Evaluating and Enhancing GameSense: A Qualitative Approach with Employees
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Executive Summary

UNLV International Gaming Institute conducted 36 focus groups to examine employees engagement and experience with the GameSense program. Focus groups were conducted on site at MGM Properties: Beau Rivage Biloxi, MGM Grand Detroit, Gold Strike Tunica, Borgata, MGM National Harbor, Las Vegas Core, Las Vegas Luxury. We conducted focus groups with GameSense Advisor Leads and Representatives, Gaming Representatives and Hosts, Gaming Supervisors-Managers-Directors, Non-Gaming Employees (e.g., Front Desk, F&B).

From the focus groups, emerged six themes about employees’ perception of the program and their experiences using it with guests. Overall, they highlighted a need for more training and regular updates on the procedures and implementations of GameSense. Employees gave specific advice on the location and quality of the GameSense materials which are outlined in the recommendation section of this report. Some of them highlighted that more training would be helpful in this sense. Employees feel that GameSense improves the brand perception of MGM and they feel proud to work for a company with this innovative program. Employees had mixed opinions on the usefulness of the program and their ability to interact effectively with guests about their gambling. Some employees feel very comfortable approaching a guest, especially if they built a personal relationship, while others are uncomfortable discussing private matters such as gambling problems with guests. Employees report that guests are interested in GameSense, especially learning about the odds of specific games and debunking myths about gambling. Overall, employees perceive GameSense gives new and more engaging tools for helping guests manage their gambling experience.

This report includes a literature review of existing academic research on responsible gambling and related programs, including a broader look at corporate social responsibility (CSR) and how employees generally engage with these programs. We then provide an overview of the focus group data collection procedures and describe the themes that arose from the data analysis: Training and Orientation, Materials, How GameSense is Helpful (for guests, for employees), How GameSense is Not Helpful, MGM Improving Brand Perception, and Employee Relationships. For each theme, we provide a description of the theme content and example quotes from the qualitative data to help explain the themes and results. The report concludes with specific recommendations to improve the use and effectiveness of the GameSense materials and program, in five categories: pamphlets, on-site material displays and access, broader marketing/outreach, general responsible gambling recommendations, and employee-facing recommendations.
Literature Review

Corporate Social Responsibility

Definition of CSR

Several scholars analyze the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), attempting to give different definitions of it. As Mamic (2005) writes, to address the concerns of consumers, activists, academics, and others, in the past years multinational enterprises started to adopt codes of conduct, which establish guidelines on topics such as child labor, wages, and environmental practices. Focusing on community-oriented activities undertaken by corporations, researchers look at CSR through the lenses of different projects, like activities that train and educate members of local communities and that are progressively involving at developing countries (Hess, Rogovsky, & Dunfee 2002). Moir (2001) explains that CSR is increasingly covering a range of topics, “such as plant closures, employee relations, human rights, corporate ethics, community relations and the environment” (p. 17).

In several cases, CSR literature goes hand in hand with scholarship on sustainability and sustainable development. Looking at the global scene, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2013) declares that nowadays transnational corporations are working on an international level to assure sustainable development and responsible social and environmental business practices. Similarly, Camilleri (2017) explains how, especially after the 2008 recession, firms are adopting new business models that embed social responsibility and sustainability into their strategies.

CSR and Marketing

In the past years, CSR has become the object of heated debates, and scholars wonder if the emergence of philanthropy ad sustainable activities among corporations represents just a marketing strategy (Hess, Rogovsky, & Dunfee 2002; Singhapakdi, Lee, Sirgy, & Senasu 2015). Similarly, researchers notice that frequently corporations communicate about their policies and practices more than they are obliged to by law (Utgård 2018). Jones, Comfort, and Hillier (2007) write that “the explicit use of CSR messages within stores could encourage customers to feel that the retailer is committed to actions and values with which they themselves wish to be associated” (p. 27). Following this idea, corporations advertise the fact that the goods or services they offer come from social responsibility-based processes, for example mentioning CSR on the labels on their products (McWilliams and Siegel 2000). Lengler-Graiff, Scheidler, and Wieseke (2018) found that in-store promotional material on CSR—such as wallpapers and brochures—have a positive effect on customers’ CSR knowledge.
Literature on CSR often shows how corporations’ responsible activities are synonyms with communication and marketing strategies. Scholars, for example, write about how strategies that aim to fight competition play a fundamental role in CSR. Analyzing green marketing activities, Bashir, Yousef, and Wani (2016) explain how they enhance competition and help companies survive in today’s dynamic market. Marketing strategies are also undertaken by firms while selecting CSR-related areas that match corporate values. As Sheikh and Beise-Zee (2011) highlight, these solutions take place “for instance by selecting initiatives that support specific business goals, choosing issues related to core products and core markets, and supporting issues that provide opportunities to meet marketing objectives” (p.28).

