



GAMING FLOOR DESIGN

HELPING OWNERS AND MANAGERS TO KEEP UP WITH THE LATEST INSIGHTS AND EXPERT ADVICE

The gaming area can be a vibrant and exciting part of your venue or a dark corner where only the bravest of patrons will venture.

Some businesses have prioritised and invested in this area and have increased revenues for the business.

If your venue has a gaming floor or even just a small area where you keep a handful of poker machines, this guide could help you to think about this area differently and help you make a few small changes that could impact your venue and patrons very positively.

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INTRODUCTION



GAMING FLOOR DESIGN

Gaming floors have changed. And what works in a gaming venue has changed.

It is not just about maximising the dollar turnover of the machines available in a venue, but how the gaming area integrates with the total venue and how visitors feel as they move around, from the restaurant to the bar, to the gaming area and to and through various facilities.

Your venue is one destination and everything within it should be considered within the context of your overall theme and your business strategy.

So it is surprising that the gaming area in some venues remains the same as it was ten years ago, a dark cavern that is a major turn off to all except the most loyal players of the games you have.

Creating a great gaming floor involves being aware of and changing the balance of a lot of elements, drawing from your own experience and sometimes expert help.

Often considered both an art and a science, a great gaming area certainly doesn't come together on its own. But it is worth the time, effort and investment to get it right.

IGT spoke to Tony Donnelly, the much sought after gaming floor design expert, to ask what venues should be doing to maximise the potential of their gaming floor. Tony's pragmatic advice is always on the money and he has helped countless venues to dramatically improve their businesses.

“Great gaming floors give patrons more reasons to enjoy the experience and return again.”



“I feel lucky to work in an area that is my absolute passion. With so many interesting venues and design challenges, I get enormous satisfaction from helping to improve user experience and business performance for my clients”

Tony is the Design Director at Donnelly Design, specialising in the layout and design of gaming installations.

Tony has over twenty years experience in Casino layout, machine/product design, jackpot design and product analysis.

He recommends gaming floor layouts, combined with lighting and interior design improvements to achieve the highest return from a gaming floor.

Specialising in the Australian, New Zealand and Asian markets, Tony works on gaming floors of all sizes, from Hotels to mega Casinos.

Before founding Donnelly Design, Tony's Bachelor of Industrial Design BDes(Ind) led him to work as a gaming

room design consultant, industrial designer, product design engineer and Jackpot signage designer and engineer for several international Gaming Organisations.

This well rounded immersion into the technical side of gaming gave him an understanding of not only how the products themselves operate, but how we interact with them, the gaming environment and our fellow patrons.

Recently, Tony has worked on the Crescent Hotel, runner up for Best Gaming Room Development in the 2012 AHA (NSW) Awards for Excellence. He is also working on several high level Casino developments in Australia and Internationally that are as yet subject to confidentiality.

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A WORD WITH A GAMING FLOOR DESIGN EXPERT

We caught up with Tony Donnelly who specialises in optimising gaming floor design to create a great experience for the customer that translates to maximum performance for the business.

Why is it important to design a great gaming floor?

The simple answer is that a badly designed or laid out gaming area will just not attract or satisfy gaming patrons. Either patrons will not want to enter the area, or if they are visiting the venue just for the gaming, may not stay very long if they are in any way uncomfortable.

Even busy gaming floors will experience 'cold spots' where nobody ventures into a particular area, or walks straight past it every time. These are usually areas that afford the least privacy to the player or are exposed to non gaming areas of the venue.

This results in lost revenue for the venue and a poor perception of the venue for the patron. The aim of well thought out gaming floor design is to make the area attractive, exciting and comfortable for anybody who wants to play, so they enjoy their experience, stay as long as they want and return at some point in the future. Like a great bar and restaurant, you want your patrons to enjoy the experience and come again.

What do you think is the most important factor in designing a gaming floor?

