himself on a game he hadn't dealt recently and which he was to deal later in his shift. If a dealer may need a little help, how about the potential player?

Beyond the gaming floor

Educating your customer is not just for gaming. Video can show off your restaurants, spas, entertainment, player's card rewards, and even tribal history and culture in Native American casinos. Often this information is only available on in-room television, but what about the larger percentage of floor customers who are not hotel guests? They may dine too and perhaps will be inspired to try a new dining venue when they see a restaurant video.

Customer training does not have to be on site. Why not teach customers about how to play on your web site... with video. Most casino Web sites have text instruction. Video is much more instructive and compelling and need not take up excessive bandwidth. If you have

video on the floor or in your rooms, why not put it on your Web site?

Player development is also a major investment made by casinos. Most have some reward for players' card signups and routinely have give a ways on certain days for some level of point accumulation. I have a friend who just asked me if I wanted a blender. He had just picked up five from a local casino. I suggest casinos consider a branded DVD of how to play your table games. For less than the cost of a t-shirt, the video can be put on a DVD for give away. Give them away with players' card sign ups, or as an appreciation mailer to existing members. Wouldn't a future guest with a room reservation or as a convention attendee, appreciate this in the mail prior to arrival-- especially with a trackable match play coupon, or an exchange coupon to be redeemed at your players card service desk. These DVDs will be appreciated even by those who are not interested in table games. They will not be tossed and they will circulate.

Finally, and critical to this proposition, how-to-play customer training is inexpensive. "Back in the day" casinos spent a great deal on in-room video alone. Now, for significantly less, branded video can be shot on site and used for all the applications mentioned above. Look around your casino and investigate your status. Everyone knows you are dedicated to customer service, but does that include the availability of effective customer training? **CJ**

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Ed Mueller has been involved with business-to-

business publishing for more than 25 years. During his tenure Mueller has had the opportunity to work on a wide variety of publications, both domestically and internationally. He enjoys the challenge of creating integrated marketing campaigns that deliver top quality and profitable results for his clients.

Ed's favorite quote comes from Thomas Jefferson, and if you ever visit his office, you will find it on his bulletin

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In addition to helping companies reach their full potential, Ed spends his free time working on his 49-year-old sailboat and relaxing on Lake Michigan.

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