

## Casino Management When the Going Gets Tough

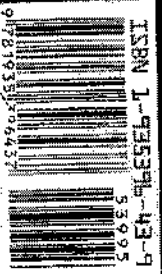
Bill Zender's *Casino-ology* took the art of casino management to new levels by introducing superior mathematical concepts to improve efficiencies within a casino operation. But after struggling through one of the worst financial periods in history, the world has changed. It's imperative that casino managers be reactive to evolving markets and *Casino-ology 2* addresses all the issues relevant to a challenging gaming environment.

In *Casino-ology 2*, Zender again confronts the gaming world's status quo, bringing to light new strategies for harnessing evolving technologies, adapting to changing customer profiles and psychologies, and improving game protection in light of the emergence of more sophisticated advantage players and cheats.

Among the topics covered are the effects of buy-in churn on hold percentage; the side-bet explosion; effective dealer scheduling; banking games in California; money lending and the Asian customer; the merits of using pre-shuffled playing cards, as well as matchplay and promotional-chip programs; the cell-phone and card-counter controversy; and an updated look at the player-error rate in blackjack.

Zender brings it all together in the service of the singular goal of further refining the art of casino management.

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# CASINO-OLLOGY 2

New Strategies for  
Managing Casino Games

ZENDER

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# CASINO-OLLOGY 2



## New Strategies for Managing Casino Games

Bill Zender

Fluctuations the casino will experience. It's not up to you and it's not up to him as to what direction the gambling gods will force the baccarat players' outcome. Just remember, at the end of the year after hundreds of thousands of baccarat hands have been played and all the dust settles, the casino will always come out on top.

### Conclusion

Understanding standard deviation and the range of fluctuation is an important tool for managing casino games. If the range of the fluctuation is too great for the casino's bankroll, or if temporary game-result setbacks will prevent the casino from meeting its financial obligations, then the maximum table limits need to be adjusted downward. If the limits are kept too high, management is no longer in the gaming business, they're in the gambling business. And if so, good luck!

222

## **Warning: There are More Ways to Beat the Casino than Across the Tables**

Over dinner, my good friend Gary, an agent with the Nevada Gaming Control Board's Enforcement Division, brought up an incident he experienced during an investigation of alleged cheating. He wanted me to know about a certain advantage-play technique being used quite regularly in northern Nevada. He also mentioned that there was a little twist to it that needed to be passed along to the casinos, especially to the surveillance departments. I found Gary's information extremely interesting and relevant.

### Understanding Playing-Card "Soft" Patterns

Several casinos in northern Nevada have been subjected to an advantage-play attack against their blackjack games known

as "sort play." In order to take advantage of "sorts," the advantage player first finds a casino that offers a hand-dealt blackjack game where the players handle the cards. Second, he needs a casino that also uses cards with a pattern back that covers the entire playing card. The playing card Gary mentioned that had been attacked was the US Playing Card company's "Aristocrat" brand. Of course, any other manufactured brand with a full back pattern can be subject to sorts as well.

Sorts are created when a card isn't symmetrically cut during the deck's printing process. All casino-quality playing-card decks are printed on 60-card sheets and cut from the sheet using a two-stop process. This process, although done with an automatic cutting machine, isn't perfectly symmetrical. The cut may result in all cards of that deck having a very slight pattern difference on the sides or ends. Since the cards are printed with a full back design of diamonds, grays, or intersecting lines, sometimes cut-pattern differences can be noticed by the trained eye. Although this isn't common, it can happen. If the difference is too great and the cut patterns can be read when sitting within several inches of the dealer-held deck, the casino is open for a sort attack.

Sort play occurs when a group of players take over the entire table. After the cards are dealt, the team positions or turns their cards in a particular manner, so one of the miss-cut pattern sides faces in the same direction when they slip their hand under the wagered chips. For example, the sort players might position the ten-value cards with all elongated diamonds on the back pattern facing to the right when the cards are positioned under the wagered chips. In this case, all non-ten-value cards will be rotated 180 degrees in the opposite direction.