Studies on CSR often focus on the positive relationship between corporations’ responsible policies and consumers’ reactions in terms of sales (Bhattacharya & Sen 2004). According to Kim, Woo, Uysal, and Kwon (2017) corporations are aware of customers’ expectations in terms of CSR, balancing the need of developing a positive image with profitability. As Bhardwaj, Chatterjee, Demir, & Turut. (2018) explain, customers value positively firms that adopt CSR strategies, being willing to pay higher prices for their products and services. Conducting surveys on CSR, Creyer (1997) highlights interesting findings, which show that consumers prefer to buy products from CSR-driven firms. As a consequence, consumers tend to condemn firms’ irresponsible behavior (Singhapakdi, Lee, Sirgy, & Senasu 2012). As Creyer (1997) describes, in some cases consumers buy from unethical firms, but they want to do so at lower prices, basically punishing the unethical act.

Relationship between CSR and employees

In the past years, scholarship on CSR started to focus not only on consumers’ behavior, but also on how firms’ socially responsible initiatives influence and affect employees. Kim, Woo, Uysal, and Kwon (2017) explain that “philanthropic CSR activities including making various donations, being committed to building a better community and developing campaigns to help the needy, are good not only for the community but also for employee QWL (Quality of Work Life)” (p.1596). Additionally, researchers point out that employees are more likely to identify with their organization when they recognize that it adopts socially and environmentally responsible actions (Tian & Robertson 2017). Grayson (2010) investigates how the Human Resources sector is integral part of the corporate responsibility area, pointing out that “social and governance performance can improve employee engagement and overall business performance” (p. 2). Moreover, Grayson (2010) writes that an increasing number of candidates choose their employers looking at their CSR policies (Nidumolu, Prahalad, & Rangaswami 2009).

Analyzing the relationship between CSR and employees, scholars often focus on personal motivations. Chiang, Saprina, and Potts (2010), for example, declare that “from the literature review, employees who participate in corporate volunteer programs benefit from strengthening self-esteem, meeting new groups and making friends, feeling satisfied about making positive changes, and health benefits generated by assisting others or having social interaction with different groups of people” (p. 28). Moreover, according to Singhapakdi, Lee, Sirgy, and Senasu (2012) the added well-being...
given to employees by CSR makes them more satisfied, and consequently they are more likely to
treat their customer well, highlighting a positive relationship between CSR and employees’ sales
performances.

Problem Gambling and Responsible Gambling

Gambling as a popular recreational activity has grown with the expansion of gambling opportunities
worldwide (Monaghan and Blaszczynski 2010). The majority of those participating in gambling are
able to gamble within healthy limits; however, a small percentage of people will develop problems
with gambling. The prevalence of severe gambling problems is approximately 1-4% of the gambling
population, though there is a higher than average prevalence in the state of Nevada (Fong et al.
2011; Abbott 2007; Volberg 2002). Problem gambling causes tremendous harm to those individuals
as well as to their families. Problem gamblers experience health problems, mental distress, suicidal
ideation, relationship breakdowns, bankruptcy, and difficulties maintaining employment (Gainsbury
et al. 2013). Problem gambling can also lead individuals to withdraw from social activities, become
burdensome to their communities, and can potentially commit crimes (Monaghan and Blaszczynski
2010; Grinols and Mustard 2006).

Responsible gaming (sometimes referred to as responsible gambling) has been promoted and
regulated by governments to reduce the potential harms to individuals and communities caused by
problem gambling. Responsibility is assumed differently by different stakeholders. While
governments create responsible gambling policies, the gaming industry discourages excessive and
irresponsible play by providing real probabilities of winning to its players, and healthcare providers
with individual problem gamblers to develop responsible self-regulation. There are some variations
in the definition of responsible gaming, but they generally use a consumer protection framework.
Restricting the amount of time and money a gambler spends is key to harm minimization in
gambling (Blaszczynski et al. 2005; Breen, Buultjens and Hing 2005; Hing 2004). The principles of
responsible gaming are that the government, gaming operators, and individual consumers all take
some responsibility in reducing the potential for harm from gambling (Blaszczynski, Ladouceur and
Shaffer 2004; Delfabbro 2008).