Venues must understand their customers. Although there are some guiding principles for design and layout that are relevant to all gaming areas, to make a really successful gaming floor, you must know your current and prospective customers. That is to say those that currently come to your venue and those that might visit if you change something about the venue.

The community around your venue is the first indicator of patron demographic.

Do you have a diverse community? Are there any particular groups living around your venue? Who are they? When do they visit?

Are you located in a busy city or a quiet town? Are you in a wealthy white collar district or a blue collar community.

Do you have a balance of men and women? What is their age?

A WORD WITH A GAMING FLOOR DESIGN EXPERT...cont'd.

Knowing who currently frequents your venue is not the complete story, but understanding that the majority of any new customers will come from your immediate catchment area, will help venues to cater for the tastes and requirements of a defined and finite group of people.

That's not to say that other people may not drop in from time to time. But that is precisely what they do, drop in. A venue need not cater for all tastes, but rather the majority of current and possible patrons.

What do venues most commonly get wrong?

Gaming areas are often the last to be considered in a design upgrade, or if they are, designed for the taste of the venue manager without considering the people who are coming in most often or those who may use the gaming area if it were more enticing.

There is often no consideration given to the flow of people through a venue and an assumption that people who want to visit the gaming area will do so regardless of what it looks like. This may be true for some gamers, but the venue is unlikely to be maximising the use of the gaming area and as a result, missing out on substantial revenue and good customer feedback.

Can you give us some specific things that venue managers should be thinking about to improve their gaming areas?

- > Make it visually exciting, without distracting play.
- > Make it attractive, with luxurious finishes.
- > Make it comfortable and pay attention to the layout, being conscious of the particular needs of different sized venues

Let me explain what I mean.

Make it exciting: All gaming areas, even those with just a few poker machines, should feel exciting. Venues should think about their gaming areas as mini casinos and incorporate elements that make the area feel like a great night out.

It should not feel like a room where excitement goes to die.

Have soft ambient music playing, always considering the age and demographic of the players (heavy distracting music should be avoided)

This ensures patrons' a complete, comfortable environment. Good seating, soft light levels, background music all contribute to the players experience of your venue.

Make it attractive: All venues should have a clear design approach and this should be relevant to the target market and be extended right through to the gaming area.

Of course, the gaming floor has its own set of guidelines to make it attractive and effective, but it should still feel part of the overall venue, just a different area within it. Using luxurious finishes, golds and reds where this works with an overall venue look, adds a sense of occasion and feeling of opulence that is very effective in gaming areas.

The gaming floor needs to feel luxurious. After all, patrons are spending their valuable time in this area, they should be rewarded by feeling like they are in a sumptuous and inviting place.

It is worth pointing out that Australian's are now all design gurus. In the last ten years, we have gone from simply decorating our homes, to designing our homes.

The simple family residence now has handmade kitchen cabinets, granite benchtops, stone baths and rainfall showers. What was once an experience we treasured from visiting smart homes and hotels, we now have in our own homes to varying degrees.

“It should not feel like a room where excitement goes to die.”

A WORD WITH A GAMING FLOOR DESIGN EXPERT...cont'd.

So it is not surprising that visitors to a pub or club expect to see high end finishes and beautiful lighting features in their venue of choice. Grotty worn seats, old carpet and boring black boxes stacked together just do not feel like a night out.

The dark, neon lit unimaginitive gaming rooms of the past are not the best way to make patrons feel appreciated or rewarded, let alone safe.

A well placed light feature can add a warm glow to a room and create a twinkling feature. Strategic lighting can make a large room feel cosy, or a tiny room feel larger than it is.

