

Customer interactions

Real-time in-play messaging for responsible gambling

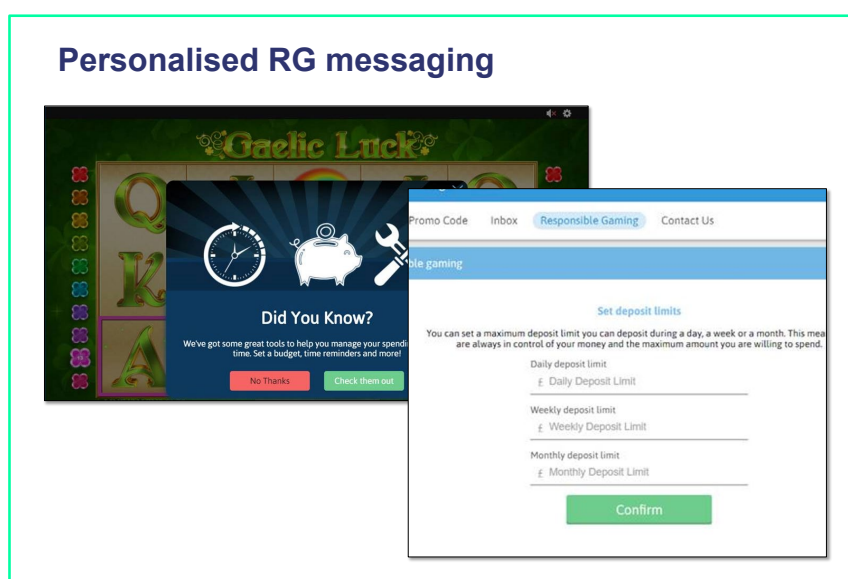
Customer Interactions: Real-time in-play messaging for responsible gambling

What is the topic?

Using real-time, personalised in-play messaging for online slots and bingo players, as part of sophisticated player journey management, in order to encourage target group players to gamble more safely and responsibly, such as through using limit setting tools.

Why is it important?

Customer interactions are at the heart of any player-facing service, whether it is sales support, transaction support, FAQs, or many other functions. In recent years, several gambling operators and academics have been experimenting with increasingly sophisticated approaches to customer interaction in order to support safe, enjoyable, and sustainable gambling experiences. However, it remains hard to get players to engage with responsible gambling tools (Delfabbro & King, 2020).



The goal is to increase the potential of such interactions to influence player behaviour, in a way that is supportive and not disruptive of their play experience. Work by the Behavioural Insights Team¹ has identified key principles for successful, light-touch, interaction-based interventions; the “EAST” principles suggest that interventions should be Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely, and often supplemented by player engagement experts with a requirement for Personalisation (Monaghan & Blaszczynski, 2009).

What did the research do?

Utilising the Playtech Protect technology platform, that includes Engagement Centre for real-time messaging and BetBuddy’s algorithms for identifying at-risk players, the team developed customised player journeys for target groups of players.

¹ E.g. <https://www.bi.team/publications/east-four-simple-ways-to-apply-behavioural-insights/>



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One example was a series of messages encouraging limit setting sent to players identified at “High Risk” of gambling-related harm, who had deposited £30 or more, and who had also not yet set a deposit limit.

The messages aligned to the principles identified by interaction experts: short and jargon-free language; (“Easy”); the font and setting graphic designed to fit in with the games they were playing (“Attractive”); appearing in-play during the gambling session when players were focused on their play and thinking about their deposit activity (“Timely”); and tailored to their player journey (“Personalised”).

