

The very best online gaming experience

Tim Johnson, CEO of The Carmen Media Group, discusses the Group's growth in an explosively expanding industry



Recent figures from AC Nielsen show the online gaming industry experiencing up to a 40 percent year on year growth, and with the sector enjoying a coming of age, a small group of major players are coming to the fore and driving the industry forward.

In 1998, Tim Johnson created what is now the second largest online casino group globally and we asked him why he thinks the industry is experiencing such success.

"There's no doubt that the emergence of professional, independent bodies to ensure gaming sites are at the forefront of responsible gaming have been a very effective, and much needed, driver for the industry. After a comprehensive and strict auditing process, our seven flagship casinos in the Belle Rock Gaming stable were awarded the eCOGRA Players Seal of Approval, given in recognition of fair game play, prompt payouts, player service and responsible casino conduct. It's that level of acknowledgement that's needed to put players more at ease when choosing where to play. The Interactive Gaming Council is another example of an independent body giving the industry, and those key players in it, the legitimacy it has craved for years."

How has The Carmen Media Group come to be one of the leading lights of online gaming? "With sector expansion at this rate comes a need to diversify offerings to compete at the top level. For example last year we created Belle Rock Gaming, an umbrella brand linking our casino and poker offerings. This mix makes it one of the most experienced global gaming operators, but more importantly it provides credibility, trust and enhanced player experience, while also allowing us to offer our players bigger prizes."

"Diversification has also led us to the sports betting arena - last year we launched the Gaming Club Sportsbook and again the Belle Rock Gaming umbrella brand has given it the credibility and trust that is so important in today's market."

• With any gambling based business



comes an association with addiction and the negative elements of casino play. What does The Carmen Media Group do to help and support its players? "Many products and services available on the open market are open to abuse, and just like the responsible companies who make and distribute cars, alcohol cleaners and over-the-counter pharmaceuticals, we are committed to promoting responsible gaming and take regular proactive steps to help prevent problem gaming.

One issue that recently came to the fore is under age gaming. We were quick to step in and reiterate our zero tolerance policy for underage gaming by stopping the use of a payment method that was available to underage people.

As a small part of our overall responsible gaming approach, we're looking at working with a network of partners, so we can refer people quickly and effectively to organisations that are there to help.

It's a business-wide initiative and one we are totally committed to - transparency in everything we do in this area is core to the business' success."

So what were the highlights for The Carmen Media Group in 2004? "My personal highlight was helping raise nearly £400,000 for The Caudwell Group, a charitable trust making direct donations to sick, disabled and terminally ill children. They stage an annual Caudwell Cycle Challenge and this year chose to ride 2,300 miles from

Athens to London. We gave them a Land Rover and driver courtesy of The Gaming Club, one of our casino brands.

"Our ever-increasing grass roots programme flourished in 2004. We worked with the Southern California Poker Tour helping communities where people want to play in televised tournaments but simply can't afford to. And then we had The Gaming Club sponsorship of The World Poker Championship in a two-year deal, and PrimaPoker.com's support for the Monte Carlo Millions - both giving us a fantastic profile.

"But 2004 really did exceed all our expectations. The Gaming Club won the prestigious Top Progressive Slot award in the 2004 Gambling Online Reader's Poll Awards. The 2004 Strictly Slots Best of Online also awarded it Best Video Poker Site and Best Jackpot Site and Inside Edge has shortlisted it for Online Casino of the Year. Our other brands were also acknowledged in a number of categories, and to finish the year with such recognition is a testament to the hard work put in behind the scenes."

2005 has a lot in store for the Carmen Media Group but it is their commitment to delivering the very best online gaming experience whilst simultaneously ensuring they operate in the safest environment that will undoubtedly pave the way for them to even greater successes in years to come.