

green, they expect clean. Being smoke-free is synonymous with being clean. Piggyback on the green movement, and promote 100 percent smoke-free gaming as the first step in "going green."

- Focus on a new customer base. Cultivate new nonsmoking gamblers. 80 percent of the adult population does not smoke and prefers nonsmoking environments. Tap into this market sector with a targeted marketing campaign that appeals to nonsmokers. Generate referrals from nonsmoking customers, gleaned from customer survey information and data on non-smoking hotel room personal preferences.

- Adapt the loyal customer to change. Consistency, familiarity and feeling welcomed is critical to maintain brand preferences in the hospitality industry. Changes over time are inevitable; some are imposed by law, while others are business decisions. Retain customers by acknowledging the change in a positive tone, and show you still care about each customer.

Gamblers, like any customer, have strong brand loyalties. Enhance the customers' brand recognition experience with unique offerings. Co-brand and cross-market with nongaming revenue streams to fit

your customer profile.

- Beware of back-firing. Nonsmokers may switch to a nearby casino that welcomes the new smoke-free policy, rather than play where management claims that it is the demise of their business. Nonsmoking gamblers have been waiting for the day when more than just the poker rooms are smoke-free. If a player feels unwanted, he or she will gladly spend their money elsewhere. Make the nonsmoking patrons feel good, and they'll feel lucky — and stay.

- Formulate a retention strategy for clientele who smoke, using enhanced customer service. Generate goodwill with acts of kindness and understanding, and show appreciation for their past business. Reiterate that it is still the same casino that they are accustomed to enjoying, with the same layout and attentive casino hosts.

- Provide gamblers who smoke with a special welcoming kit at check-in. Explain how a player holds their seat at a table, or slot machine, during a quick, outdoor smoking break. Include gum, lozenges or candy that may be provided through promotional channels. If space is available, construct inviting, pleasant, outdoor smoking areas that reflect the look and feel of the casino, which produces a

seamless indoor-outdoor transition.

- Capitalize on the health-oriented component of smoke-free casinos. Reduce expenses by rolling-out smoking cessation incentives for employees. Over time, employees who quit smoking may take fewer sick days, and have lower medical costs. Time the program to coordinate with the implementation plan for transitioning to a smoke-free casino.

- Align with local nonprofits and charities that support smoke-free environments, to project and promote a positive image. Reach out to donation recipients and co-promote a kick-off event that celebrates the newly minted, clean environment that will be forthcoming, for both patrons and employees. Honor local champions who brought about the change. A casino's commitment to the community can lead to an increase in the customer base.

It's easy to find that silver, gold, platinum or even diamond-encrusted lining in smoke-free casinos. Just go back to basics. People frequent casinos to win. Some players are serious, while others find it fun and entertaining. Bottom line: gambling is not about the smoking; it's all about winning and the entertainment value. Embrace the future, and plan ahead for a smooth transition, rather than let the chips fall where they may.

Operating trends ...

SMART OPERATORS WILL FIND THE SILVER (OR PLATINUM) LINING OF SMOKE-FREE CASINOS

Editor's Note: Karen Blumenfeld is Policy Director for New Jersey GASP (Group Against Smoking Pollution). An attorney by trade, she is nationally recognized for her expertise in tobacco control, with more than 15 years' experience — including a concentration in gaming-related issues.

Although Blumenfeld has been a leading voice for smoke-free casinos in Atlantic City, she is not anti-gaming. Here, she offers how the gaming industry can make the best of a smoke-free casino floor.

BY KAREN BLUMENFELD

Smoke-free gaming, on a grand scale, is no longer just inevitable, but a full-fledged reality for Atlantic City casinos, when on October 15 they join more than a dozen states that mandate smoke-free gaming.

More casinos throughout the country will soon follow that lead, either by legal requirement or voluntarily. The momentum is here. Just in 2008, Colorado, Illinois, Maryland and Kanewah County, WV, smoke-free gaming. Michigan is contemplating it. Connecticut is moving toward smoke-free tribal casinos. Overseas, Canada, France, Italy, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia, to name a few, have moved ahead.

Embracing the future, and believing in its success, is key to a winning marketing and public relations strategy for smoke-free casinos. In recent years, even the gaming industry acknowledges that smoke-free gaming is unavoidable. Yet, the industry has not wholeheartedly accepted the concept, with the exception of a few casinos that have seen the light.

An unwillingness to change with the times, or to do so begrudgingly, projects negativity, which rarely boosts revenues, unless the business objective is to short the market. It also lowers employee morale, which affects customer service, and impacts the bottom line.

A successful smoke-free casino is all about attitude, so casino operators must reconfigure their

mindset. That is, they should focus on the advantages — competitive and otherwise — of a smoke-free venue, rather than wallow in perceived disadvantages. Casinos are not the first hospitality sector to face demands for smoke-free environments. Starwood, Marriott, and now Sheraton hotels, are 100 percent smoke-free, voluntarily. Properties range from luxury, to basic lodging options, and attract a wide range of clientele. And they are geographically located next to hotels that are not 100 percent smoke-free. It does not matter what the competition is offering; these smoke-free properties are successful.

Here are suggestions for a casino operator to consider, when going smoke-free:

- Be a leader. On April 30, the same day that Atlantic City's Mayor **Scott Evans** signed the smoke-free casinos ordinance, Atlantic City's Borgata, co-owned by Boyd Gaming and MGM Mirage, went further. Borgata declared a commitment to be 100 percent smoke-free on the gaming floor, and forgo building non-staffed, separately enclosed and ventilated smoking-only lounges, which are permitted under the new law. Only outdoor smoking areas that are "reminiscent of Borgata" will be constructed.

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This bold move, timed to the signing of the law, signals that Borgata not only embraces change, but takes it to the next level. It is a savvy public relations move, which reinforces and solidifies Borgata as a trend-setter, rather than a naysayer. It's also an instant employee morale booster, which in turn, improves customer service.

- Develop a cohesive, public relations campaign and marketing strategy to promote smoke-free casinos. Brand the campaign with a creative theme and tag-line that is appropriate

for all channels of promotion: from casinos and redevelopment authorities, to convention bureaus and tourism boards. Incorporate that branding identity into individual casino marketing campaigns.

Feeling good means feeling lucky. Creating a positive environment generates a positive vibe for the customer. Clean environments are aesthetically pleasing and inviting, and make people feel good. If a gambler feels good in their surroundings, they'll feel lucky and be eager to play.

- Ride the green wave. When customers think *see SMOKE-FREE on page 7*



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