The risks associated with gambling vary in intensity depending on the frequency, duration, and
amount of money spent (Currie et al. 2006; Schaffer 2005). The severity of problem gambling also
varies throughout the life course and over time (Abbott 2007; Hodgins and el-Guebaly 2000; Slutske
et al. 2003). In order to reduce the potential for problem gambling and its associated harms,
strategies that target the frequency and duration of gambling are necessary. Responsible gaming
initiatives have sometimes been modeled on alcohol or drug campaigns. For instance, signs have
been placed on gambling machines warning users of potential harm (Monaghan and Blaszczynski
2010). These models have been adapted often without evidence of their effectiveness. Gainsbury et
al. 2014 advocate for using evidence-based practices when developing responsible gaming policy,
and further to refine and test those policies to ensure that they are effective at reducing gambling harm.

An effective responsible gaming initiative encourages gamblers to reflect on their gambling and access whether they are spending too much time or money. Research evaluating the effectiveness of signage in gaming areas show mixed results. While gamblers have indicated that they have seen responsible gaming signs in casinos, few are able to recall the information contained in the signs and few report that they modified their behaviors as a result of viewing these signs (Monaghan and Blaszczynski 2007; Hing 2003; Hing 2004).

The goal of such signs is to motivate gamblers to evaluate their time and money spent on gambling (Delfabbro 2008). Responsible gaming efforts need to focus on distributing information that will be noticed and remembered by gamblers in such a way that they can use it to modify their gambling behaviors. The content and messaging of informative signs that inform players of game odds is based on the premise that the possession of such knowledge will positively influence gambling behaviors, although there is not evidence to support these behavioral changes (Steenbergh et al. 2004; Williams and Connolly 2006).
Focus Group Methods

We conducted 36 focus groups at the following properties: Beau Rivage Biloxi, MGM Grand Detroit, Gold Strike Tunica, Borgata, MGM National Harbor, Las Vegas Core, Las Vegas Luxury. The focus groups took place between March 12 and May 3, 2018, and lasted between 35-90 minutes each. Each group included 4-10 employees from these employment category classifications: GameSense Advisor Leads and Representatives, Gaming Representatives and Hosts, Gaming Supervisors/Managers/Directors, Non-Gaming Employees (e.g., Front Desk, F&B). The Moderator’s guiding questions can be found in Appendix A.

The focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. Employees participated voluntarily, confidentially, and received informed consent letting them know the purpose of the focus groups. The transcripts were coded and analyzed by our team between June and August 2018, and six prominent themes emerged: Training and Orientation, Materials, How GameSense is Helpful (for guests, for employees), How GameSense is Not Helpful, MGM Improving Brand Perception, and Employee Relationships.

Themes

Training and Orientation

Employees in different positions at different properties had a wide range of exposure to GameSense. Some people were confident and well trained in the program, while others had never heard of it. The ones who attended the orientation enjoyed the practical part of the GameSense orientation which used simulation training.

It was very informative, I was surprised by some of the myths, like, you know, how guests believe in the odds, and if they play the machine a certain amount of time it's going to hit. It's kind of, it's kind of interesting to hear all those little myths, what, what guests really do think, cause I really haven't experienced it myself, I'm not really a gambler.

I thought the training was good, I thought that like, I had it here at the Mirage, I thought they they involved us, they made it interesting, I thought, and you know it was it was kind of like a facelift on our old program When the Fun Stops.

All employees felt that more training was necessary, either an initial orientation or a refresher course. Employees would like flexible training opportunities, such as in-person or online options. They agreed that annual refresher courses would be beneficial.

I think it's good, I mean we do the refresher classes about responsible gaming every year, we have to get signed off on, maybe we can add something in terms of GameSense to it. That we have to do every year. I think that'd be good.
Refreshers, but it's not just, you know, once a year. You have to become part of our vocabulary when we conduct these team updates on a daily basis. Just like we've mentioned, this is today's promotion, remember GameSense.

Materials
Employees had many suggestions for how to optimize the use of GameSense

Brochures/pamphlets
- They are too long. They should be shorter, with less information. Guests get overwhelmed with too much information.
- They should be more portable, perhaps the size of a business card with a QR code they can scan that will go to the website.
- They should be featured more prominently. They are hidden in many locations.

Mlife Desk
- There are already too many brochures at the desk
- Employees don’t feel comfortable adding more information to what they already have to say.
- Guests are in a hurry to get done with the Mlife desk and GameSense takes extra time and leads to longer waits for people in line.

Hotel
GameSense should be mentioned in:
- Booking confirmation email
- On key card of hotel room
- On the television screen in hotel room
- Printed materials in the room, pens, etc.

Kiosks
- There should be more kiosks, some properties did not have them yet at the time of the focus group

Touchscreens
- Feature touchscreens more prominently. They are hidden in many locations.
- Guests are not aware that they are touchscreens. There should be a sign letting them know that they can interact with the screen.