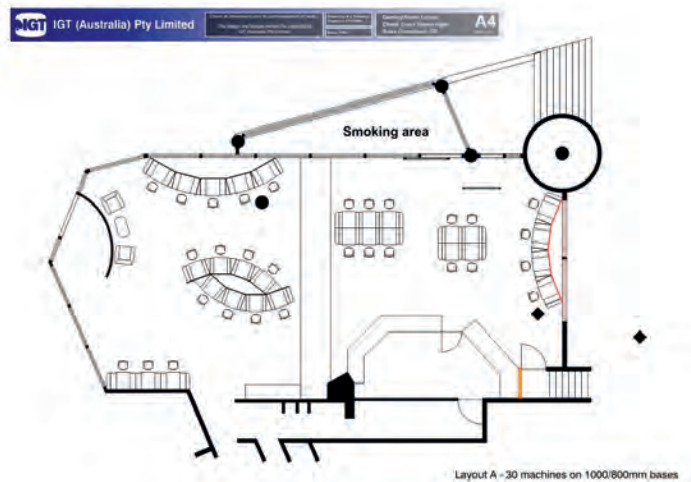
Artwork on the walls, or flat TV screens create interest and can add excitement to a room. But be carefull of the content on those screens. A football match played in the gaming room is not only distracting to the gaming patron, but can bring non gaming patrons to the area. Promotional materials are far better suited to those screens.

Make it comfortable: Patrons should feel that they can stay in a gaming area as long as they like. From the choice of seats and height of gaming machines, to the layout of the gaming elements and flow through the room, all these things should promote comfort rather than make the player want to leave to get away from the atmosphere.

It doesn't matter how small a gaming area is, it should feel airy and well ventilated.

The placement of machines should be sufficiently far apart so patrons don't feel like they are in each other's space. A medium sized venue should be in banks of 3 or 5 a side. This accomodates the very human tendency to want to sit at an end, preferably partly shielded on one side. Much like our use of public transport where our preference is to leave a space between us and the next person, there is the same preference when sitting at a gaming machine.

“It doesn't matter how small a gaming area is, it should feel airy and well ventilated.”



You may not be able to change the actual location of your gaming area, but you can pay attention to where you place the entrance and in creating interesting walkways through the area, to make the space interesting and not all visible from all angles. There are many techniques to create intimacy in a venue without making it feel closed in.

Attention to customer service in the gaming area is also an important part of making the experience a comfortable one. Staff that are freindly and attentive but not familiar will make the patron feel important and looked after, without feeling intruded upon or constantly disturbed. Providing and serving free beverages (where allowed) is a low overhead for a venue, but is so highly appreciated by gaming customers. The benefits far outweigh the cost.

Finally, what are your views on outside gaming areas for smaller venues?

They should benefit from the same attention to detail and cohesive design as the inside areas.

The trend towards outdoor spaces continues to increase and if sufficiently well ventilated to take away smoky atmospheres, many customers prefer to sit outdoors with fresh air and natural lighting.

Smaller venues should consider that as many as 40% of their machines should be located outdoors. As the size of the installation increases, the number would be closer to 25%.



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WE HAVE LOOKED IN MORE DETAIL AT SOME OF THE AREAS TONY DISCUSSED EARLIER AND HAVE INCLUDED SOME THINGS THAT YOU CAN DO IN YOUR OWN VENUE TO IMPROVE HOW YOUR GAMING FLOOR PERFORMS.

UNDERSTAND YOUR TARGET MARKET

Different age segments, ethnicities and genders will be motivated to participate in gaming for different reasons.

Understanding the needs and motivations of customers in your venue can dramatically enhance the success of the business. This is true for the venue as a whole. It is equally important to understand the people that currently visit (or would visit) your venue for your food and beverage offer, your marketing, your staff recruitment and training as well as to get the gaming floor right.

It is not the gaming machines in your venue that generate revenue for the business, it is the customers that play them. Empty gaming rooms don't make a profit and focusing only on the games themselves has distracted many venues from providing a great experience for the customers.

The gaming area in smaller venues rarely receives as much design attention as a restaurant, lounge or bar. The design of the gaming area is often the result of subjective personal preferences of the owner or venue manager, without taking into consideration the specific preferences of the customers.

For example, in most clubs and many pubs, the best gaming customers are over 55. But gaming areas and many of the actual games are not designed with them in mind.

