

## Q&A: BetBuddy CEO discusses how data will revolutionise RG strategies

Simo Dragicevic, CEO of Playtech's BetBuddy subsidiary, explains how technology and AI can simplify responsible gambling



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As a business, **Playtech** has always been at the forefront of new technologies and strategies which have helped the development of the wider egaming industry. In recent years, the issue of remaining compliant for operators has become a more challenging and prevalent aspect of the industry. Many operators are having to adjust quickly or face non-compliance and possible fines and exclusion from regulated markets.

At the same time, consumer protection using responsible gambling tools and strategies has become as large a part of any egaming operator as product development and attracting new customers. This was one of the driving factors behind **Playtech's acquisition of RG software firm BetBuddy** back in 2017. Below, BetBuddy

CEO Simo Dragicevic chats to *EGR Compliance* about the Playtech roadmap for addressing RG and how it might be rolled out across the industry.



**EGR Compliance: What has the use of AI brought to the table in addressing problem gambling?**

**Simo Dragicevic (SD):** Data is the industry's single biggest asset in helping to prevent and minimise gambling-related harm. If used diligently and with a structured approach, AI offers the industry tremendous opportunities by understanding risk and personalising the customer experience. We know many aspects of ecommerce are today personalised because customers are individuals and personalisation works. The same applies to harm minimisation and prevention. All customers could benefit from a more personalised approach that reflects their own personal circumstances and patterns of play.

**EGR Compliance: What benefits or drawbacks would increased use of AI and technology bring to the work of gambling regulators?**

**SD:** Regulators are setting ambitious targets for the industry. It's a complex problem and doing this at scale and quickly is not possible using existing systems, tools and processes. But simply relying on technology as the solution on its own will not work. Sending this message is a risk and regulators are becoming aware that organisational cultures also need to change to support fully integrating safer gambling solutions into day-to-day risk and compliance, marketing, and customer support processes.

**EGR Compliance: What is the central philosophy which runs through the BetBuddy programme?**

**SD:** From the outset our philosophy was to build a transparent solution for industry. This means the methodologies we use are published and externally validated and operators can see how our algorithms work and make decisions. Our designed systems and solutions embed ethical AI principles. Consumer protection is the single biggest issue the industry must solve and regulators and operators need to trust solution partners. That trust comes from many elements: technical expertise, domain knowledge, experience and transparency.

**EGR Compliance: In what ways does the BetBuddy system help operators to assess the problem gambling risk level of forthcoming online casino releases?**

**SD:** This is an area with little research and evidence and so Playtech has developed a comprehensive R&D programme to address this. The current game risk methodologies are too generic and blunt because they don't leverage the vast data available on how games are designed and played. We are developing educational messages for players about game volatility and safer gambling, while sharing more data about game characteristics and risk with operators in our marketplace. We have also initiated a research project with City, University of London, to start examining the relationship between product features, such as game speed and behavioural markers of harm. We envisage a future where BetBuddy will be able to risk-assess certain games and combine this data with the player behavioural data we generate.

**EGR Compliance: How does BetBuddy adapt to regulatory changes?**

**SD:** It's essential we keep on top of industry and operator developments, whether they be regulatory changes, consumer consumption shifts or product developments. AI is only as good as the data used to train the algorithms. The models need to learn new player patterns. By being part of Playtech, we can leverage its relationships with the industry's top operators and regulators to compare notes, understand forthcoming developments and share best practices.

**EGR Compliance: How far away are we from a *Minority Report*-style system where we can identify problem gamblers before they've even gambled?**

**SD:** Within the next two years the leading operators will be able to assign a risk score to every new player. This will be based on a combination of demographic and credit data, and possibly even gambling play data shared via the regulator, central self-exclusion schemes or other operators. While this score is unlikely to be a strong predictor of problem gambling in the short-term, it's not inconceivable that in future AI will be able to accurately predict the propensity of someone to be a problem gambler. The direction of travel on use of data for compliance is clear, but clearly there may be questions over a wider use of personal data.

**EGR Compliance: Where do you see the next big technological enhancement in the identification and treatment of problem gamblers?**

**SD:** It's difficult to see beyond the impact of data sharing. The combination of more research and use of data, coupled with greater levels of data security, will drive the most improvements. In terms of treatment, the biggest challenge today is joining-up the various stakeholders to provide effective services. If technology can be implemented to enable the secure sharing of industry player with personal health data to all support services, then the level of problem gambling treatment will improve.

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**EGR Compliance: What enhancements are planned to the BetBuddy system during the next 12 months?**

**SD:** We are focusing on three areas: more sophisticated models to assess risk on registration and after first deposit, more user-driven options to develop bespoke alerts and reports that operators can add for specific scenarios, and more workflow and case management functionality to help the industry manage the safer customer journey more efficiently. Like today, flexibility and interoperability via APIs will be critical. Operators need to maximise the investment in their existing infrastructure and there is also no one-size-fits-all solution.

**EGR Compliance: How does BetBuddy interlink with Playtech's current player management system?**

**SD:** We have developed an extensive integration that allows operators to specify a range of player risk data points that can be linked back to the player management system. This is then continually updated. This has been completed with not only Playtech's player management system, but also with other player management systems that have BetBuddy integrated. This means every day, along with risk ratings, we can share each individual players' drivers of risk.

**EGR Compliance: Are you in discussions with any regulatory bodies about the adoption of BetBuddy at a national level?**

**SD:** We have had exploratory discussions. Many regulators require operators to submit granular player data to secure central vaults, and those regulators are exploring using such data to help the industry in raising standards. This could offer the opportunity for regulators to provide a range of value-added services to industry, such as benchmarking player risk scores to help improve models and processes. Further research on this area is needed but initiatives like GambleAware's Patterns of Play research, where Playtech plays an expert advisory role, will help provide much needed evidence.

**EGR Compliance: How many operators use BetBuddy and what has the feedback been like from those that do?**

**SD:** We are working with a number of operators and are at an advanced stage of discussions with several others. Our customers value partnering with an expert team over the long-term. They understand this is a complex area that requires a range of expert skills and knowledge, incorporating data science, safer gambling, gambling industry data, social science and research and software engineering.

**EGR Compliance: Are there any plans to offer BetBuddy as a separate standalone service to Playtech's operator partners and the wider industry?**

**SD:** BetBuddy is currently available as a standalone solution for operators not using the Playtech player management system. We have also said we will support any Playtech competitor wishing to integrate BetBuddy into its platform. Playtech understands that building a robust and proven safer gambling analytics solution from

scratch is a major undertaking requiring significant investment. And only through collaboration will the industry solve its major consumer protection challenges. There is a time to compete and a time to collaborate, and this problem urgently requires collaboration.

**Artificial intelligence BetBuddy Data Data Insight Playtech Product Development  
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