



## THE PERIODIC TABLES SHOWCASE

Grosvenor Casino's New Games Showcase highlights the very best table gaming innovations and best customer practice

Building on the success of the first live table games showcase, a unique event bringing together the latest innovations in casino table gaming, Grosvenor Casinos staged its sequel at the now regular venue of the Coventry G Casino. One of the largest UK casinos, the G Casino Coventry proved the ideal location to showcase 20 new tables gaming concepts from a variety of suppliers, some familiar faces and some newcomers to this year's event.

The New Games Showcase is designed to allow customers hands-on experience of the brand new games Grosvenor is looking to trial in the UK. Invitations to the showcase are distributed to over 200 guests, with their valuable opinions canvassed and compiled to create a profile of each game that informs the selection process, whittling down to a short-list of the most popular games as ranked by the players themselves.

The organiser of the event, Ian Shanahan, Table Gaming Project Manager at Grosvenor Casino, was delighted with the results from the first event held in April 2011, and in May of this year expanded on the format with a broader mix of games across even more tables. "The first event involved an enormous amount of planning, but this second event has been much easier to stage," explained Mr.

Shanahan. "Everyone's now familiar with the process, we've brought together the same staff to help organise the event and the suppliers see the value in presenting their games both to customers and to our staff. We have made a few changes, widening the game mix as last year there was a concentration around blackjack and poker variants. This year we have a number of unique games, dice games and progressives, which have made it really interesting for our customers to sample games they'll never have seen before."

Attendance has remained consistent from last year to this, with around 120 invited guests visiting the casino representing a mix of new players, infrequent players and transactional customers. "We didn't want to grow the test base too much as we want all attendees to be able to sample all the games," said Mr. Shanahan. "We ask each guest to complete a questionnaire after they've played each game, generating feedback that we'll use to determine our short-list of favourites, while also giving the individual suppliers direct feedback on their games."

The selection of the games sticks to a strict criteria in which games must be new to the UK, something players at the UK casino will never have seen before.

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Grosvenor views the showcase as not only a useful efficiency tool to quickly gauge real live customer reactions, but as a competitive advantage in the drive to offer players a unique gaming experience. "We look to include games making their UK debut at the showcase, games that our competitors have yet to trial and evaluate," said Mr. Shanahan. "This year we are particularly interested in progressive games, with a few offering unique side bets that bring additional excitement and interest to classic casino games."

Following the showcase in 2011, Grosvenor short-listed 10 games from the event that made the first cut. The games were then installed in eight further locations across the UK on 60-day trials.



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TCSJohnHuxley.

(Top) Casino Pairs from Mr. Casino Games, Mississippi Stud from Shuffle Master and Bjinggo by Customised Casino Games

Once over, the last games standing, four from the original 20+ games shown at the first showcase, are now live in casinos throughout the Grosvenor Group. "If I can select another four games from this current showcase I'll be very happy," outlined Mr. Shanahan of his hopes for the 2012 crop. "We have to sift through each of the games and find the ones that hold player attention. They can't just be novelties, they must maintain longevity, which is very difficult to achieve. It's hard for any new game to penetrate the player consciousness of roulette, black jack and roulette. It's a challenge for any game to brush shoulders with those three, with only three card poker having significantly broken into this inner circle to date."

The suppliers seeking just such a

breakthrough with their latest games at the New Games Showcase included: Mr. Casino Games, Customised Casino Games, Galaxy Games, ICS Europe, Shuffle Master, Royal Roulette, Prime Table Games and TCSJohnHuxley. Speaking to Luke Davis of TCSJohnHuxley, whose company showed Supernova Roulette and Supernova Blackjack, progressive versions that do not alter the classic games themselves, he sees real value in the Grosvenor-staged event. "Conducting a trial with real players lets game developers understand the mechanics of their game on the floor of the casino," said Mr. Davis. "The questions Grosvenor asks each player about the game are also hugely important for us, enabling us to understand how players are interacting with new offerings. We're delighted with the response from the Showcase to Supernova Black Jack and Roulette, though the games are slightly different from those shown here in that we're not reinventing the games, but rather adding a progressive to the existing traditional games. There's nothing proprietary here aside from the

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three numbers generated from the roulette, which forms the side bet mystery win. We can offer a local table or all table mystery win, depending on operator. This isn't so much a new game, as we're using standard wheels and displays, with a traditional layout that simply includes colour-coded player assists. Instead, Supernova adds excitement to established favourites in a very simple, retro-fitable solution that's already gaining real momentum in the UK."