The sort players continue to keep turning the cards in the same manner throughout the dealing of the deck. Once the dealer shuffles the cards and begins to deal the next deck, the players resume turning the cards until they have a majority of the playing cards positioned so they can be read to indicate the

top card of the deck is either a ten or non-ten-value card. In essence, the advantage player uses the miss-cut sort patterns to gain information, just like a cheater uses marked cards. As you'll see, the effect is quite similar and in this next case, too similar.

#### Gary's Message

Over dinner, Gary explained that he'd recently responded to an alleged marked-card situation at a Reno casino. Once he arrived at the casino, he was informed by management that they believed a team of players on one of their hand-held games was marking the cards and using the information to bust out the dealer's hand. When Gary reviewed the video, he noticed that every player on the table was turning and positioning the cards in their hands in a fashion that Gary recognized as sort play.

One player was observed standing up and wagering the table minimum on the first table position. Apparently, his job was to read the sort patterns and try and steer either tens or non-ten cards into the next player's hand. The next player, seated at the third table position, was playing table limit, acting as the team's "big player." A third player was standing at the last position, wagering the table minimum. His job was to read the cards on the top of the deck and try and steer cards into the dealer's hand in an attempt to bust the dealer. After the team members turned cards and played sorts for about a half-hour, they terminated play and left the casino.

Out of curiosity, Gary followed them to another casino just down the street. Once inside the casino, the players set up on another hand-held blackjack game, but after a short period quit. Why? The dealer on the game was using an old technique that severely deterred sort play known as "the turn." When the dealer noticed the group of players on his table sorting and arranging cards, during the next shuffle he simply broke the deck in half and turned one half of the deck 180 degrees before starting the first riffle shuffle. Once the team saw the dealer

employ a turn in the shuffle, they ended play and left the casino. This confirmed Gary's assumption that the team was using sort information and although they gained an advantage over the casino playing in this manner, it was totally legal and of no concern to the Nevada Gaming Control Board.

One thing, though, bothered Gary. During the review of the video at the first casino, he noticed that all the sort players touched the cards in a manner that resembled a marked-card play known as "daubing." This was quite perplexing. Why would advantage players, using a legal technique to beat the casino, simulate the motions of a cheating card marker? Usually, players using a legitimate technique to gain an advantage will purposely stand clear of any hand action that might mimic a cheating move. First, they don't want to draw undue attention to their play. Second, they don't want the casino to grab them up for allegedly committing an act of cheating. Why were these players acting in a manner that might make someone think they were cheating? In Gary's words, "It appeared as if they were planting the idea that they were cheating, since they were so obvious and kept running their finger across the top of the cards, over and over again." What would be their motive to attract all this attention?

#### Zender's Comment

One thing I understood that Gary didn't is that there's more than one way to beat the casinos out of money. The first is over the gaming tables. An advantage team, sorting mis-cut card patterns, can gain an advantage that can result in wins of several thousand dollars. Second, a group of players arrested by the casino for cheating when all they're doing is using an unacceptable, but legal, technique stand a chance to make a hundred thousand dollars in a civil lawsuit.

From Gary's rendition of the play in Reno, it appears the team was using sort information to gain an advantage, while

simultaneously trying to simulate a cheating technique to, shall we say, hedge their bets.

The following are some suggestions that you might wish to consider if presented with this type of situation

- Always take time to analyze any suspicious play; don't jump to conclusions.
- Watch for players who continually turn and position cards held in their hand. This is the primary indicator of sort play.
- Be sure the players aren't using a legal technique before accusing them of cheating. Sorts emulate marked-card play.
- Allow any gaming investigator responding to the case to make his or her decision on whether there's evidence of cheating. Show him the facts, but don't give him a narrative of the event filled with accusations.
- The best methods for preventing sort play are placing a 180-degree turn of half the deck immediately prior to a riffle shuffle into your shuffle procedure and using only faded-edge cards on your hand-dealt blackjack games.
- Remember, losing money across the tables isn't the only way to get beaten.