App
- There should be a GameSense app.
- Young guests will be more likely to engage with GameSense in a digital platform.

Other
- Printed material should be on the restaurant tables, ATMs, in theaters, and other non-casino areas of the property.
- There should be GameSense pins for employees to wear on their uniforms.
- GameSense should be advertised on highway billboards.
- GameSense should be featured on the MGM website homepage. It is currently in the casino section.
- There should be less brochures and more digital material like email

There's kind of a lot of it though. Like for me, at the Mlife desk where we keep all the material, it does feel a little bit like overkill, to be honest (...) I guess volume, the total number of pieces we have on GameSense, right. So we've got the brochure, we've got two different rack cards, we've got some inserts, like it's kind of a lot.

I almost wish that there was less paper material, and there was more like more of a GameSense teaser program. Like I wish there were something like a QR code for GameSense and for an app or something that you can get a card maybe that size, a smaller size, and it says GameSense and gives you a quick blurb, and that there was some something to get you interested in researching it more on your own because everybody has a smart(phone)

Maybe if they're, I think maybe do more digital advertisements, a way to reach out to more people that way, like through email, or something like that, anyone who's gotten on the email list, you know we send out advertisements all the time, well include the GameSense on all the advertisements, why not? Put it on there, so that way they see it that way, it'll reach more people, as opposed to us handing them a piece of paper that they're not going to really keep, and especially in this age. Go digital, or some way of reaching out and sending information without physically giving somebody something, cause nobody physically wants things anymore.

How GameSense is Helpful

For guests...

GameSense is different from When the Fun Stops because it is more friendly and less stigmatizing. It is also focused on preventative behaviors, rather than problems that have already developed.

it's more, it's more fun, it's more out there and more creative, so I think that's the difference between the two. I think this is a lot better than the other because the other was more set on just, if you know somebody that needs help, here's a number that you can give them so they can call. But that was it. And this is just a little bit more fun, so.

I like how it it brings like awareness I guess about like responsible gaming, but then at the same time it took away like the seriousness of like having like a problem

Employees believe GameSense will be particularly beneficial for first time gamblers and young guests who will be able to use the information to develop good gaming habits.
I mean it should go out to everyone, but the easiest group is the new members because they're just starting out at least in a sense they're just starting out so it's easier to have them know about being responsible and they can, you know, grow from it, whereas the people who've been gaming for 20 plus years of their lives it's a lot harder.

As opposed to people before born before that, like a lot of the baby boomers who, you know, gambling was their big thing, Vegas was all about gambling and nothing else. Now a lot of more people are coming here for non-gaming activities and you know this you know really appeals more towards them than you know say the the older generation. I guess they're they're not as you know offended by someone giving them something like this as say you know someone born in like 55

For employees…

Employees feel more comfortable talking to guests about GameSense because the content is interesting and helpful. Guests often ask about the odds of games, and employees are able to give them clear answers in a friendly way. It is important to clarify the myths they might have about gambling. This gives them the tools to manage their behavior responsibly and enjoy themselves. Employees believe that guests having fun will remain loyal to MGM.

But now with with GameSense it gives us a little more personal touch to it, where we can explain you know how the games work, why we were able to build these places the way we do, things like that, so it's just a little more personal touch that we have with the guest versus here's a brochure, call this number, it'll help you, and send them on their way.

It's easier for us to have that conversation with the guest about responsible gambling because we have that tool right in front of us that's visible every day all day you know on video monitors on pathways and stuff like that, and I would say that you know my experience has been very positive and that you know guests have come up to me and asked me about what is GameSense what is it about, so it's really been easier to have that conversation.

Employees see GameSense as another tool available to them to manage the guest’s experience. They prefer it to more drastic solutions, such as self-exclusion or security intervention. They also prefer it to less effective solutions such as suggesting they call a 1-800 number or suggesting Gambler’s Anonymous.

Yeah it's a lot lot friendlier message delivered to the guest, hey, here's how gambling works, let's keep it you know fun, set a budget, all these good tips, versus like hey if if when the fun stops, like it's it's a lot more proactive and a lot easier to deliver that message.

I think it's a better program, like I said, it's taken it from being a negative and trying to turn it into a positive. It's trying to you know we don't want to, with the proliferation of gaming everywhere now, you don't want to burn
out your customers, you want to make sure that they understand that we have other things for them to do on the property.

How GameSense is Not Helpful

Some employees do not think that guests who have a gambling problem will be motivated by a pamphlet, especially people who have been gambling for many years. Moreover, they are in a hurry to play, and employees perceive that they are not open to discussing GameSense.

