



BACK IN THE GAME

The formation of Williams Interactive is a game-changer for WMS Industries as the company establishes its gaming content across leading-edge online, mobile and interactive platforms for the benefit of land-based casino operators

Changes are afoot within WMS Industries. Renowned as a market leader and innovator in the field of slots gaming, the most recent announcements from the Illinois-based company have centered upon online gaming acquisitions, social media partnerships and operator-focused interactive platform launches. The news in July that the company has chosen to bring its online wagering, social, casual and mobile gaming resources under a single iGaming umbrella organisation, Williams Interactive, is the culmination of this flurry of activity.

Slot innovation remains a fundamental component of the WMS Gaming



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portfolio, but it's no longer the sole focus. While delighting trade show audiences with stunning presentations of new slots concepts, the pipeline between trade events and gaming floors significantly constricted for WMS over the last 18 months. A backlog of innovative games caught in a testing bottleneck, a lack of strong math/core games and capital constraints at the customer level has impacted negatively on WMS. In response, the company has redefined itself as a provider of leading gaming content across the widest possible spread of media. Slots are now just one channel amongst a range that encompasses online, mobile, social, casual gaming, VLTs, server-based, AWP's and every new platform and

channel currently in development. G3 interviewed WMS Industries President Orrin Edidin at G2E Asia, who presented the past and future of the company in frank and compelling detail.

WMS is to present more distinct maths models at G2E in October than the company has brought to the combined exhibitions over the last three years. At the same time, as the convergence of online, land-based, casual and social gaming continues to accelerate at a tremendous pace, WMS is finally showing its hand in the interactive space too. The key element that binds these three sectors together is content - WMS' content. "We see online, land-based and social media as simply different distribution channels," stated Mr. Edidin. "Up to this point we have been flying under the radar in the interactive space, which has not been unintentional. We believe that customers are now used to the concept



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of casual play-for-fun as well as play-for-real gaming, and we want to be their interactive supplier in that space. We are offering a full suite of managed services, supplying everything our customers need to provide online interactive gaming to their players, or supply lite packages to suit their individual needs and ongoing strategies. We are forming alliances for server integration, forging deals with pre-existing sites to have access to our games, and offering our own distinct platform solutions."

Williams Interactive is the vehicle for the growth, development and execution of the company's online wagering, social, casual and mobile gaming initiatives. As such, the company's structures have changed to reflect this, with Mr. Edidin promoted to the new position of President and Chief Executive Officer of Williams Interactive. In his new role, he will lead the company's efforts to leverage its product development expertise, content and already comprehensive iGaming capabilities to capitalise on the emerging industry's potential growth opportunities by supporting casinos' participation in these new distribution channels.

Williams Interactive will integrate under a unified organisational structure the company's extensive array of interactive gaming operations and development initiatives in the rapidly growing online wagering, social, casual, and mobile gaming distribution

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channels. Williams Interactive is expected to facilitate the continued expansion, evolution and extension of WMS' interactive businesses.

One of such businesses, the acquisition of Jadestone in May, provides WMS with access to 15 million players, the ability to integrate with existing online providers and offer its gaming content to the widest possible distribution channels. "We are integrating our content with all the current online providers, ensuring that we cover the 'entire wheel'" described Mr. Edidin. "WMS is a games company. We recognise our competencies and we understand what we do best. We are not a B2C company and we are not looking to compete with our customers. The acquisition of Jadestone, a leader in its field, enables us to expand the offline/online experience of players with WMS' compelling gaming content."

In addition to the Jadestone acquisition, WMS Gaming also recently revealed the launch of Facebook game Lucky Cruise, which saw over a million active users subscribing to the site in a single month. Mr. Edidin makes very clear that Lucky Cruise from WMS's perspective is not a financial proposition, but rather proof of content. "Providing gaming content in the social space is a completely new for us," stated Mr. Edidin.

"The hooks that attract players are very different. We've had to modify our content to appeal to this audience, but it has been both rewarding and very successful. It means that in US jurisdictions we can provide web-based casual play tools, all with appropriate branding, all linked to our customer's database. Lucky Cruise has registered over one million users to the website, and has become a tool that we can add to our customer's arsenal, taking players from land-based gaming, through to online, social/casual/free and play-for-money branded website gaming."

Following hot on the heels of the formation of Williams Interactive, it's first launch is Jackpot Party, a social casino on Facebook. Drawing slot content from WMS, the Jackpot Party social casino offers a library of exclusively authentic, classic Las Vegas-style casino slot entertainment; something of a first for Facebook.

