

Fast Forward towards Transformative Disruption

Jan Karas

Chief Executive Officer, OPAP

OPAP.gr

PGRI Introduction: Customers seeking great experiences now have expectations that evolve faster than ever. Fortunately, technology and digitalization are creating more opportunities for innovation and growth. Listening to customers and addressing their needs, while exploring technology possibilities, is fundamental to OPAP's Fast Forward business strategy, which drives the company's philosophy of delivering value across its stakeholders' ecosystem in a sustainable and socially responsible way.

OPAP, a member of Allwyn group, is the leading gaming company in Greece and one of the most renowned in the industry worldwide. Founded in 1958, it operates and manages numerical lotteries, sports betting games, horseracing mutual betting, lotteries, instant win games and video lottery terminals (VLTs). Moreover, OPAP is a leader when it comes to embedding global Responsible Gaming principles into every aspect of its operations.

At the same time, OPAP holds a prominent position among corporate social champions in Greece. Through its extensive Corporate Responsibility program, which focuses on Health, Sports and Employment, the company supports Greek society in practice.

Our discussion with Mr. Karas drilled down on the importance of embracing change even when it is disruptive. That is the pathway to Fast Forward into a future that meets the expectations of the modern consumer, the marketplace, and OPAP stakeholders. You'll see that OPAP is indeed implementing an ambitious strategy to deploy some of the most advanced technologies available today. And looking forward to continuing its role as bold change-agent to position itself and its customers for a bright future.

Paul Jason: Do you agree with the notion that digitization is imperative for the lottery and gaming industry? What is OPAP's approach towards digitization?

Jan Karas: In my view, the continuous rise of online gaming and the fact that customers generally pursue more and more digital experiences indicate that digitization

and machine-learning, we can understand customers better, offer personalized experiences, and interact with them in meaningful and innovative ways, ensuring that lotteries are up to date with customer demands and expectations.

At OPAP, we consider technology as an

certainly is the "name of the game" for our industry globally.

Lotteries all over the world are seeking ways to remain relevant and successful in a world of ever-changing customer preferences. This is where technology steps in. By leveraging the power of data, AI

enabler of the evolution of our business model. In fact, exploring technology possibilities is one of the priorities of our Fast Forward business strategy. In this framework, we prioritize the digital transformation of our retail and the evolution of our online activities, implement targeted technology initiatives that upgrade our product propositions and customer experience, and promote innovations such as the use of AI to ensure player protection and promote responsible gaming, among other things.

What would you consider a success story in OPAP's digitization efforts? Is there a practical example you can share with us?

J. Karas: In the last couple of years, we have focused on disrupting the traditional retail customer journey, promoting a fully digital, paperless, and cashless gaming experience for our customers.

This has been possible through several initiatives, but I would like to highlight the introduction of the OPAP Store App, which

Continued on page 32



allows the customers of our stores to play and collect winnings directly on their smartphones, without interacting with cashiers or using paper slips. Also, through the OPAP Store App, customers participate in our loyalty program. It should be noted that in order to deploy the app, we developed one of the largest IoT (Internet of Things) networks in Europe, spanning across more than 3,000 stores across the country, which constitute the largest commercial network in Greece.

Overall, the OPAP Store App has been proved a successful digitization initiative. First, it is preferred by thousands of players to enhance their in-store gaming experience, with its basis of registered users reaching more than 800,000 customers. Second, we see that the use of the app has led to increased customer engagement, generating incremental gaming activity and revenue. Third, the customer data generated through the app allows us to gain valuable insights, which can be used in our commercial initiatives, as well as for personalized offerings.

Today, there is a big discussion around emerging technologies like Web 3.0, AI, and Metaverse. How do you see their application

in lottery and gaming operators?

J. Karas: Indeed, there are a lot of interesting innovations and emerging trends in the area of technology and especially in virtual and augmented reality. As people spend more time in the virtual world, the gaming industry will have to use such technologies to create more immersive, interactive, and social gaming experiences. Some of these trends have the potential to reshape our industry, but this will at large depend on customer adoption.