…we talked a little bit about it, like explaining just the basics in the pamphlet and directing them to the touch screen if they wanted to learn more. Most people, honestly, most people don't care. Like we try to bring it up to every new member because we’re told it's going to be on our secret shopper thing, and most people just laugh. They take the pamphlets.

They want their comps, they want to play, they want to earn, they want to come back, they don’t want to hear like the negative.

Guests do not seek out Gamsense materials on their own. When employees have approached guests with GameSense materials, they often will take the materials without engaging with them or become agitated with the employee.

Like I've mentioned, they may pick it up like, they may like just look and say, and then sit it back down and say, can I print my card. They just look and might assume that that may be just talking about things that's going on throughout the casino. They haven't actually thoroughly, I've seen one person did really look at it, but that was my only encounter.

I think you know the people that really have a problem with gambling aren't going to walk to the side of the cage and grab three of those brochures and read about their problem. Like you're going to need to catch them and you know lend kind of a human touch to it, I think.

The timing of when an employee approaches a guest with GameSense information represents a challenge. If a guest is enjoying herself, then she does not want to be interrupted. If a guest has lost a lot of money or is chasing a win, approaching her at that time can be awkward and jeopardize the relationship with the guest.

Yeah, then the other thing is there's just so many different messages we're always trying to get to our guests, and this just you know and this is a very important message but you know it's just one more thing that you have to balance than trying to deliver a message to a guest.
One thing I think too is, if that's something we're going to do, be proactive, I think that's something that we should try to talk to the customers while they're coming in the door because most of the time, at least in slots, they're sitting down playing. They really don't want to be bothered. You know, so they're into the game. You know, they're spending their money. So that's something I think we need to approach them before they actually on the casino floor.

Employees state that a person with a visible gambling problem will not benefit from GameSense because they are beyond the stage where this information will help them.

Or, or what does GameSense offer at the too late moment of no return when somebody's already lost all their money, and then they're reading the sign going, oh fuck.

Because, I'm sorry, I've gambled many times where I've looked up, and I don't see that sign until I'm like, yeah, ok, well. So when you have just average everyday people depending on what level of addiction they are because usually the addicts are the ones going to sit there and gamble their house away thinking they're going to own something like this. What is so impactfully different about GameSense where the protective measures that are offered are put into place and effective enough to stop that from happening? That's a preemptive strike. That's not program after.

Employees express confusion at the perceived contradiction between free drinks and other promotions for those who gamble and the goals of GameSense. The wide availability of gambling options in Las Vegas deters from the effectiveness of GameSense if guests can gamble more freely elsewhere.

…I think that if you're trying to be that socially responsible, then you shouldn't be in this business. That's what this business is. That's like if you've got, if you're working on Bourbon Street, and I won't serve anybody who's an alcoholic, guess what? The bar next door's going to be full and yours is going to be empty. You know, I think that that's, at some point you accept the responsibility of what you're doing. That's just like big tobacco. They know they kill people every year. You know. But we haven't legislated to get rid of it because people are going to do it regardless, look at the war on drugs. We've been fighting the war on drugs since I was a kid, and we've never stopped anybody from doing anything they wanted to do, yet.

I do find that all I've, when I first got the brochures, when it first came out, it goes against the general motto of Las Vegas, you know hottest slots in town and all the like local casinos that try to get I guess locals in, tourists in, by having the hottest slots in town, so it's kind of it's like the truth teller I guess you could call it, but it's only for MGM and MGM doesn't market any type of slot hotness of any kind, so, but yeah, I think all raucous tourists do go from one property to the next to the next, so

I honestly think this is kind of counterintuitive to casino players because it's discouraging you from playing longer, and that's how casino players earn all their comps, like playing longer. So having…2 different messages in the casino is really, really confusing…
There’s a perception that MGM is adopting this program because of requirements from Massachusetts and that it is merely a public relations strategy rather than a program that helps guests.

_Like, I think it's great to have resources available for people, to be responsible as a company, but I, I don't know. I think it's up for the individual to want something, not to force everyone to go through training when we're going to forget, I'm going to forget most of it by the time it becomes important. If someone comes up to me and tells me they have a problem, I'm not equipped to deal with that. I need to move on to someone else who's been through more extensive training._

_Is there really that big of an outcry within this, within our company for us to really push this program, because I, I haven't seen this at all before?_ 

_.....I think it's because we went into Massachusetts, we went into Massachusetts, and the state of Massachusetts wants this program in casinos._

**MGM Improving Brand Perception**

**Brand perception for guests**

Employees perceive GameSense as a positive rebranding of MGM image as a place for entertainment and fun, not just gambling and losing money. GameSense is important explaining the value of gambling as just one type of entertainment among many options within the casino property.

