

Maintaining and Improving Your Cashless Systems

By Victoriah Arsenian

People used to think of slot machines as coin-clanging, one-armed bandits, but today the majority of games on slot floors are cashless, no-armed bandits.

When the cashless slots were originally introduced to the casino gaming industry, though, they were designed to have the look and feel of slot machines — they were not expected to be embraced by gamblers — but it seems that these new machines have gained a high level of acceptance of players in both tribal gaming facilities and Las Vegas casinos.

This may be attributed to the fact that players no longer have to hassle with lugging change buckets around the casino floor or wait for hand-pays or hopper fills, but instead now have options such as use of electronic cards similar to debit cards to track their winnings. They can push buttons or touch screens instead of pulling a lever.

Ticket-in/ticket-out systems use thermal printers to print barcodes that contain a cash value amount on pre-printed tickets. When a player decides to cash out of a game, he or she receives a ticket that can be redeemed for cash at the cashier's window or inserted into the bill acceptor of a different machine for additional play. IGT's EZ Pay works with the company's new multi-denomination games where players may select anywhere from 1-cent to \$25 plays on a single machine.

Coinless slots also provide benefits to casino operators because the system requires less labor costs because less maintenance is needed, as the machines do not experience many mechanical problems like the traditional slot machines.

"When gaming started and tribes began installing slot machines in their facilities, mainly coin with some cash acceptance, they needed people on the floor to manage cash flow," explained Tom Nugent, vice president of JCM. "Ticket-in/ticket-out has given a structure to, or has created a streamline operation where people can simply have their ticket scanned, decreasing time. The auditing structure became easier for tribes because of the single transfer ability and elimination of changing cash."

Employees are no longer needed to fill hoppers and pay out jackpots. The cashless system reduces the need for inventory of coins and tokens, reduces the time and personnel needed, decreases down time when machines are being filled, and increases revenue. However, maintaining the system's working parts is vital to its efficiency.



Photos courtesy of JCM American Corporation

Bill validator

The bill validator has an embedded barcode reader to improve recognition of tickets. The idea is to make it easier to read. Several companies have improved the system to improve the reading, so people do not have to continually feed the ticket into the system to try and get it to read the ticket.

Evolution of the printer

Reliability is one of the most important aspects of the printer. "The printer is already evolving to make it easier to use from an operator perspective," Nugent said. "Some companies are looking at multicolor or multi-marketing material to be placed on the tickets, or dual barcodes that may allow the



FutureLogic's Gen2

quent service calls and premature equipment replacement. Keeping the system clean is essential to how it will continue to operate.

“In barcode printers, the main cause of premature printhead failure is a buildup of adhesive, label residue, dirt and other contaminants,” said Jimmy Timmins, marketing communications for Kic Products (a division of Enefco International.) “This creates a baked-on coating that heat produced by the dots on the printhead cannot penetrate. The trapped heat burns out the dots. We make products that ensure the transactions that are taking place are consistently uninterrupted and worry free.”

There are differing opinions on how to clean the system. Kic Products uses a card that is saturated with a surfactant (soapy solution). The card is placed into the system, which recognizes that the card is not currency, and spits it out. It is safe, effective and will not dry out before it has completed the job. Some companies prefer to completely open the system and use swabs, which can be time consuming, but work just as well.

While everyone seems to agree that cashless slots are more cost effective than the traditional one-armed bandit, maintenance is still essential to keeping the system in high working order. **NAC**

ticket to be redeemed inside the casino restaurant or elsewhere. Ticket sizes are also being reduced because players leave and come back with crumpled tickets. Sometimes players leave their tickets on the dash of their cars and the sun damage can make it difficult for the system to read the ticket.”

Because the system is what holds the value of the ticket, there are security elements to the ticket; however, the system knows the value and holds the value. It knows when it was printed and how much is on it and collectively how much is out there total. However, there is always someone who will try to cheat the system.

Late last year, two men were arrested for cheating and fraud when they duplicated a Tribal Lottery Ticket (TLS) and simultaneously inserted the original and duplicate into two machines, confusing the computer-linked system.

Keeping the system clean

Over 80 percent of printer and reader failures are linked to poor maintenance. The not-so-hidden costs of neglect include lost production, customer dissatisfaction, fre-

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