Understanding why your local community would visit your venue and specifically your gaming area gives you the insight to meet their needs:

Experience: Many people enjoy the experience of gaming itself, regardless of whether they win or lose.

To Win: Virtually every player would like to win. Most people who take part in gaming hope for at least some monetary gain.

Excitement: While most visitors view the act of gaming as exciting, the gaming environment itself is also highly stimulating. The sights and sounds, the presence of money, the other people and activity level, opulent and comfortable environment.

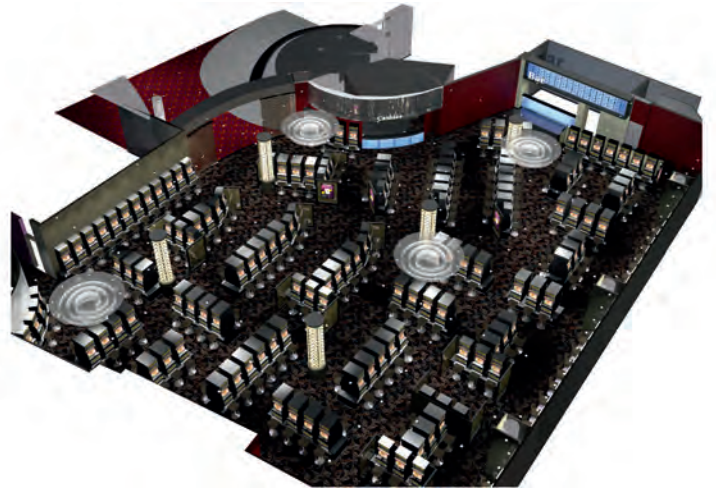
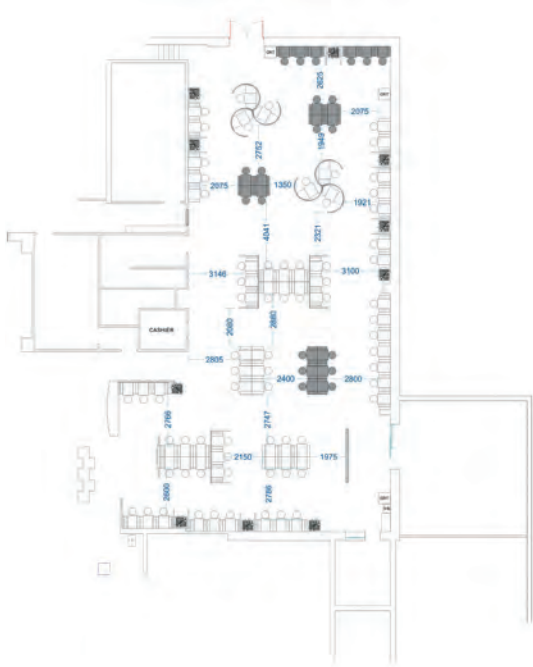
To relax: An exciting gaming site can also be a source of relaxation to the patron, helping them to unwind from busy work and life commitments.

For attention or personal recognition: The customer-service standards of gaming areas creates an environment in which even infrequent players may appreciate recognition from the staff, a free drink or snack or vouchers to use in other facilities in the venue. The power of this is in creating a sense for the patron of being special and valued.

For social interaction: Gaming venues are good places to meet new friends or people watch. The fun atmosphere encourages people to converse easily and to be friendly.

For challenges and risk-taking: For some players, winning is satisfying because they have beaten the odds, played smart and well, or prevailed against that imposing institution, "The House."

“Understanding your community will help you to steer your gaming floor towards what your patrons will most appreciate.”



CREATE AN ATTRACTIVE ENVIRONMENT

There is no doubt that a lot of investment goes into designing gaming technology. From the chorus of sounds, to the bright and flashing lights and illuminated signage, the effect is very entertaining.

But placed into unimaginative gaming floors and boring design, the excitement is often lost. Venues need to step up the time and effort devoted to the look and ambience of the gaming area to create exciting adult “play-spaces” that engage and motivate the players.

