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John Romero is a Casino Marketing Consultant, Writer and Lecturer specializing in direct mail, database building, floor promotions and direct response advertising for gaming clients in the US and abroad.

News & Opinions

May 1, 2011:

Gottlieb's Win Cards: 25 years and counting

Do Blackjack and Craps tables ever intimidate the customers? Some pit bosses I know would laugh and say, "Hell, no." But others grudgingly admit the rules of those two games often scare players away. Some of them actually know how to play the games, but don't want to make an embarrassing mistake. In the mid-80s, when the old Sahara-Tahoe was a client, I used to go there every two weeks to see my pal Larry Close, the GM. We'd eat breakfast in a little pastry shop off the casino and most of the time a former dealer named Ted Gottlieb would join us. Ted had some working models of a BJ guide he named "Win Cards." Did I think casinos could use them to teach wary customers to play, and thereby remove the intimidation factor on table games? Well, maybe, I told him—so start making the rounds. Ted promptly packed his Win Cards, hired Pam Butler to help him do the marketing, and marched into battle. It wasn't easy, and the first few sales he and Pam made might have been a case of sheer persistence. But a chance meeting in 1988 (in an elevator!) with executives of Atlantic Associates put Win Cards into cruise ship casinos. Ted's colorful little plastic cards equipped with a dial to tell players the best plays, and when to make them at 21, Craps and Roulette, were perfect for cruise ships. And when Larry adopted Win Cards for The Mill Casino in Oregon, business began to move. Excuses such as "I'm not teaching anybody anything," and "They'll hurt the win margin" finally gave way to sales. In 25 years, Ted says, ten million players in more than 185 casinos, cruise ships, riverboats and tribal casinos bought Win Cards. Major casinos include Mandalay Bay, Luxor, Excalibur, Harrah's/Harveys Tahoe, and Circus Circus in Reno and Las Vegas. In 1986, Ted sold his Win Cards to casinos for \$5 each—a price that has never changed. Congratulations, Ted and Pam, on the 25th anniversary of the product that just kept winning.

Tip of the Week

May 1, 2011:

When cost became zero, Nevada came in to help

Win Cards (story at left) maybe the first promotion that weathered all casino budget cuts. The casino pays \$5 a set for the Win Cards—then sells them for \$20 and makes a \$15 profit. Next, the casino gives the Win Cards buyer \$30 in special chips that are generally valued at half their face value—plus a "Dealer's Tip" coupon. (Of course, the player must join the casino's player club.) So the casino has educated its rookie players in the game (BJ, Craps or Roulette), created play with the special chips, and didn't pay a dime for it. The Nevada Gaming Control Board liked the program so well they set up special accounting procedures to help casinos use it...when Ted and Pam were in Puerto Rico to train the staff of the Condado Plaza in the use of Win Cards, they showed up at noon on Tuesday—as the casino manager wished. When no one came, Ted asked him when training could begin. "Manana," replied the casino manager, which Ted and Pam understood as "tomorrow." But no one showed the following day. The casino manager again told them training would begin "manana." After some probing, our two heroes discovered that "manana" in Puerto Rico also meant "Not today." Final add: "More reasons casinos gave in the beginning for not buying Win Cards. "All our customers already know how to play," and the kicker, "We have plenty of table game players and don't need any more right now."



Ted Gottlieb
President

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"Gaming International Inc. markets WIN CARDS... instructional cards that work to attract and develop new players for Blackjack, Craps and Roulette."

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