

BRICK-AND-MORTAR HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT SOCIAL GAMING



Retail is social in the truest sense and new shop networks are playing a key role in enabling omnichannel, says **Dario Fruk** of SBTech

With so much focus on mobile and other ‘cool’ online features such as social media, it’s easy to forget about the retail channel. But that would be to ignore its scale and the fact that in regulated markets many betting shop networks are undergoing significant modernisation.

Incorporating retail into their omnichannel propositions, major industry players have updated their premises and image to attract new demographics. Indeed, up until very recently, many locations were rundown affairs, but newer shops now boast multiple HD screens providing live streams of top events and dynamic odds and schedules.

New retail settings

Self-service betting terminals power fast and foolproof bet placement, boosting engagement and customer satisfaction while reducing overheads in a setting that enables players to socialise while they enjoy their betting.

However, adopting a new retail product is a far bigger proposition than upgrading an online operation to a different platform. It often goes hand in hand with the relaunch of a brand, and the in-shop experience will often be radically different from the one provided on digital channels.

Timelines, of course, are key, and players demand immediate transactions and instant access to their winnings. Keeping the customer satisfied while boosting betting volume across both pre-match and in-play markets is vital, and it’s essential to define ambitious but achievable KPIs, which can be altered on an ongoing basis in light of developments on the ground.

A retail betting services provider will also collaborate closely with the operator on the strategy for expanding or updating its shop network and achieving revenue growth. It must seek to gain a complete understanding of the dynamics of the business, its sources of investment, its hierarchy and any potential obstacles to rolling out a new solution.

Risk and reward

Loyalty programmes are central to creating winning retail experiences. In-store bettors are some of the most committed and savvy customers, and expect to be appropriately rewarded for sticking with a particular brand.

There are a number of possible structures for a successful loyalty scheme. Players can earn points for each bet, with more awarded for larger stakes. Another approach is for players to collect points every time a bet comes off, which has the appeal of offering a double win proposition.

A third option is offering points based on the risk level of each bet. Also, leaderboards inspired by fantasy sports are highly popular. The ultimate goal is fully personalised loyalty schemes, tailored to the betting habits of each player, and providers who focus on innovative data usage have a clear advantage here.

Loyalty schemes offer a view of customers’ habits and interests, fitting into operators’ omnichannel strategies, where product consistency across platforms needs to be aware of players’ preferences. This data can be used to tailor both online and shop betting, which is why suppliers such as SBTech maximise the deployment of this information so that its operators can target their players with customised offers and markets.

Building brand power

Many operators leverage their deals with top sports clubs in ways that go far beyond shirt sponsorship. In this respect, content is king: in-shop video feeds should include unique items such as exclusive player interviews.

Rolling out a retail product ‘under the radar’ through a soft launch enables both provider and client to assess each element of the solution, allowing fine-tuning of everything from voucher processing to the display of live odds.

The heart of retail’s appeal is the social experience. Betting with friends, in shops or places such as bars and cafes with self-service terminals, gets us back to what sports betting is all about.

Dario Fruk is head of retail at SBTech, where he ensures the roll-out of all retail products and solutions for the group. He was formerly chief product officer at Hattrick Sports Group, where thanks to his strong software engineering background he helped it develop its products.