Colour / Feel

Many venues have gone from one extreme of an explosion of colours and styles created over time with new design touch-ups and small updates, to the other extreme of a dull beige and brown palate that fails to inspire.

There is a place in the middle where colours are stimulating and can enhance and work cohesively with the rest of the venue. Red, gold, silver, blue are all effective colours for a gaming area.

Carpets

Once carpets were very loud and colourful, the look often likened to somebody throwing up on the carpet. The choice of carpet really should depend on the venue. It is true that too many colours or patterns are confusing and uncomfortable to be around, so the primary goal, to make a player comfortable, is lost.

However larger patterns in a few colours do make big open spaces look smaller. Smaller patterns in a few complementing colours can make a room look bigger. There is a balance to strike on what your venue needs to achieve, how much dirt the pattern needs to hide and keeping the place warm and cheery, but very loud, bold prints are unlikely to enhance any venue for today’s design aware patrons.

Lighting

Gaming rooms designed several years ago are now too dark for today’s patron. The dark, smoky, windowless gaming room should be a thing of the past.

Daylight is a basic human need and where, arguably, bare windows may cause glare at certain times of the day, it is considered good practice to have some daylight in gaming areas where possible.

Natural daylight is restorative and promotes positive emotions.

Pay close attention to the glare that can be created on the machines, and try to locate the natural light on the extremity of the room. This will allow for much more effective manipulation of light levels. There’s nothing sinister here, as there are so many light sources in a gaming installation now, from the LED top boxes to the belly panels, to the under-base lighting, and all of these effects can be wiped out by strong ambient light.

Where daylight is not possible, good central lighting and specific task lighting is a must. Using art and sculptures as lighting sources is a strong trend.

Adjustable, effective lighting also enables the staff to pay attention and attend to any player that needs something.

All of the lighting in the gaming area needs to be under the venue’s control, with different light levels for different times of the day.

Intimate spaces

Where gaming rooms are large and cavernous, the aim is to compartmentalise, to make them feel smaller. So, creating structures within the area that give the feeling that the ceiling is lower or that the spaces around the players are closer, promotes a cocooning effect that is comforting.

Small rooms need to feel light and airy but retain a feeling of intimacy, so thinking about the placement of machines so they are not bunched together is important.

Creating curved pathways through a larger gaming area that take players on a short journey, retains distinct playing areas that have their own space. If the whole space isn't immediately visible, it stimulates curiosity and invites a bit of exploration.

Spatial layout: make it comfortable

It is possible to make a substantial change to the gaming area, just by changing the layout of the gaming floor, without encountering too much cost.

A different layout will create different pathways and move the focal points of the room, that can be further accentuated by changing the lighting to highlight them.

Making sure that the top revenue generating machines can be seen will increase their usage.

Machine placement

Tony Donnelly recommends breaking up banks of machines into groups of 3 or 5 each side, thereby allowing a space between players when the venue isn't completely full. He also advocates placing machines in a 'T' shape, which gives an extra bit of privacy for those players that prefer this.

By grouping machines like this, you can create separate areas with different machines, different lighting and different denominations, to suit various styles of patron and gameplay.

Seating

Gaming patrons who are physically and psychologically comfortable will enjoy the experience more.

Gaming stools and chairs are made to suit all requirements and their selection is partly governed by the type and style of machine, venue decor and patron preferences.

But the top priorities should be that they are durable and above all, comfortable.

Think about seat backs and swivel bases for increased comfort.

You might want to have increased comfort for a high denomination machine than for lower denominations.

THE RIGHT GAMING MIX

Gaming venues in Australia are limited to the gaming positions the venue has acquired. This means that in order to meet patron requirements, venues may need to think about the mix of games they provide

Venues can monitor the popularity of existing games and decide whether to change the game or type of machine. In smaller venues, just moving the location of a particular machine can dramatically change its usage.

Game styles

The graphic designs on the game, new themes being introduced and the use of brilliant colours, mirrored finishes and signage are all used to differentiate one game from the next.

