



## Don't Gamble on Success

by Haydee Antezana

In recent years, one can see the massive efforts casinos and resorts are putting into re-branding, expanding and improving their facilities. From high tech boardrooms to celebrity chef restaurants, outdoor plazas, award winning spas, adult only hotel towers, state-of-the-art event venues and high internet connectivity – the race is on to provide a more “wow” experience than the neighboring competition.

### The Forgotten Truth

Innovation, expansion and differentiation are key to elevate a brand's identity, heighten awareness, attract new markets and retain existing guests in the very competitive gaming industry. However, in the rush to be ahead of the game, many times a simple truth is forgotten – customers don't buy into new shiny buildings, 4-D video slot machines or exotic wellness packages. They buy into people they like and trust.

Patrons will certainly notice the new re-branded look and feel in a physical space and on social media platforms. But is the renovated brand, look and feel communicated via the employees?

### The Best Brand Advertisement

Each year, millions of dollars are spent on social media, billboards, TV and radio ads, offering a promise of a bigger and better casino and resort experience. Yet a recent Nielsen survey showed that 83% of respondents said the most trusted advertising comes from word of mouth. These are the people who have already had an experience with the casino and resort.

It's not to say traditional advertising has to be ignored. Rather, the promise of the experience promoted through paid media needs to be supported to ensure success. How is this achieved? By putting the efforts into who is offering the experience... it's the valet attendant, cocktail server, cage cashier, and so on. In essence, the employees are “walking billboards.”

When employees are engaged and in tune with the renovated brand, they become a casino's greatest marketing and sales representative. The best brand advertisements are the brand ambassadors – future-proof them for success.

### Elevate Brand Reputation

To elevate the brand's reputation it's not only the online brand that needs to be managed but also the human-to-human brand. This means empowering brand ambassadors with the right skills to elevate the brand at every touch point.

Every day, patrons interact with employees who are totally unaware of the value of first impressions, and how they can

provide an experience rather than just a service. What will guests remember more? The fact that not all the lobby furniture arrived for the opening week or that they were greeted by name by a server when they went to dine?

### Consistency Builds Trust

Empowering employees to be “on brand” is critical for success in business today. A new expansion or development heightens a guest's expectations. The future success of any expansion is determined by a few factors. One of the most important is: “Are the teams prepared to meet these high expectations and make that all important first impression?” Everyone needs to be on the same page when it comes to representing the “renovated” brand. For customers to have brand trust, there needs to be consistency.

If the total professional presence, look and attitude displayed by the employees are inconsistent with the new brand evolution, there will be an immediate lack of trust. This often results in the loss of a valued existing or potential patron.

### Change is Scary

Change is necessary for progress, but it can be unsettling. Not only can it cause employees anxiety but also current loyal patrons as well. Team members may express fears like, “I don't feel confident to interact with the new guest the expansion will attract – it's not the same guest I'm used to.” Employees need to have the knowledge and skills to deal with new target markets. While certain patrons may be excited by the new development, some might feel apprehensive. This is where employees can help them feel they are part of the new exciting journey. These brand ambassadors are the glue to uniting the old with the new brand – they help to humanize the experience.

### Common Mistakes

Many casinos and resorts strive to move from a “Walmart” brand experience to a “Nordstrom” experience. Often, many teams are just taken through a customer service refresher. Providing them with brand ambassador skills that are in synergy with the renovated brand look and feel is often not considered, but should be.

Another common mistake made is that online frontline and management teams are upskilled to represent the brand. In today's fiercely competitive gaming market, one needs an army of brand ambassadors – everyone who comes into contact with the patrons needs to be on the same page.

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Many times management forgets to communicate the what, how and why’s of the renovated brand, resulting in disengaged and demotivated teams. Employees need to feel passionate, connected and part of the brand journey long before the project is finished.

**Questions to Ask**

- What is your top concern when it comes to your team members/new hires representing your brand?
- Do your teams display a professional image and presence that represents your brand and values?
- Do you have a program empowering employees with the critical skills to be brand ambassadors?

- Are your employees motivated to contribute towards the future success of your casino and resort?

Even though staying ahead of the curve is critical in the gaming and hospitality space, it means little if the guest experience provided by the employees is a poor one. Before launching a TV campaign, unveiling a new logo or state of the art building, ensure the employees brand provides an experience equal to the investment, time and effort that went into the expansion project. ♣

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