



MAKE SURE YOUNGER PLAYERS 'STICK'

Operators are under pressure to cater for an increasingly mass-market consumer. SBTech's **Ian Bradley** explores how to broaden in-play's appeal beyond its current core constituency



One of the biggest user-growth drivers during the forthcoming Russia 2018 FIFA World Cup will be live betting via mobile. The ability to appeal to younger demographics – people who can't be without their phones even for a moment – will be key.

Thanks to faster data feeds, in-play is now a fully immersive, real-time experience - there's huge hunger for the fastest possible bet placement and settlement flow, especially during short sessions and operators will soon be able to offer instant markets on a far wider range of sports.

With so many online activities, from social media to gaming, younger players don't want to spend any longer on site than they have to. Analytics on the player journey show the time spent searching for bets – especially in-play selections – is an area that still needs to be addressed; the providers and operators that deliver the fastest, smoothest experiences will reap the rewards of the in-play revolution.

No longer deemed 'pushy'

Perhaps unsurprisingly, younger players have a far greater appetite for live betting than other demographics; and in-play bettors of all ages prefer to bet during the same periods of matches and on the markets that have delivered success for them previously. As such, personalisation must be central to any in-play strategy, and the average bettor is now far more receptive to bet encouragement overtly based on their unique history. What was once considered 'pushy' is now part and parcel of the online experience in general and betting in particular. With careful calibration, it's a win-win situation, saving valuable time for players and increasing brand loyalty for operators.

For that reason, mobile-first features providing tailored quick-bet suggestions on specific incidents during live events are now poised to achieve peak profitability.

SBTech has also discovered that many players end betting sessions simply because they have zero balance, despite having one or more active bets with cash-out available.

These findings have had a major influence on the group's development processes over the past few years. A new feature that allows players to unlock the cash-out value of an existing bet by including extra 'banker' selections, to turn a single into a double or a treble into a fourfold, for example, now offers more control to customers and enhanced margins for operators.

Our research has also identified that a more gamified and engaging user interface makes bettors stickier and more likely to spend their leisure time and money on a sportsbook than on, say, a freemium game. For example, we know that simple additions such as matchtrackers increase time on device by 20%. The next logical step is to extend this feeling of excitement to the bets themselves. This is why our newest feature, Pulse, pays out incrementally larger amounts for goals occurring as time progresses. Users can follow the progress of their bet in the context of a matchtracker and a countdown timer, thus building their excitement toward a jackpot amount if a goal is scored in the final few moments of the bet.

This radical new approach adds an extra dimension to live betting; by increasing time on site, turnover, margin and loyalty, it represents a genuine game-changer.

But perhaps the most important consideration is convergence: how principles of personalisation, social and peer-to-peer interaction, esports, and gamified formats will come together to create innovative lifestyle betting products. Ingenious loyalty programmes are certain to be core components of such offerings with a range of rewards available, from free bets and bonuses to real-world gifts, such as sports merchandise.

An entire online economy based on exchangeable points could spring up, with sports and casino betting at its heart, requiring powerful omnichannel infrastructures and big-data capabilities provided by forward-thinking technology providers with the knowledge and experience to deliver robust, flexible and highly scalable solutions.

Ian Bradley is SBTech's chief product officer and has more than 10 years' experience in the gaming industry. He is responsible for the rollout of new features and services across the company's global partner network.