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Online Casinos are Becoming Game Publishers: Why Proprietary Games are Moving In-House

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Open two online casinos side by side, and take note of the similarities. The same slot games appear in roughly the same order on both sites. The same table games have the same graphics. Most of the games load through a variety of aggregators. Integrating a single aggregator can give thousands of games to choose from, and a single integration can be used by multiple competing sites. As such, players can expect to find the same games across sites.

That's exactly what makes in-house and exclusive titles interesting to a business. A game exclusively developed and published by a single company, or licensed for a single company to publish, stays there once released. It's something the competition can't offer, and something the customers can't find elsewhere. However, that raises another intriguing question: why does a casino, which typically focuses on offering games, start publishing them?

Most platforms share many of the same games and can still offer a unique experience when one carries exclusive titles. Examples include the incorporation of a company's brand identity into a game, or the creation of a game around a company's style and structure that doesn't exist anywhere else. Since much of a platform's game selection is interchangeable, that unique experience drastically alters how the platform is perceived, making games designed and published around a certain brand register more powerfully than others.

Some companies have taken notice, and have created game studios to specifically design games around a company's style and structure, with the added bonus of having control over the games' thematic elements. Those studios control the timeline of game releases, as well as post-game updates. Thus, for a player landing on [Swiper.ro Casino](#) or any well-stocked gaming site, content designed and created around a company's style and structure shows how proprietary content can give a platform something the wider industry did not simply hand it.

The same lobby, everywhere

It's important to discuss the positives of the aggregator model because, from an engineering perspective, it is a good solution to a real-world problem. Before aggregators, game platform operators had to manage multiple, independent business relationships and integration contracts to carry the games of various game studios. This is time-consuming and costly. A game platform aggregator unifies these relationships and integrations. Aggregators removed that work and enabled game companies to carry thousands of games from multiple game studios with a single

integration.

There are trade-offs to this model. Competing game platforms showcase identical game catalogs, which are sourced by upstream game platform aggregators. A new gaming platform can open for business with thousands of games, without producing a single game.

From the player's perspective, there is sameness. Sameness exists in game platform catalogs, which list the same few gaming franchises. Sameness exists across game platforms in the same promotional items, as well as the same table variants.

Because so many game platform aggregators license similar, if not the same, games, it is a good strategy for a game platform to own games outright.

Designing a Game

The differences between a game designed by an external developer and a game designed by an in-house team extend far beyond the logo on the loading screen. From the start, the in-house developers are able to consider distinct questions. What does the player expect and want to find in this game? What features and elements should be included to make the game feel like it belongs to this platform rather than something that has been licensed?

A published example can illustrate the thinking. A game developer, for an online gambling operator, designed and created a multihand blackjack variant with surrender. The game included various adaptive game modes and incorporated the existing brand elements of the operator.

The same game developer created and released a casino slot game with the same thinking and philosophy. The game included specific features and design elements for a particular audience and operator, as opposed to including features and designs that broadly appeal to the slot gaming market. The game is intended to have clear design lines and boundaries.

The thinking of the design team determines the edge, uniqueness and many of the powerful features of the game. A game created for a single operator site can go deeper on what that audience actually wants than a game created for a multitude of operator sites.

Advantages from the concept stage cascade to other areas. Having full control over development also means decisions around the presentation of game features and systems can be customized based on data and learnings from users on that specific platform as opposed to making assumptions from generic market data. A team working to satisfy the needs of a population or user segment can make informed decisions on, for example, whether the frequency of a feature is adequate to maintain player interest. In the case of a third-party developer working to meet the expectations of the widest possible audience, they are making decisions with respect to probabilistic estimates, by definition. In the case of a first-party developer with the ability to control the frequency and the nature of a feature, they are in a better position to know what the audience likes.

Modifications and Updates are on the Developer's Schedule

The game developer also sets the terms for "typical" adjustments to the game, like how often a bonus feature is awarded, or how the game's payout structure is configured. The operator is at the mercy of the developer to make these sorts of changes. This is also the case for game updates or the release of new seasonal content.

With their own studios, developers are in control of their game's post-release updates. The rules of the game can be changed. So can bonus triggers. The team behind the game can extend or expand a **jackpot structure** without waiting on an external roadmap. One company built **an internal slot operation** to make games using its own math models. The operation has over 30 games in its catalog and releases roughly one game per month. Because the game company has its own math models and game code and handles certification internally, the games can be updated quickly.

Players don't usually see the game's development behind the scenes. Players see changes to a game that feel logical, and a game that doesn't get stale. A game can surprise a player by adding a mechanic that a player has never encountered in the game.



Photo: Darlene Alderson via Pexels

A game selection with a face

Identity-level modifications to titles and IP result in a core difference in how different platforms are experienced. As an example, a casino operator who owns important cultural venues has the ability to develop slot games set in those properties. A game could be set in a casino owned and operated by that company. Another game could be set and developed to incorporate a major show or attraction owned by that company. Slot developers can create games using the location's surrounding environment, landmarks, and architecture.

A game company's ownership of important cultural venues and major attractions reinforces how important an operator's owned venues and IP are to the development of slot games. A slot game operator would benefit from being a vertically integrated casino operator, because that structure would result in an important competitive edge.

In-house-produced titles have accounted for more than half of a reported \$138 million in progressive payouts, and in Michigan and Pennsylvania, the ten largest jackpots were on games developed in-house by casinos. Players are engaging with owned titles.

What the Player Sees

At the player level, the line between a third-party and a first-party game can be hard to distinguish. A first-party game can easily seem like the polished cousin of a game made by someone else. Differences in implementation can be found in smaller aspects of a game. For example, a game can be built to take advantage of a platform's known bonuses. It can also make use of the same color scheme and fonts to provide visual cohesion. Lastly, a game can make use of a platform's technology to provide additional features.

From the player's perspective, the effects of both approaches can be easily recognized. An example in the industry can be found with a popular franchise of online slots. A game can be released as part of the franchise, and an operator can reach an agreement to be the only operator to provide that game for a certain time period. This means that during that time, that game can only be played on that operator's site. This model has been used by several operators to release games of a popular franchise as part of a series.

In order to address this type of shopping behavior, both approaches can be found in the industry. A player comparing two casinos can easily recognize which of the two has content that the other does not.



Photo: Tranmautritam via Pexels

The importance of player choice

It's important for players to consider where they devote their time because different platforms offer different advantages. Take sites that merely carry licensed content. They have a real entertainment offering. However, they create little reason to stick around and explore once a customer has found what they wanted. On the other hand, sites that feature or host unique content give patrons a reason to visit them specifically.

That content might differ only slightly from competing offerings, but it typically establishes a real basis for a platform's identity and focus. Original game mechanics and formats achieve this. For a firm to express its identity through its product, a real commitment should be made. Serious commitment is shown through the opening of in-house game development studios, the regular release of game series, and integration of game content to further the firm's brand identity.

Companies investing in this area illustrate the betting industry's commitment to actually producing original game titles. This is in contrast to firms that take a more passive stance by stocking product that offers little to no competitive advantage. For players, this means content is released that allows them to access titles not available elsewhere.

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