Across the 20 new games unveiled at the latest New Games Showcase, Grosvenor aimed to provide a broad mix of brand new innovations and subtle enhancements of traditional games. "I was really impressed with the level of detail in the games," stated Mr. Shanahan. "We have shown a series of totally innovative games, some I've no idea how they were ever dream-up.

Others are adding something new to traditional games, with multiple betting options and variations. I always find it harder to gauge the more radical games as they often prove to be region specific, which is why we sample the games across such a wide area following this event. Last year we saw 22 games at the showcase and across the whole year sampled 30 in total. Since running the first Showcase in April 2011, we additionally conducted three 'mini' showcases, giving the clubs the ability to gauge the games for themselves. We can't conduct an event such as this in every casino, as we're restricted by space in most of our venues. However, we can conduct smaller events having reduced the number of games from this event to a manageable size. Last year we conducted mini events in Leeds, Cardiff and Birmingham and I think we'll stick to this format this year too."

Following the New Games Showcase and the whittling down of the games to the shortlist, Mr. Shanahan and his team begin a briefing process with the clubs across the Grosvenor estate that are looking to trial the new games. Each receive a training session in club and are asked to open the game at specific times, prices and set periods, even requesting that certain areas of the floor are devoted to the game to give maximum exposure. "We don't want the game sat in a corner of the casino as we want a fair evaluation of its potential in each location," explained Mr. Shanahan. "We want it to be played by as many people as possible."

**Smashing the crystal ball**  
Predicting which games will be popular with players has been described as a 'black art', something that you can't test, trial or focus group. It's a statement to which Grosvenor gives absolutely no credence. The purpose of the New Games Showcase is to put new games in the hands of players and let them decide which they want to play. It's not exactly rocket science, but at the same time it's taking conventional thinking and standing it on its head. Grosvenor has taken the traditional model, in which the management team select the games they want to offers players, and stood this on its head. Players choose the games, the management simply listens and reacts to the requests. Mr. Shanahan is frank about his own ability to spot the best games from across the multiple variants at the Showcase. "Of the games that I thought would work really well, I was really surprised that they didn't gain any traction, while some the games that we have taken-up within the group are ones that I'd never have imagined would have been successful," admitted Mr. Shanahan. "What mentally stimulates the player and

(Right) 2 Way Texas Hold'Em Poker Side Bet by Galaxy Games, Supernova Blackjack by TCSJohnHuxley and PTG Poker from Prime Table Games.

(Far right) Roul8Fifty by Gary Chow.

As an industry in which there are so many possibilities to offer new games, I think it's strange not to give players the opportunity to experience these games. The majority of people coming to our G Casinos are from a younger demographic. They're familiar with touchscreens, they play Zynga poker on Facebook and are already playing in online casinos. When they enter a real casino environment it's not about simply replicating an electronic experience, it's about creating a differentiated experience."

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keeps them playing is something that is very hard to define or create a formula to predict. I don't see myself as the gatekeeper to this process, evaluating the games and presenting only a small edited sample to my customers. This process is about showing as many games as possible to our customers, who choose for themselves which games they enjoy playing. There are a couple of games here that I really like, about which I'm really keen and hope they do well, but ultimately it's down to what the customers say - we make the selection based on their feedback."

