



Brand Personality: Profits Through Leadership

by Adam H. Smith

“As casinos nationwide look to garner the next generation of players, one thing remains constant – a unique experience always wins.”

When examining leadership responsibilities and opportunities around organizational profit growth, the number one reason for lack-luster performance – a void in brand personality. In an era of COVID-19 and its eventual end, gaming operations must reestablish and rethink how existing customers are maintained, and new patrons are attained. As any experienced tribal gaming professional knows, not all markets are equal – managing a casino in the Midwest versus California presents different challenges and opportunities. Understanding an existing or desired market generally starts by having a full appreciation for the economic and social micro-environments of a given customer-base.

For years, the decision around casino marketing has been a 15 minute conference call with management to either provide more free-play, give some kind of tangible product away, lease a new billboard, or bring onsite entertainment in on Fridays and Saturdays. While there is certainly a place for each one of these marketing initiatives, the problem lies in how these activities successfully differentiate one casino from the next. Do these activities create a unique brand experience for patrons? Possibly, but that is the question each property should ask themselves before issuing more free-play or giving something away. Every casino should ask themselves how their patrons would describe their experience with the property. Is it unique from the casino down the street? Does the casino have a brand personality at all?

Taking a business from average performance to tremendous success goes beyond existing or being available; it is about creating a personality – a series of characteristics and interrelated connections and feelings patrons have towards the casino. How to accomplish these connections is the difference between being a destination facility or a quick-stop property. The challenge is separating yourself from the competition in various intangible ways, which is true for all types of businesses. Usually, casinos will describe their platform for targeting certain age groups and this comes in the way of free play and mailers that go out to these demographics. There is nothing wrong with this approach, but the problem is this is exactly what every other casino is doing. How does that differentiate one casino from another? A casino may be able to rely on a local customer base for a certain base level activity; but generating profit growth must extend beyond a customer base. Garnering patrons from

other markets is done through providing a unique experience versus sending out mailers every month.

How does a casino get a personality that elevates their brand imagine into a destination style facility? “Keep it simple” goes a long way in developing a unique personality. Below are some key steps and questions to consider when embarking on a transformational brand:

- The fact of the matter is – in a casino, many people will leave with less money in their pocket. Ultimately, patrons want an experience and will gladly lose money for the opportunity to have fun and be given a break from daily life situations. How does a facility create an emotion in which customers want to return after losing?
- Look around the local market and the people employed in the casino – what personalities already exist in the facility? Let your employees flourish in their unique characteristics.
- Create a theme, not just a logo – being different is key. Many properties will describe how they are kind and friendly to patrons and this is somehow a unique experience for customers from the casino down the street. The goal is to be recognizable not for “loose slots” or “double free-play Fridays,” but for a unique gaming experience.

As casinos nationwide look to garner the next generation of players, one thing remains constant – a unique experience always wins. One of the biggest mistakes tribal casinos make is thinking their branding should be that of a Vegas casino. Is creating branding like Vegas what the market wants? Possibly, but today, many casinos attempt to look and feel like a Vegas property. For exponential profit growth outside of the surrounding market, casino management and tribal leaders must come together and identify ways to be different than the competition. Everyone in a market loses in a rush to issue more free play and this approach is not sustainable. Brand personality is the key to short and long-term profits. ♣

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