_They're, yeah they're intentions are good, I mean, and our whole new thing is we're not in the hospitality business. We're in the entertainment business. Which is huge, and that's what they want to focus on is entertainment, and they want you to be entertained without losing your shirt, you know. But still spending money and being entertained. So, I appreciate what they're trying to do…_

GameSense provides tools for employees to reach out to guests who may be gambling too much. This is particularly helpful when interacting with guests who are local to the area, as they have more access to the casino and potentially more opportunities to develop problems. Employees see GameSense as improving the image of the casino by offering information to guests without requiring employees to identify their problems.

_…we have a social responsibility to that, and we are the ones that are supposed to know the people better than anyone else, and I have had in the past conversations where I tell this, listen, take a break, take a month off, you know this local was coming in almost every day. So it's great that we have the information there but I do believe that we we're not doctors or psychologists or anything, so we can't diagnose someone with a problem, but we should be proactive in if we're going to take it seriously, if you see signs of problem gaming, I think we do have a social responsibility to to help them and get them them in that direction._
GameSense is a unique program and showcases MGM as a leader in corporate social responsibility.

Well, the only, you know the only thing I would add to it is, typically the companies that succeed are the ones that stand out, they have things that make them different from the rest. I think our entertainment makes us different, I think a strong presence of you know social responsibility, this is just an aspect of it, is one of the things that make us stand out. Whether it be you know going green, helping out our communities, foundations, this is just one more way that we have to show that we're not your normal company.

I think everybody, you know, plays a part, and especially everybody in this room definitely. You know, we have, we're, we have a responsibility to ensure that the guest is fully educated, whether it be slots, table games, player development, their odds, and you know, we instruct the guest to either, you know, go through a pamphlet or walk them through it, you know. Some of the newer guests that want to know the odds, it gives us a definite advantage over other properties that don't have GameSense, so we can actually touch it, feel it, see it, instead of just, you know, oh here's a here's a pamphlet, and just walk away. It's more interactive.

GameSense shows guests that MGM cares about them and their wellbeing, not just their money. They feel a sense of loyalty to MGM because they feel MGM was loyal to them.

it was just, to me, it was just one of those things where you know it reiterates that you work for a company that not only values profit but also values people and their families. Just like, we've always known that MGM values us as employees and our families, but to also see that it's not just you know like the guest chasing a dollar, we're not just chasing a dollar, that we actually care about our guest well-being, and everything, so you know as an employee, all the, everybody that's in here that's an employee we care about our guest, and we knew that, every day we care about them and we didn't want them to spend their livelihood here gambling and losing family so to see the company feel that very same way just adds to the, to the love we have for MGM.

Focusing on the overall experience at MGM as entertainment, not just gambling, makes guests more comfortable with their gambling loses and more likely to create fond memories.

If you're doing nothing but losing the whole time you're at a hotel, if you have a show, you can be like, man I lost, but this show was absolutely amazing, and then the food we had here was incredible, and man the staff members were great. Yeah, we lost money. Going back? Absolutely.

Brand perception for employees

Employees feel that corporate responsibility strategies are always good. Employees feel proud to work at MGM.
I think it was a bold move to go out there and do this, and I think it’s the right thing to do, and it does, it, you know. I’m proud that we did it. It’s tough to be in the industry and to come out and say some of the things, you know, but the other saying, what is that? Hope to win but expect to lose, right?

I’m proud to say it because it’s a responsibility thing, I think it’s a large company -- some of those large companies will sweep things under the rug and it’s all about money but. In this situation it’s something they brought this into MGM, I think it’s amazing I kinda stand behind them for that. So if you want this program to take off in the sense that you brought it in initially, put a little bit more power behind it, but I think it’s all about responsibility and that is what they are trying to get out to the public, that MGM wants to be seen as ‘yes, we are a big large corporation, but yes we are concerned about the people who come into our casino and we’re really want you to come in here and gamble responsibly. So it’s all about them trying to say “be responsible”

GameSense gives them a tool that helps improve their relationships with guests and makes their job easier.

… to be honest, whether or not the company and all of its employees actually care about the guests gambling responsibly or not, at least there’s the perception that we’ve made an effort to be on the right side of talking about responsible gaming. Right? Like us being aggressive and talking to guests about responsible gaming could impact our guest visits, our revenue, but I think at least the way that this program is set up, it allows us to have an easier conversation and encourage guest education on it.

Brand perception at state level

GameSense supports MGM in showing corporate social responsibility to the regulators in states where they do business.

