



by Michael J. Broderick

Maximized Marketing: *Improving Card Usage on Your Casino Floor*

Nothing is more disconcerting for the casino marketer than to walk down a busy bank of dollar slot machines and see the words “Please Insert Players Club Card” over and over again. For the savvy, modern marketer, the value of tracked play and player information can only be compared to water in the desert – it is the source of our marketing life. And the thought of missing out on getting new names into our club database, not increasing our volume of targeted mail, and losing repeat visits because of those offers can be depressing to say the least. Unlike the locals casinos in Vegas where the clientele “gets it,” smaller properties have their work cut out for them. Just convincing the casino's customers that “using a club card is good for you” is in itself a huge challenge, never mind overcoming the completely false rumors that are out there regarding card usage. My two favorites that I have overheard are that the machines don't pay out as much when you use the card and that Federal Immigration and Naturalization Service somehow gets your information – this being an especially popular belief in Southern California.

Sadly, many properties miss the mark when it comes to capturing new names in the database and improving card usage on the gaming floor. Frequently, this essential task is undervalued by staff and management alike, delegated as a secondary role while the focus of the marketing efforts is usually to implement successful promotions while remaining on budget. Often casino marketing departments will put so much work into developing and implementing creative and exciting promotions and mail pieces, that they tend to lose sight that if card usage is down, the potential of increasing marketing ROI will be limited. I can assure you that the strength of a casino's marketing programs depends wholly on the strength of the player's club database and card usage. Here are a number of techniques that I have found to be easy to implement and have created sustained improvement in the number of monthly club card sign-ups and carded play.

If Mohammed Can't Go to the Mountain, Bring the Mountain to Mohammed

One of the easiest ways to improve card usage and card sign ups is to simply have your club reps walk the floor. At almost every property I have been to you hardly ever see the staff out actively promoting the benefits of the club and facilitating the club's sign ups. And why is that? I've often seen, and I always find it interesting, how staff becomes so dependent on that wall or separation at the club booth between

them and the guest. It seems to become a subconscious shield between them and the guests, a protective area that says, “You can't come past this and invade my personal space.” Typically we hear that staffing is an issue (not enough club representatives to send out and to cover the club booth at the same time), but I disagree. It doesn't have to be a scheduled activity. Usually traffic at the club is in waves, so downtime is a great opportunity to cut them loose and have one or two out there capturing new players. I also hear complaints that guests don't like to be disturbed while playing. That might be true, but not all of the players are like that. Besides, I think the majority of the players would be interested to hear about what they might be missing out on by not having or using their club card.

Another concern I often hear from staff that is not used to actively walking the floor is that they have trouble approaching a guest or closing the deal (i.e. getting their information and valid ID for their card account). I am sure that is nothing a little training and hand holding can't overcome. Once they get out there and learn how to properly approach guests and break the ice, it will become second nature.

The Immediate Reward

Organizational behaviorists have shown there is no greater incentive to achieve desired behaviors than the immediate reward. We as casino marketers are looking to get the guests to sign up and use their cards when they play. The players want to see the benefit for using their cards, so the immediate reward is the most viable alternative to achieving our goal. First and foremost, you have to be willing to spend a predetermined amount of money per name or guest who signs up. On average this could be anywhere from \$2 to \$5. The types of immediate rewards can be a gift to cash or an immediate discount when the guest shows their card at your different points of sale.

When your club representative goes out onto the floor, clipboard in hand, have him or her take along a few baseball caps or key chains. When they approach the guest, have them tell the guest that if they give them (the rep) their information they would love to give them the baseball cap or other gift right away. Your casino representative could then tell the guest about all of the wonderful benefits they will get by becoming a member of your club. Even better, give them a coupon that can be redeemed for \$5.00 in free slot play when they sign up for the club the first time. There is nothing like free money to entice

those players to join and use the card. Chances are your player will be more open to the idea of signing up.

Diversity of Benefits

Believe it or not, not all of your guests are interested in changing points for cash. While this is a great incentive for high frequency, high handle players, the average player probably does not accrue points fast enough to be able to feel a significant impact on their rewards and, to be honest, it's boring! That is why a diverse number of benefits are needed to be in place that will cater to all players. Offer them multiple tiered rewards. Low-end items are popular for the first time visitor. Inexpensive fanny packs, t-shirts, and baseball caps typically have been the way to go, but I have found that there are other creative gifts that have the same cost but higher perceived value. Binoculars, flip-phones, handy pocket tape measures and wallets garnish an improved response from the guests and they think they are getting something "better" than the typical t-shirt. Even discounts in your food and beverage outlets or gift shop sometimes have a better reception by players. Just remember, not all guests want material items and your rewards are only limited to the creative concepts you come up with!

While your low-end guests might like these items, your higher-end players probably already have a small warehouse full of these gifts. This is where you take the time to invest in items of higher value. Brand name merchandise and electronics usually do the trick, and chances are you can find great prices for these items. One very popular item that I have used as a reward is the DVD player/home theater system. I have found a great vendor who sells me each one for under a hundred dollars, and they are always a huge hit. The most important thing to remember when diversifying your redemptions is not the cost of the items or reward, but the perceived value of them by players.

The Casino's "Friend"

This is one of the most interesting (and aggressive) concepts I have seen that really improves card usage. Basically what is done is a number of new accounts are created in the player tracking system with the surname "New Casino Friend." Once created, different cards are printed with the "New Casino Friend" moniker and the different account numbers on each card. Then the casino slot club representative goes out on the floor, or is stationed in a high traffic area (for example the entrance to the buffet) and they offer the card to passers by who are not already members of the club. Guests can immediately use the card in order to accrue points and earn gifts as well as reap the rewards of being a club member. The catch is, if the guest wants to redeem the points earned, or receive a gift, they have to go to the player's club booth and show their valid identification. Once that is done the casino representative edits the account used to reflect the name of the guest. The genius of doing this is that the guest does not have to go to the club booth in order to begin earning their rewards. However, they can't receive any of the rewards earned until the account is

modified and the player is verified. If the guest doesn't go to the club after some time, the account can be purged.

The Team Effort

Fundamentally the most important aspect of improving card usage and club sign-ups on your gaming floor is team effort. It is not only marketing's job to get the guest to use the card, but all of the casino's staff. Slots, cash ops, F&B, and security all can play a significant role to this end. All they have to do is to talk it up to the guest. A slot attendant who has been helping a guest all night long with hand pays can let the guest know about the great benefits of the club. The F&B person can ask the guest if they have a club card in order to get a discount. If the guest doesn't, that employee can remind the guest about how beneficial having, and using, the card is. Even security can play a role by knowing what the benefits are and directing the guests to the player's club booth. All in all, a team effort can greatly enhance the power of your property's ability to capture new players and improve carded play. ♣

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