



Roundtable: How to adapt a retail slot for the online market, part one

As more operators look to broaden their slots offering with games that appeal to both online and retail players, can existing land-based titles work just as effectively in the digital environment? We asked five game developers for their views on what types of games and features can make the transition from the casino floor to desktop and mobile devices.

CasinoBeats: What steps are required to ensure that a popular retail game theme/mechanic works in the online environment?

Robert Lee, Realistic Games: First and foremost, the most important aspect for suppliers to get right when moving retail themes and mechanics online is the maths. As there are a number of restrictions in retail around maximum stakes and prizes, delivering a good – and similar – maths model is key to successfully converting a retail game for online channels.

Retail players in arcades, betting shops and bingo halls are used to seeing the maximum prize of x250 at a £2 stake, or x500 at a £100 stake, and so similarly they tend to like to see the same ratio applied online.



Robert Lee, commercial director at Realistic Games.

Rob Procter, Scientific Games: There's typically a three-step process when it comes to the developing these types of games. Firstly, we review the game mechanic and see how it can work in the digital space.

Based on feedback from player insights and previous experiences of transferring games to the online environment, we're able to make a judgment on what needs tweaking. We then consider the theme and if it needs altering at all. While the front end needs to work well for online, it can be refined and updated to suit the online player base.

Lastly, we take an in-depth look at the math model and we usually evolve and adapt this to meet the online audience. This approach has worked particularly well for us. For instance, 88 Fortunes came from the US land-based sector and has performed strongly online, with its brand, mechanic and theme fitting the online profile. Similarly, the Rainbow Riches suite of games from the UK encapsulates how that transition to digital can work.

Jo Purvis, Blueprint Gaming: Understanding the traditional legacy of a retail game and the online world is a must to successfully create a slot which transitions across both channels. Retail games are very different compared to the traditional online slot. In many ways, the popular 'pub fruit' format found in the retail environment are even more interactive in terms of the number of features available and the relationship in which a player can build with the game.

The relationship with these mechanical games is built around the fact that they have a compensated math profile compare to the 100 per cent random profile of online gaming. Players are able to learn the game over time, understanding the peaks and troughs of the profiles and knowing when a machine is likely to pay out or not.

Taking this fundamental concept to the online market has to be diluted somewhat to compensate for the lack of overall control in the math model. The social element of the retail gameplay is an important consideration too. With players experiencing these slots in



Jo Purvis, director of marketing and relationships at Blueprint Gaming.

groups at the casino or in pubs, spending time playing the game is the aim, as opposed to playing quickly to push through to the jackpot.

Reducing the features and only implementing a few of the retail favourites with the online variant is important in order to appeal to the wider the audience and capture the faster players' imagination and attention span.



Nikolay Illyustrov, game producer at Playson.

Nikolay Illyustrov, Playson: Market and player analysis are key. Game providers should clearly understand the lifecycle of a specific game along with its peaks and troughs. At Playson, we insist on making detailed comparisons of our game releases to understand which themes work, and which proved to be the most successful game mechanics. That allows us to re-invent many fruit game concepts which are still proving to be popular among players.

Boro Brumen, Greentube: Converting land-based games to online and mobile, just as we do with Novomatic titles, can be a challenge, as you have to consider the different player journeys and experiences. For one, player demographics can differ widely between land-based and online.

The former is naturally used to a more sensory experience of being in a casino or a slot hall, while the latter will most likely look for first-class graphics and visuals. In moving to mobile and online-focused game design, content has to keep the traditional player entertained, ensuring an immersive UX no matter the players' preferred device or the orientation of play on it.

To achieve this, we give deep consideration to both the user interface and experience, taking care to ensure our titles have the flexibility to appeal to different styles of play. One great example of this is our Diamond Link: Mighty Elephant title where we took the win spins, mathematics and visuals from the original game and improved the mechanics by adding an enhanced version of Novomatic's Hold'n'Spin feature we believed would appeal to online players.

We then greatly improved the quality of the graphics and invested months into game play optimisation and frame rate performance. The game was also the first in our linked jackpot series, a feature that is very common in land-based environments. Diamond Link: Mighty Elephant has been hugely successful and remains in the top 10 of best performing online titles we have ever released.

CasinoBeats: What gameplay features of classic slots do players prefer? Have you looked to evolve these for online players at all?

BB: Our most popular slot title by far is Book of Ra, preferred indiscriminately in both land-based casinos and online slots. The game was first launched in 2004 and we have since created sequels that have been evolved but that all still share the Book of Ra DNA.

What has made Book of Ra game series so famous is its popular Egyptian theme, the math model, its graphics and sound elements, as well as its powerful mechanics, great jackpots, and features, such as the much loved stacked and expanding symbols and Hold'n'Spin. The game maintains its simplicity by providing an easy to understand player experience, without neglecting stimulating visuals. While most of the mechanics are the same for online and land-based, what differs is the gameplay.

Online, we bring more diversity and features as well as gamification aspects to further increase the excitement of the game. With online games we can also afford a 'try and fail' approach as the life span of a game is often shorter and requires less investment which results in more experimenting and bigger diversity.

NI: A tendency to simplify things is a natural human desire. It creates something tangible and provides a much more recognisable product for people to enjoy. The simpler the game concept, the more players it attracts, despite their preferred slots.

Yet, a strategy to produce games with the same math and different art tends to be less successful in the long run. At Playson, we like to add small twists to well-known concepts in such a way we create an illusion of the game being familiar, yet the math model is completely new.

RL: The preferences of traditional slot players have changed over the years – a shift which has been driven by the advent of online games and more dynamic mechanics. Classic UK retail slots used to be streak-based in the features, but now some of the most popular land-based titles are centred around free spins and bonuses within the free spins round. The advent of more diverse games such as Megaways are still driven by the initial free spins trigger.



Boro Brumen, games producer at Greentube.



Rob Procter, content specialist director at SG Digital.

RP: A great example of how we've evolved retail features for online is 88 Fortunes. The game's jackpot and free spins features have worked well across both channels. When it comes to the online version, we're able to tweak it slightly to include more innovative features to enhance the user experience even further.

When we look at games such as Raging Rhino, which features a higher volatility and increased payline with 4096 ways to win that are synonymous with the slot, we ensure that we take these key factors to online. It's typically an evolution of the games to break out of the land-based mould by adding the refining touches for the online experience.

JP: Many of the traditional features found in classic slots have already made their way into online slots, but probably without people really recognising this. Free spins, which is by far the most used bonus within the online slot category, is actually a development from the traditional retail respins concept, which was and still is a staple of any land-based mechanical product.

Of course, online slots allow for far more interaction purely by their nature of being digital, but that level of complexity doesn't always resonate with players. A more simple, easy to understand game concept has a further reaching appeal and retail games lend themselves perfectly to these mid-tech types of games. Blueprint Gaming, through its Pub Fruit series has taken all the traditional retail features and digitised them, allowing a band of new players to experience this classic format.

Although digital, the retro look and feel has been kept for the online version, keeping the concept as close to the original as possible. Plus, the traditional land-based machine fits perfectly into the portrait mode of a mobile device, allowing a greater number of features to be displayed on-screen.