The beta launch of the Jackpot Party social casino includes six of WMS' most popular slot themes – Zeus II, Invaders from the Planet Moolah, Brazilian Beauty, Reel Rich Devil, Jungle Wild and Fortunes of the Caribbean – that utilise gaming action featured in several of the company's player-favourite game families – G + (R), Hot Hot Super Respin, Cascading Reels, Spinning Streak and Money Burst. Many more of WMS' exciting game themes are scheduled to be added to the Jackpot Party social casino.

Additional recent announcements from WMS have further expanded its online offer for US operators through an agreement with 888.com, in which, WMS will market and distribute 888's world-class online poker solution to land-based casino customers in legal venues in the United States, initially with a play-for-fun offering. WMS will serve as the exclusive provider of 888's online poker solution to casino operators in the US, with certain limited contractual exceptions. In addition, the deal will also facilitate



the creation of an interoperable platform that will enable an integrated experience between 888's poker solutions and WMS' online casino solutions incorporating WMS content and capabilities, providing for play-for-fun and wagering solutions.

Defining the philosophy driving these announcements, Mr. Edidin summarised: "A global migration toward content convergence and multi-channel distribution is rapidly underway. Having anticipated the convergence of land-based casino gaming with online, social, casual and mobile gaming, we set out several years ago to prepare WMS to benefit from these exciting new opportunities. We have developed and acquired the appropriate experience and skills needed to help our customers prepare for the convergence in their businesses with a broad set of value-added solutions, products and managed services."

The inevitable expansion of the online gaming market in the US is likely to prove to be very disparate, with state-by-state regulation creating a

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smorgasbord of contrasting and conflicting legislation. Mr. Edidin's view is that we're unlikely to see federal legislation governing online gaming in the US as part of overarching regulatory control. As a result, suppliers will need the flexibility to satisfy a multitude of different requirements. What works in one state won't necessarily work in another. "It's likely that individual states will need to pool liquidity and therefore it's crucial that we are in a position to integrate with both current and future systems," stated Mr. Edidin of WMS' interoperability objectives. "We see ourselves as both a games company and an integration company. We want



access to systems, just as our customers want access to WMS content. We need as much of the distribution channel as possible, while continuing to concentrate all our energies on creating compelling games. In essence, we are going back to our roots; providing a unique gaming experience that engages across every gaming system and platform."

In the online gaming space outside of the US, WMS is concentrating its efforts in the European sector, with the UK considered a major focus as the most mature 'legal' market for online gaming, with the emphasis resolutely on 'legal.' While market expansion will be dictated at the legislative and regulatory level, it's customer demand that is really driving WMS' interactive games development. "Right now there isn't a customer I talk to that doesn't want to hear about our interactive plans. This isn't a solution that we're pushing onto the market; most people agree that interactive gaming will continue to grow and our aim is to be an important contributor," stated Mr. Edidin. "Everyone on the land-based

side is looking at the online space. As a games company we're here to help our customers exploit every channel. We faced a learning curve on the technical and analytics side online, which is why the acquisition of companies like Jadestone have helped speed us to market. There are others out there, and we are evaluating those that can help us to truly achieve leadership in the online space. Somewhere between our managed services and game server integration you are going to see a huge proliferation of WMS content. It's an exciting time."

WMS has been very careful to set-up a management structure which, despite the company's interactive gaming ambitions, is not going to become distracted from its core land-based offer. "We simply want access to the all those pipelines, which means that we're not just delivering amazing new titles with our next level of CPUNXT3, but offering our enormous library of games to our online customers too," confirmed Mr. Edidin. "We are very mindful of not taking our eyes off our core competencies, which means that

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we are structuring the business to maximise our ability to leverage proven content across all channels. We want our customer to succeed in the online space and we're offering them with the tools to ensure their business capitalises on every opportunity."

Mr. Edidin concluded, "Creating a single organisation to unify the company's efforts in online wagering and interactive gaming distribution channels, while drawing upon our extensive existing library of great gaming content, will better enable WMS to participate in the many high-margin opportunities this content convergence offers. Williams Interactive enables us to efficiently integrate our Atlanta-based online development resources, India-based systems and software capabilities, Chicago-based online development studio and engineering staff, our UK-based operational center, our Sweden-based online development and operations center and our Iowa-based Phantom EFX development team for social, casual and mobile gaming entertainment."