As a customer-centric company, we are closely monitoring global developments and experimenting on certain use cases, which could add value to our customers. For example, we have used Augment Reality applications in our Scratch cards. In addition, we have piloted a virtual OPAP Store where, with the support of VR glasses, users can navigate around the store, check game results etc. So, when it comes to emerging technologies, OPAP is focused on preparing for what the future may bring, testing things, and being ready to respond fast, when a trend gains scale.

Supporting good causes is a fundamental

aspect of lotteries' activities. Do you think that technology can help in this direction as well?

J. Karas: In one word: yes! In fact, I believe the possibilities are endless in this domain, as technology can help lotteries engage more deeply with their customers, but even with non-players, helping their mission of giving back to society.

On our part, we've seen this in practice, using technology to boost people's engagement with OPAP's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Specifically, we are the only company in Greece to deploy a mobile app dedicated to CSR. Through the app, people participate in our initiatives, by playing entertaining games and collecting points, which OPAP turns into actual contribution for specific projects, like the renovation of Greece's largest children's hospitals, which we completed recently.

We are proud of our CSR app's success, as it has a basis of more than 300,000 registered users and has helped us reach audiences beyond our customer base – and especially younger and female ones. ■

For the Benefit of Society: On EL's Strategic Outtime Overview 2023-2025 — continued from page 14

decision that more money can be made by going legitimate than continuing to flout the laws of the land. This sudden change of heart needs to be much more than a public relations campaign designed to win approval to operate legally instead of staying in the shadows without legitimate license to operate.

That said, EL welcomes the challenge to lead the way and contribute towards the goal of regulating games-of-chance for public good. That is the only way for the games-of-chance to be acceptable and sustainable in the long run. We want to reduce illegality and irresponsible practices in the gambling industry. Illegal and irresponsible operators pay fewer if any taxes and pay less if any attention to standards of player protection, integrity, security, and prevention of money-laundering. EL wants to be a part of the solution, and do whatever we can to promote the values represented by our members and articulated in our Strategic Outline. We are united in diversity, we adapt to changing times, and we welcome members who truly share our values, our purpose, our goals, and our dedication to be here for the benefit of society.

How about global issues; what are the

important ones for EL and how are you as an association addressing them?

R. Girandon: EL is a community of 70 entities operating in 39 different countries. Many of the issues we face are global in nature and exceed the wide range of our membership. Preserving integrity in sports, for instance, is an effort that must be addressed on a global level to be effective. Besides EL's own efforts, together with the World Lottery Association (WLA) we are the founders of The United Lotteries for Integrity in Sports (ULIS), a non-profit organization to educate and prevent as well as monitor sports betting on a global scale, aiming to detect and report suspicious betting activities and collaborate for law enforcement.

We are pleased to cooperate with the WLA and ULIS on this and other global initiatives to uphold our shared values.

Thank you for sharing the new EL Strategic Outline (See pages 16, 17). Any closing comments?

R. Girandon: I'm happy to share some of the newest EL Report 2022 figures, showing the magnitude of the impact that EL members

have in in practice. First, I'm extremely proud that in 2022 the EL members secured 22,2 bn Eur funds for good causes, which is 11,3 % more than the year before. It's also great to know that EL members employed more than 51,000 full-time employees in 2022, which is an increase of 5,2% to the year before. I'm proud just the same that all EL members are independently Responsible Gaming certified, and also that 40 % of our members are already taking part in our voluntary Environmental Initiative. As for the percentage of women – with about half EL members employees being women, there are 32 % of women in management positions. I think, with building inclusiveness and equality further, also with the initiatives like EL Women's Initiative in Lottery Leadership and EL DEI e-learning platform, we still have some great expectations and room for improvement on this topic.

I want to thank our Executive Committee as well as all of our members for their vision and dedication. Also thank you to our Secretary General and the EL team that keeps everything moving forward. See you at WLA/EL Marketing Seminar in London! ■