Grosvenor Casinos makes extensive use of focus groups in its decision-making processes, something Mr. Shanahan attributes to his boss, Kevin Graham, Head of Table Gaming for Grosvenor Casinos. "Our decision-making is informed by our customers," underlined

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Mr. Shanahan. "We're not here to tell our customers what they like. We create focus groups before making and agreeing changes to gather as much information as possible. We know from experience that it's much less efficient to implement changes and then gather feedback retrospectively, than it is to consult and make the right changes from the start. The initial process takes longer, as the more people involved ultimately slows down the process, but compare this to the hit-and-miss approach where you're making changes over and over again till you get it right and there's simply no comparison. Ours is a more effective and ultimately faster process."

The efficiency of the selection process involved in the New Games Showcase sees the 20+ games shaved down to 10 for the wider trials. Three mini showcases in three locations whittle down the number to those that eventually are sited for 60 day trials, with casinos from across Grosvenor's 34 club estate taking part in the final stage. "We track the games remotely, keeping an eye on handle and win in relation to the time the tables are open," stated Mr. Shanahan of this final



stage of the process. “We receive feedback sheets per week enabling us to continue to monitor everything we need to make our final choices. The ultimate goal of this process is to broaden the spectrum of games we offer our customers, appealing to the widest possible spectrum of players.”

At the last showcase, players completed over 500 questionnaires on the evening, detailing their opinions about each of the games on the floor. All the entries were then inputted into a database and cross-reference against the games with Grosvenor comparing the performances before making the short-list. “Even if I loved a game, if it performed badly on the night then it wouldn’t get to trial,” stated Mr. Shanahan. “We keep the questionnaires simple so that we can compare all the data from all the different

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games. There were several games that were strongly disliked by players who tend to give very honest feedback. We also found that staff and management didn’t pull their punches either, which was information that we shared with each of the suppliers so that they get relevant information about their games. The first six or seven games making it through to the trials last year were very straightforward, but it was tricky thereafter to choose the final 10 as it became quite a close race between the final few.”

**Trials and tribulations**

The relevance of this type of event could be questioned as the electronics side of the casino industry is now the dominant part of the gaming offer across most of the globe. However, while slots and electronic table games take the lion’s share of the floor space in most casinos, live tables continue to be the heart of a casino. The relationship between customer and staff is defined by the dealer and player. For Grosvenor Casinos, offering a variety of new table games to the customer, from novelties and variations of popular games, to

progressives and side bets, keeps that contact dynamic and fluid. “We’re not presenting a static offer to the same set of customers that want the same set of games,” said Mr. Shanahan. “If you provide that offer you’ll find that you’re only operating at full capacity at the weekend. We are attracting the players looking for fun and entertainment throughout the week. We will always present the transactional players with the games they want, but we need something extra, something different to attract the wider audience, the discretionary player who wants something new.”

One of the reasons why this format works so well in the UK, making it a unique event on the global stage, is that the UK has untied legislative restrictions surrounding the introduction of new games to the marketplace. The introduction of new games is very straightforward in the UK as compared to many other jurisdictions around the world. The limiting factors in the UK usually revolve around restricted floor space and the cost of implementation, with marketing, dealer training and manning of the games all needing to be weighed and measured. They’re limits, however, that Mr. Shanahan sees as benefits.

“I’m actually very happy that no one else is implementing this kind of initiative,” commented Mr. Shanahan. “It means that our customers have the widest choice of games on the market and will get to play the best games first. As an industry in which there are so many possibilities to offer new games, I think it’s strange not to give players the opportunity to experience these games. The majority of people coming to our G Casinos are from a younger demographic. They’re familiar with touchscreens, they play Zynga poker on Facebook and are already playing in online casinos. When they enter a real casino environment it’s not about simply replicating an electronic experience, it’s about creating a differentiated experience.

“I don’t see us replacing the dealer with a host of an electronic product, I think players want to interact with the dealer, with the cards and chips and other players too,” concluded Mr. Shanahan. “We had a game at the showcase last year that trialled well, but proved to be a bit ‘too electronic.’ When we replaced the electronic dice element with a hand deal, it’s proved a hit. I’m not saying that we’re dismissing technology, far from it. Technology is such a big part of the casino offer and we recognise that we need to offer the customer the best available on the market – but ultimately, what the customer really wants is a great time.”