Ultimately, it depends on the venue's patron mix whether a particular game will be popular.

FENG SHUI

Feng Shui literally means "wind" and "water" in Cantonese. The concept gained interest in the west in the 80s, when designers embraced this Chinese art of creating spaces to promote better wealth and health.

Casinos and large clubs all over the world hire Feng Shui specialists to turn their venues into places where people will come and enjoy their time and experience. Gaming patrons also consult Feng Shui specialists to advise on the best days, time, colours to wear and positions to stand, to gain maximum prosperity from their visit. It seems everybody is doing it.

Many professionals, sceptics and industry commentators believe it is nothing more than superstition and mysticism. The reality is that good design practice actually reflects good Feng Shui practice and in itself, is an excellent reference point for establishing any public space that is comfortable with good energy flow.

The basis of Feng Shui for gaming areas is about effective design for maximum utility. Perhaps the creation of good luck and subsequent wealth seems a little far-fetched for westerners, but creating open, well ventilated spaces that do not feel boxed in, just seem like logical requirements. This is the foundation of Feng Shui.

It is also about good manners and etiquette. Even though so many conversations focus on light and water flows, a lot of Feng Shui in practice is about people and courteous service levels.

Of course, for large hotels and casinos, it is common practice to consult a Feng Shui expert. Marina Bay Sands, the Mirage and Wynn Las Vegas are all examples of FengShui incorporated in the architecture itself, from the location of the main entrance to the colour of the buildings. Donald Trump may not believe in the concept himself, but he is wise in catering for the beliefs of his business partners and customers from asia. It has been noted that Trump Plaza reads like a Feng Shui guide, with plenty of mirrors to reflect and boost the fortune of the players, opulent stone-and-wood-inlaid columns to introduce the energy of nature, and a wall of gaming tables that look out onto the floor, so no dealer will ever have his or her back to a guest.

Pathways through a venue should be meandering. Straight pathways mean that people come and go fast. A curving walkway or path is friendlier, slows people down so they do not see everything all at once and the experience is more relaxed. When a patron can explore a space that isn't immediately open to see, they explore and stay longer.

Large casinos have a very different task to smaller gaming rooms, but the basic principles do translate to any venue. Respecting natural elements is a good start, wood, fire, water, earth & metal. Using natural materials in the build and decor is one way. Wood surfaces, stone bench tops, metal rails and enhancements. You can also reflect an earthy or fiery carpet design, or represent running water through your artworks and design enhancements, water features and natural curves.

Getting it wrong is also very easy and a symbol can go from positive to negative very easily depending on their placement. So if you want to take the Feng Shui concepts all the way through your venue, get some advice.

INTEGRATE GAMING WITH THE WHOLE VENUE AND GET EXPERT ADVICE WHERE IT WILL HELP MOST

The gaming area should work in tandem with other parts of your venue and as part of the total business strategy. When considering updating this part of your venue, you should be collaborating with your machine suppliers, designers and builders, the restaurant areas and the marketing function.

There are many options open to a venue, and some of the points here will make more sense than others, based on your particular situation.

There are also a number of solid gaming design professionals to help you reach your goals and avoid costly mistakes that may not become apparent until you complete the refurbished gaming area.

“The basis of Feng Shui for gaming areas is about effective design for maximum utility.”

When it comes to gaming, IGT understands that each venue has different requirements in relation to game choice, machine requirements, system needs and service support. That is why IGT takes the time to build a long-term, mutually beneficial partnership with its customers to ensure that it provides a total gaming solution offering:

- > Innovative games and gaming machines
- > Professional support and service
- > Gaming management systems

IGT has a strong affiliation with local industry associations in the club, pub/hotel and casino markets to ensure that it keeps abreast of the gaming issues and needs of each sector. This knowledge teamed with IGT's global strength and extensive experience within the gaming industry means that IGT can provide the best gaming solutions for your venue.

To find out more, please call us on +61 (0) 2 8345 3000 or visit:
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