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WEEK 28

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COMMON SENSE PREVAILS: SKY BET REVERSAL IS A CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION

THIS WEEK

- **First legal sports wager accepted in Arkansas**
- **Parx Casino to launch online in Pennsylvania**
- **Aristocrat and Ainsworth heading to court**
- **Suncity singled out in Chinese gambling report**

GUEST COLUMNIST:

- **Simo Dragicevic, CEO, Betbuddy**



Two complaints.

That's all it took for the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) to ban one of Sky Bet's televised sports betting adverts in March.

Now news has broken of the nonsensical ban being reversed upon appeal, it's difficult to imagine who would have complained about such a promotion.



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GUEST COLUMNIST



SIMO DRAGICEVIC
CEO, BETBUDDY

Dragicevic argues the industry must ditch passive compliance and innovate quicker to tackle problem gambling

The pressure on our industry to tackle problem gambling continues to grow. Frankly, our collective approach has been built on a strategy of passive compliance for too long.

The industry is routinely on the defensive, reacting to sanctions and waves of critical media coverage. The cycle is now familiar: enforcement reports highlight failures, funding pledges are made and new operator systems and processes are introduced to tackle systemic failures. Rarely is the issue properly addressed.

When different versions of the same approach continue to fail, it's time to try something new.

The word innovation is grossly overused, but with regulators and politicians calling again for more draconian measures to address problem gambling, our industry genuinely needs it.

That innovation doesn't have to come from some magical new source. It simply requires more intelligent – and ethical – use of what we already have.

Gambling today is an industry built on technology and data as much as entertainment. These are the sector's biggest assets in helping prevent and minimise gambling-related harm. But we have only just begun to use them to protect players to the same degree as we use them to promote to players.

Two things have been missing until recently. First, businesses using data to 'know your customer' (KYC) and ensure the basics are always addressed. Second, the more intelligent use of data, through concepts like machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI), to support more effective harm prevention measures.

Today, it is possible to design systems that take millions of data points from thousands of players to understand when an individual is showing signs of potentially problematic behaviour.

Each time we deploy AI-based systems, they learn incrementally more about these signs, so we can spot them with more accuracy next time.

This is not about tracking player patterns and applying general thresholds to flagplayers. That capacity already

exists today. While it is useful for flagging obvious behaviours like large deposits, it has a limited ability to detect more nuanced patterns.

We are talking here about machine learning to spot signs of problematic play and offer a series of operator options to influence that behaviour. This use of AI is genuinely innovative, and we are starting to see encouraging early results.

There are of course challenges. The most obvious is around transparency and ethics. AI's black box systems are by nature difficult to understand. Do our players, communities, regulators and governments trust industry to build and implement these systems correctly?

We must ensure the transparency and ethics underpinning the design of safer gambling products is robust. We cannot allow such designs to be influenced or biased by conflicting industry objectives, least of all profit.

Improved reporting is another challenge where the industry's current focus on certain key performance indicators (KPIs) needs to evolve. While some larger operators are now reporting KPIs relating to safer gambling customer interactions, this must be improved significantly. Measures of the success of safer gambling interactions in preventing and minimising harm are vital.

Collaboration is a third issue. Sadly, the sharing of best practice and data is still the exception, not the norm.

While advanced systems built using AI thrive with more data, and thus benefit from collaboration, more simplistic uses of data, such as operators sharing data on player limits, also benefit.

Access to other sectors would help too. Data from banks and credit agencies would significantly increase the ability to understand players and prevent harm through more sophisticated affordability assessments.

Of course, integration of safer gambling technology is always a challenge. Technology providers have to ensure operators can utilise their existing investment in technology, rather than build everything from scratch.

While no single initiative will solve a problem as complex as problem gambling, the availability of AI and increasing data sources is a new alternative that can help the industry give its safer gambling initiatives a much-needed boost.

If the sector can work together to deploy promising technology much quicker, perhaps we can finally demonstrate what we can do to help solve this problem; rather than wait for others to tell us how to solve it.

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