

SETTING STANDARDS BEYOND CASINO WALLS

The Gaming Standards Association's Online Gaming Committee has made significant progress towards developing communication standards for online gaming, reveals GSA Protocol Director **Ethan Tower**.

The expansion of the casino industry outside its traditional brick-and-mortar walls into online gaming has created the need for a new set of industry standards. Those standards will assure interoperability and accountability for online gaming sites and, at the same time, provide the broadest selection of gaming options to players.

Two important changes are driving this need. First, online operators are no longer the suppliers of the online gaming systems. Suppliers are not competing against other suppliers for players. Instead, licensed operators are competing against other licensed operators. Those operators are working with multiple suppliers to provide the best and broadest range of gaming options to players. Interoperability and ease of integration have become critical issues for the operators. Ideally, it should be as easy to integrate a new game into an online gaming site as it is to integrate a new gaming machine into a brick-and-mortar casino.

Second, regulatory oversight has become an increasingly important part of online gaming. In many jurisdictions, only licensed operators are allowed to provide services. They need to comply with strict technical standards and reporting requirements, much like the traditional brick-and-mortar casinos. Many of the concepts used to regulate brick-and-mortar casinos have migrated their way into the regulations for online gaming. Online gaming systems need to anticipate regulatory needs and be prepared to provide the information needed to assure fair and responsible gaming operations.

The Online Gaming Committee of the Gaming Standards Association is aggressively trying to address these emerging requirements by developing communication standards for online gaming.

The first standard, the Third-Party Game Interface, will address the need for interoperability between online gaming platforms and third-party game servers. Much like the standards that are used in the brick-and-mortar world to link gaming machines to casino management systems, the Third-Party Game Interface, will allow online games from multiple suppliers to be easily integrated into an operator's online gaming platform. The standard will address how games are launched, how monetary transactions are managed by the games and platforms, and how game content interacts with gaming consoles. The standard is on track for release in early 2015.

"Open standards will have numerous benefits for the industry. They will make it easier for suppliers to bring new products to the market. This will provide players with more variety and more reasons to play", Ethan Tower, GSA's Protocol Director, explained.

Currently, some jurisdictions, such as New Jersey, require that online gaming sites terminate play when the player leaves the jurisdiction. Looking towards the future, the committee is including mechanisms that would allow players to move seamlessly across jurisdictional boundaries, allowing a single online gaming platform to manage play in multiple jurisdictions, with the proper revenues being reported to each jurisdiction.

The second standard will address regulatory reporting requirements. Through cooperation with regulated jurisdictions, the Committee hopes to develop a comprehensive set of reporting standards that can easily be adapted to meet the specific needs of individual jurisdictions. While there may always be special requirements in individual jurisdictions, the committee hopes to identify those that are common to all jurisdictions and have a standard approach for addressing them. Much like meter and event reporting for gaming machines, these specifications will identify what information online gaming platforms and game servers should be prepared to report and when. "The regulatory reporting standards will be a model for new jurisdictions getting into the market." Tower explained.

Asaf Doron, Head of Integrations at Playtech and chairman of the Online Gaming Committee, added: "Modifying the standards for specific jurisdictions should go through a well-defined standardization process managed by GSA to assure smooth adoption by the industry."

Doron invites all online gaming suppliers to become involved in drafting the standards. "A broad cross-section of suppliers will bring business experience gained in multiple regulated markets around the world to the table. We welcome everyone's input." he said.

Ethan Tower is a 20-year gaming industry veteran, holding principal director positions for numerous companies. He has been actively involved in GSA's G2S, S2S and Transport committees since their inception, and is now serving as GSA's Protocol Director.