… this is all stuff that was already part of the culture, but now we just have a name to it, and we have a tracking system from UNLV research lab that we can show to the Massachusetts gaming board that like, yeah we are fostering this culture of responsible gaming given that we were already fostering that culture, and now we have this…

Employee Relationships

Employees differ in their approaches to guests regarding GameSense. Some feel that they are not in a position to determine whether a person needs GameSense information. They are not always comfortable talking about GameSense and feel that it is beyond the scope of their job to become involved in the guests’ personal problems. They know how much a guest is gambling, but they may not know whether that amount of money is causing a problem for them.
Well I said you have to be careful because you don’t want to insult the guests. I think you have to pick, you know, you have to be aware of the situation and if the person is coming to that point, like I said, you can give them, present it. I don’t think you should just hand them out randomly. I don’t feel that’s appropriate. You know, it’s like you said, it’s like handing out, you know, you know, somebody from AA handing out a pamphlet when you walk into a bar. I mean I don’t think that’s appropriate, and I don’t think this would be appropriate.

Employees are not confident that they are supposed to intervene in a guest’s gambling. They worry that they will be reprimanded by a supervisor if they disrupt a guest’s gambling. They also worry about the repercussions from the guests or their families who might be offended by their intervention. They will often contact their supervisor or security instead of approaching the guest directly.

I think it’s just the, it’s always going to be awkward, no matter what, whether or not it’s early or late, it’s just, that’s a hard conversation sometimes to have with, you know, people, you know, in that situation. So it’s just the awkwardness of it no matter what. It’s just always going to be, you know, sensitive.

However, if the guest is interested, employees do feel comfortable sharing GameSense information with them.

If a customer comes to me with a problem and states that they admit they have a problem, I don’t have an issue giving them the information. That’s helping a guest, you know.

As long as they ask for the help or something like that, it’s hard too. We’re put in the hard situation. Like you don’t want to like intervene and bother people. Now you’re being offensive.

Some employees feel that they have a moral obligation to intervene when they see a person in distress from gambling. This happens especially in cases where they have developed relationships with guests over a long period of time.

They see the same guests over and over and over, they get to know them, and now they see a clue of like, I’m not, I can’t win, or this game is not paying. Then they got, they got some little things that that attendant or he can speak on, like this should be just entertainment. You shouldn’t be using your bill money. It enables him to handle that situation a little earlier. And then, instead of just waiting until she like lost all her rent money, and she’s mad.

Employees do agree that context matters when approaching a guest with GameSense information. Their experiences guides them to know how receptive to the information the guest will be. For example, someone who has been drinking heavily and is shouting at a machine will not benefit from being handed a pamphlet. Employees believe that some guests are beyond help, and they will gamble excessively regardless of their intervention.
Well, I mean, to identify somebody who might be, who could utilize this, there's always some type of sign, either they're, you know, how they're gaming, you know, how much they've lost. There's always something. You just don't go up to somebody. But in that situation, that was an extreme situation with the reaction after he lost, but in the past when so I personally had to go up to somebody or introduce maybe taking time off or things like that, like I said that's always probably past the point of when they should've been approached. You know. I think this will, at least you can bring it up in a more lighthearted way where you can even just get the idea out there before you would have to do anything else.

Employees feel that building relationships with guests is important and should happen organically. It is through these conversations that they are able to bring up GameSense in a way that is comfortable for both the employee and doesn't embarrass the guest. Embarrassment and shame should always be avoided.

You know because sometimes you think like what if this this guest is going to say like, what do you think? I gambled a lot? That's why you're giving me this? You know, those kinds, but it never happened to me personally so far yet. But yeah, and those kind of thinking when we got all of this, and we got the intro about the GameSense, but yeah. At first kind of like, do I give it to him or not, depends. But we give it to everybody now.

The most common conversation that employees have about GameSense is about the odds of specific games. Guests are especially interested in this information and seek it out from employees.

...we always include the understanding the odds when we mention it because that's kind of a big part of the responsible gaming as well, at least we feel like it is. Most people are really interested in that when we bring it up to them, and so we'll go through those a lot just because they'll be like, oh I didn't know that like penny machines have different house advantage than nickel machines or quarter machines, and so they'll find it useful, maybe for the wrong reasons because they'll think that they have better odds of winning on that particular game, but I mean, at least they're taking the information, and they're, you know, they have that information.
**Recommendations**

Based on these focus groups, we are able to make some recommendations to improve the use and effectiveness of the GameSense programs.

