



Safeguarding casino players: seat belts or airbags?

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The latest safety feature you can add on to your new Mercedes is the PRE-SAFE® Sound which “emits a harmless noise tuned specifically to trigger a reflex inside your ear to safeguard it from the pressures of a loud crash.” All Mercedes (and other marques) now come with a raft of inbuilt safety measures like lane assist, blind spot assist, and adaptive braking. No more rolling back on a hill start! So, all very handy, but what’s that got to do with gambling?

At the moment, ‘responsible gambling’ tools almost all require the customer to do something ‘responsible’. Set a deposit limit. Decide whether or not they want to take some time out. Press ‘yes’ when they get a message asking whether or not they want to continue their slots session. We don’t need to remind you that the majority of gamblers simply don’t believe that they need to use these tools.

The gambling industry prides itself on innovation, but in the 10+ years we’ve both been working in this space, we’ve seen very little advance on the basic tools. Lots of effort has gone into identifying risky behaviour, but that bumps up against the thorny issue of persuading someone to then modify that behaviour. And yes, that means asking them to set deposit limits. Take a time out. Not play slots continuously. How about, rather than asking a gambler to put on a seat belt, we built in the equivalent of airbags, lane assist and PRE-SAFE® instead?

What might that look like? At the Game Safety Institute we’ve been working hard over the last year to identify product features which could result in harm. We believe we’ve got a sound product risk model, based on the available academic research, for slot games. The slots equivalent of ‘lane assist’ could be ‘stake assist’. If you suddenly stake some way above your average, the game warns you that you’ll burn through your wallet more quickly. We’d love to see game designers apply their design smarts to an idea like this to make it appear like a game feature, rather than a ‘play responsibly!’ warning.

There’s a term in the automotive industry – homologation – for the work that needs to be done to adjust the safety features on a car for each country. In the gambling world, the UK (for example) has banned certain platform features such as autoplay. Certain US states don’t allow online casino at all, but do have sports betting. Games studios could

co-operate to develop ideas which will enable entry into new markets with safer, more player-friendly games. We've seen the industry innovate 'crash' games: can it also innovate with safety features for those games – for example, explaining how the odds change depending on your betting strategy, but building this into the game play?

The safety features in a Mercedes don't generally reduce the enjoyment of driving the car, unless you get a thrill from burning the clutch on a hill start. Could slots and game designers think about how to build in safety, rather than relying on the player to use platform features? Mercedes' safety features are front and centre of their website. What if the gambling industry adopted the same attitude? If it worked to give players games which will enable them to get the entertainment they are looking for, without draining their wallet faster than they expect, or encouraging them to chase jackpots at immensely long odds? This doesn't have to be done by using blunt instruments such as slowing spin times, mandating a max stake size or enforcing a nominal 'affordability'. Baking safety intelligence into the design of slots games and their platforms could have an outsize positive impact on the sustainability of online casino.

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