

# Why winning the jackpot is just part of the Buzz!



By Simon Reynolds, Buzz Bingo

Simon Reynolds is Chief Compliance Officer at Buzz Bingo, a sector-leading operator and member of the strategic body the Gambling Business Group. He explains how the Buzz brand which boasts 82 clubs operating in 72 UK towns and cities is at the forefront of compliance at the same time as embracing the strong community values which are central to the land-based bingo experience.

Buzz Bingo is one of the best-known brand names in the sector and despite the economic downturn and across the board increases in business costs boasts some 82 clubs operating throughout England and Scotland. There's no such thing as a 'typical' Buzz Bingo club with the estate comprising a mix of purpose-built venues typically found in retail parks through to the more traditional town centre halls such as the Buzz club in Tooting, south London which was previously a cinema and is a Grade 1 listed building.

In overall terms Simon's job encompasses all rules and regulatory areas impacting the business including health and safety, player protection, audits and security and it involves engaging with both the UK Gambling Commission and local authorities. Each of the Buzz Bingo clubs will be visited by their local licensing authorities to verify that they are complying with the terms of their alcohol and gambling licences. Whilst visits will also confirm age verification undertakings and policies on consumer welfare and self-exclusion Simon believes there's an opportunity to help local authorities gain

a better understanding of the culture and the nature of the bingo experience and with it the depth of the relationship which exists between staff and consumers. "As a company we are more than happy to share insights and experience with local authorities" he confirmed. "I think it's important everyone recognises the unique nature of the relationship that we enjoy with our clientele which goes way beyond what is generally known as KYC or Know Your Customer."

During Covid this welfare-centric outlook and unique relationship came very much into its own serving as a lifeline for many of Buzz Bingo's more socially isolated customers. "During the first national lockdown, we launched an initiative called Buzz Buddies – a scheme that saw our general managers regularly call and keep in contact with customers who needed support" he noted. "Keeping in contact with them was so important – for many, a visit to the bingo represents their main social activity, so not being able to do so resulted in them feeling isolated and getting extremely lonely. "We wanted to help ensure they kept as upbeat as possible, so we contacted some 3,500 members during lockdown #1, and re-ran a smaller programme again during lockdown #2. Our general managers rang members purely to stay in contact and check they were ok. Some of our teams also used social media to keep in touch, arranging live singalongs, quizzes and doing video diaries so that members still felt connected to their community whilst in lockdown isolation."





Buzz Bingo operates a 'Think 25' scheme and uses Serve Legal an external age verification specialist agency to test the efficacy of the policy in action. Each club is visited at least once a year with the success rate benchmarked against the best practice examples of high street retailers. Failures result in the introduction of a bespoke action plan and a subsequent re-test.

The demographics of the bingo market are changing and involve a growing proportion of 25 to 40 years-old customers who visit the increasingly popular event shows which blend music, DJ and a bingo offering in a 'female-friendly' safe space. "We have a high proportion of female employees –in excess of 60% - and many mums and their grown-up daughters come to bingo in order to enjoy hassle free nights out together" noted Simon. "We describe it as 'low stake social gambling' where our customers set out what they want to spend at the start of the evening and budget accordingly. Everyone is playing the same game at the same time which generates a social cohesion unique to bingo.

Whilst the opportunity to win a jackpot and perhaps splash-out on a new car or a big holiday is obviously important our customers see themselves as buying entertainment in a social environment, having a drink and a competitively priced bite to eat surrounded by friends and staff who know and care about them. Gambling is an important part of the experience alongside community and friendship. I think in many ways a

bingo club shares important characteristics with a well-run community pub where the staff genuinely care about the well-being and welfare of their customers."

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### Bingo Industry Fact Sheet

- 92% of bingo players attend with friends or family
- 90% of bingo players play because it's fun
- 85% of bingo players see bingo as an opportunity to socialise
- 69% of bingo players go to bingo to be around other people
- 40% of bingo players would be interested in playing bingo after midnight
- 43% of bingo players say they have been to a late night bingo entertainment event
- 16 is average number of times per year a bingo player visits a club (once every three weeks)
- 11% of players say they can't imagine life without bingo
- 3 million members of bingo clubs
- 21 million visits to bingo clubs a year or 400,000 a week

Research provided by Bingo Association