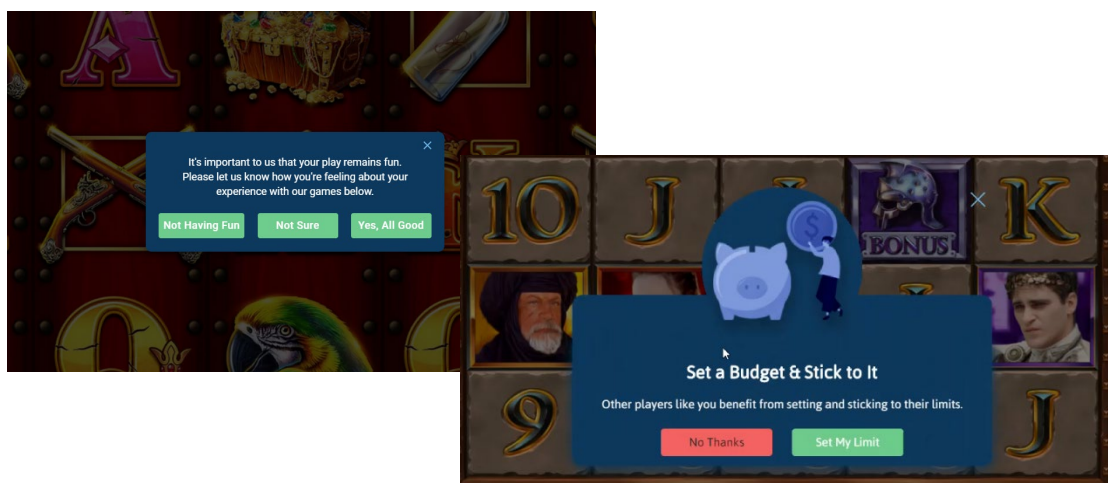
The only principle not deployed in our messaging was “Social”. A typical implementation of this principle would be to reference the majority of regular players within a certain category choosing to gamble responsibly. In this campaign, we prioritised short, easy messages and chose not to highlight the comparative elements.

What did the research find?

During our trial period, 15% of unique players (103/702) applied a deposit limit within 1 hour of being shown the message.

While this is promising from a safer gambling perspective, it is important to check that such limits are not being set arbitrarily high – with players simply trying to stop any future messages disrupting their play. In some environments, where operators require all players to set limits before playing, our partners report that many players do indeed set limits arbitrarily high. In this case, a sample check showed that over three quarters of players were setting deposit limits below their recent deposit amounts, indicating their limit setting was a meaningful responsible gambling activity.

Across the range of player journeys tested, uptake of limit setting varied between 8% and 15%. However, effectiveness reduces over time, pointing towards the need to continually refresh messaging campaigns. After six months, the efficacy of some campaigns had dropped as low as 2%.





What might the gambling industry do in response to this research?

The most important insight is that in-session or in-account messages can help change behaviour, although the influence is modest and should only be considered a component of a larger strategy on safer gambling.

Across a range of studies conducted on live gambling sites by other researchers, the effect size is typically between 1% and 15%. For instance, large-scale messaging trials, with little targeting and tailoring for player groups, typically have a small impact across a large population. Gainsbury & Heirene (2020) analysed Australian gamblers using sports/racing websites and found 0.7% (161 players) set a deposit limit within five days of receiving messages, analysing a control group trial with a total of 26.5k players. In another large-scale trial across 1.6m play sessions, 1.4% of players stopped playing when they received a messaging notifying them of their 1000th spin, but the message rarely worked a second time (Auer & Griffiths, 2014).²

Smaller trials with more targeted feedback to players tended to see higher success rates, although it is unknown if these would replicate over larger samples or longer periods of time. For instance, in addition to our trial, 8% of 460 regular electronic gaming machine players reduced their play in response to a neutral pop-up info message detailing their play duration, amount spent, and loss amount (Du Preez et al, 2016). This is reinforced by other evidence that it is hard to engage lower risk players in responsible gambling tools, even when framed positively around budget management or player control (Delfabbro, 2011).

The research provides additional evidence on what tends to make messages more effective in the field of safer gambling, building on the general principles established by experts like the Behavioural Insights Team.

- Pop-ups are generally more effective than static messages, creating an interruption in play and requiring active removal by the player (Monaghan & Blaszczyński, 2009; Ginley et al, 2017)
- Messages are more effective at modifying behaviour when brief, easy to read, and direct (Ginley et al, 2017)
- Normative information, comparing the gambler's play behaviour to those of their peers, appears to have limited impact compared to self-appraisal information (Auer & Griffiths, 2015, 2016)
- In-system/in-play messaging has more impact than emails (Gainsbury & Heirene, 2020).
- Providing objective information and insights about gambling in general, such as explaining that a win does not become more likely after a series of losses, does not appear to make a difference (Monaghan & Blaszczyński, 2009; Hing et al, 2017)
- Self-appraisal messages can help players track their activity and might lead to reduced spending among at-risk players, but have only a small effect overall and are likely to require both frequent delivery and variation in content over time to maintain effectiveness (Wood & Wohl, 2015; Blaszczyński et al 2015; Auer & Griffiths, 2016))

How can I find out more?

To find out more please contact the research team via protect@playtech.com.

² "Message text: "We would like to inform you, that you have just played 1,000 slot games. Only a few people play more than 1,000 slot games. The chance of winning does not increase with the duration of the session. Taking a break often helps, and you can choose the duration of the break".



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