

Industry

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Problem Gambling: Industry associations speak out on rates declining to a record low of 0.2 percent

Peter Hannibal: 'Industry should take some of the credit for the record low problem gambling rates, but never become complacent'

GAMBLING BUSINESS GROUP

For **Peter Hannibal**, CEO of the Gambling Business Group, the art of persuasion may well be lost on the ardent anti-gambling lobby. But constantly falling problem gambling rates cannot be wrong - especially given the amount of money given to RET to achieve exactly that. Which leaves the non-believers with a problem: if you don't believe the evidence, then you should be questioning the principles of RET rather than the successful initiatives of the industry.



Coinslot: The problem gambling rate remains at a record low and has been falling consistently since 2017.

What's GBG's response to this?

Peter Hannibal: You have to believe that the relentless work that operators undertake in implementing safer and responsible gambling initiatives is having an impact, and as a consequence they should take some credit for what has now become an established and consistent downward trend.

You also have to believe that the

many tens of millions of RET (research/education/ treatment) pounds that Gamble Aware has commissioned over the last 15 years for this very purpose is having an effect too - despite it being difficult, if not impossible to quantify.

If spending on RET is not having an impact on these numbers, then surely, we should question the principles of RET?

Coinslot: Despite the dramatic decline, the general narrative remains resistant to listen. Why is that and what can, and is, GBG doing to get the factual message across?

Peter Hannibal: "The difficulty we face is that for those who do not see gambling entertainment as being a legitimate way for adults to spend their hard-earned disposable income, and those for whom the industry represents the 'devil's work', positive news simply doesn't fit with their belief system or the prejudiced narrative they subscribe to. As a consequence, they refuse to agree or even acknowledge it.

There is an excellent comment piece by Hugo Rifkind in Tuesday 9th edition of The Times concerning 'fake news'. In the piece he

states: 'when somebody has gone wrong, it is no use to tell them the truth. For they don't want the truth. They want the belief. And they will find a way to keep it.'

We should also be aware that such positivity does not chime with the vociferous calls for the introduction of a statutory 'levy'. There is an argument to suggest that the decrease in problem gambling rates that the UK is experiencing does not help the arguments for a statutory levy.

Listening to the anti-gambling lobby we appear to have the same scenario described by Hugo Rifkind - which means that as an industry we have to make sure that facts backed by evidence are always heard above supposition, extrapolation and prejudice.

Coinslot: Given problem gambling sits at the heart of the gambling review, and it's at its lowest ever level, is there any more that can be done or are we realistically at the baseline?

Peter Hannibal: The commitment to 'protect the vulnerable' should forever be seen as a fundamental part of our day job(s).

If we ever think that there is no

more that we can do then we will be letting the vulnerable down, which I believe would be a profound failure on the part of the industry.

Coinslot: On that point, if the margins to reduce the rate are fairly minimal, what other Social Responsibility options are there that GBG members can apply that will sustain the low rate and meet the concerns consistently voiced by politicians both national and local.

Peter Hannibal: Key components in the on-going battle to reduce problem gambling rates are the need to educate and support consumers to stay in control of their gambling activity.

Licensed Operators are experienced in knowing when to interact with their customers and in the right way to keep an eye on them.

Every GBG member believes that responsible gambling is essential if we are to have businesses that are sustainable.

But we need to protect that very small proportion of customers who's gambling might drift out of control.

This is part of the duty of care that operators have.