1) **Pamphlets.** Pamphlets should be placed more prominently in order to be seen by guests. Employees suggested placing them in hotel rooms and well as at the front desk of the hotel. They also suggested making use of technologies to create a digital version of the pamphlet that guests receive when booking their hotel stay online. A digital version of the pamphlet can also be placed in rewards kiosks. Other suggestions were to place the materials in locations where guests might go to take a break, such as near a bathroom or near a restaurant. Employees also feel that the size of the pamphlet is too large and suggest creating a pocket sized version, or a business card sized version. The variety of types and volume of GameSense materials is confusing for employees and guests to navigate. In terms of content, employees suggested adding directions for how to find on-site help in the casino, as well as printing the materials in languages other than English. Finally, it would be useful to add a QR code to the pamphlet so that a guest can scan the code and be directed to more online resources.

2) **On-Site Material Displays & Access.** Improvements can be made to improve use and access of materials. A dedicated GameSense expert at the M Life desk would improve the quality and consistency of information that guests receive about the program. Better signage, specifically a sign that indicates the GameSense kiosk is a touchscreen would also increase access. Having a dedicated GameSense event as well as creating games around the learning material will both improve access to GameSense as guests will find them enjoyable.

3) **Broader Marketing/Outreach.** In order to make the program effective, more targeted and broader marketing actions should be undertaken. Employees expressed that a GameSense app for mobile devices could be a good strategy. According to them, GameSense should be advertised also through websites such as Mlife.com, MyVegas, and the individual properties web pages, along with a social media campaign. It would be important also to send GameSense material to guests via mail, email, and texts. Additionally, GameSense marketing strategy should include TV commercials and billboards. Finally, the program would benefit from nearby University outreach, and this should particularly involve regional properties.

4) **RG Recommendations.** There are some strategies that could help in terms of responsible gambling. Employees suggested that GameSense should be included in the self-exclusion program. Moreover, an app for mobile devices that helps with self-budgeting could be helpful. Finally, it could be useful to create an off-site rest spot, far from the gaming area.
5) **Employee-facing Recommendations.** Employees’ training plays a fundamental role in terms of GameSense effectiveness. Employees pointed out the need to have more information about the program, especially on how to approach guests without offending them. Moreover, they stated that the advisor name should be advertised at all times to them. In terms of refresher training, a large number of employees declared they would like to have pre-shift meetings.
References


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Appendix A

Moderator’s Guiding Questions
MGM GameSense Employees Focus Groups
UNLV International Gaming Institute
PI: Brett Abarbanel

Warm-up

Let’s start by doing some introductions. I know some of you know each other already, but we don’t know you.

First, let’s have everyone introduce yourself to the group. Please share:

1) Your first name
2) How long you have been working at MGM, and
3) How long you have been working in the gaming industry

Thank you, everyone. Now, as we continue, just remember to answer to the best of your ability and if you don’t know how to answer something, that is fine too.

Guiding Questions

Introductory Questions

- We’ll start broadly – what sort of training did you receive on the GameSense program?
  - Training duration? What did it include?
  - What were your initial thoughts on the program after you left the training?
  - What kind of responsible gambling training had you received before? Was this different? How so?
- Now that the program has been implemented for about [3-6] months, what has been your general experience with the GameSense program so far?
- What do you think about the aims of GameSense?
  - What is the program trying to accomplish?
- What, in your opinion, is the most positive aspect of GameSense? Why?
- What, in your opinion, is the most negative aspect of GameSense? Why?

Employee Engagement with GameSense

- Has the GameSense program changed the way you think about MGM? If yes, how?
Do you feel like your role in the GameSense program has a purpose?

What are your thoughts on the GameSense content? (do not include for nongaming employees)

Has the GameSense program impacted your job? In what ways?

**Views on Impact on Gambling Behavior**

Do you feel comfortable interacting with customers on responsible gambling?

- Do you feel comfortable interacting with customers on GameSense?
- Is this program enhancing your relationship with customers? Why/Why not?
- Did the training prepare you for your typical interactions with guests?
- What are some ways we can improve communication to customers?
  - Is the language used in GameSense easy to understand?

Do you think that GameSense is likely to improve the gambling behavior of MGM’s customers? If yes, how? If no, why not?

Do you think that GameSense is likely to improve the MGM customer experience? If yes, how? If no, why not?

Do you think that GameSense has improved the MGM brand? Why/why not?

**Overall Improvement Suggestions**

Thinking back on the training you received during the GameSense rollout, are there ways that it could have been introduced that would make it better for you?

What would you suggest to improve the GameSense program, based on your experience?

  - If there was one thing that you could change right away, what would it be?

**Concluding Questions**

Of all the things we’ve discussed today, what would you say are the most important issues or topics you would like to express about GameSense and your experience so far?

Is there anything else you would like to add to the discussion that we have not already covered?

**End of Questions**