

# Age Matters



By The Gambling Business Group

**A**ge estimation and age verification technology is rolling out at gaming, gambling and hospitality sectors throughout the UK. Charlotte Meller of the Gambling Business Group explains how innovation in this arena is protecting customers and staff.

As licensing officers know, failure to comply with age verification laws can result in significant penalties, including fines, licence revocation, and potential legal action. Retailers of age restricted products and services need to practice due diligence by having an effective age verification policy in place, and ensuring it is monitored to identify and improve any weaknesses.

One aspect of that due diligence is Challenge 25, which was introduced in the UK off-trade sector in 2009 (initially it targeted those who looked under 21) with the goal of encouraging individuals who are 18 or over (the legal age to buy alcohol) but appear under 25 to carry an acceptable form of ID, such as one bearing the PASS hologram, a photographic driver's licence, or a passport, in order to buy alcohol.

Challenge 25 is a policy now embraced by other age restricted products and services including gambling.

There are three products now available to support staff in licensed operations via camera technology:

1. Age Estimation (AE). This identifies customers below the age of 25 requiring an age verification check.
2. Age Verification (AV). This is a digital, accurate confirmation of a person's age.
3. Facial Recognition (FR). This allows the identification of an individual's face from a watch list.

To date, age checks in the retail and hospitality sectors have been challenging and increasingly, age estimation and age verification systems are being used to bolster protection and more accurately confirm the age of customer (having pre-registered with documentation checks).

Advanced technologies, such as facial age estimation technology can determine a customer's age, significantly reducing human error when identifying which customers (under 25) require their age to be verified. Age verification systems can then accurately verify an individual's age making the whole process far more effective and less confrontational.

The pioneering MyCheckr system, one of the market leading age verification innovations used at checkouts, is delivering protections to businesses across the economic landscape.

The company behind MyCheckr and other age and identity verification systems is Innovative Technology (ITL), which has been a leader in cash validation products globally, for decades. But it's the company's AI-powered age & identity verification division, which originally focused on helping gambling operations drive safer gambling protocols forward, that is moving age verification technology into new territory.

ITL is a member of The Gambling Business Group (GBG) and Charlotte Meller, General Manager of the GBG, explained the impact. "The gambling sector has been at the forefront of age verification technology development for many years now. For our members' operations, age estimation technology is becoming vital in player

protection - gaming machine manufacturers were keen to integrate on-machine AV into their technology to ensure that these licensed products remain adult only and that young people remain protected."

She added: "Not only does the on-gaming machine age verification product (called ICU Lite) help prevent underage players from using gaming machines, when used with facial recognition technology, they can also stop those who are self-excluded from playing. It also extends into delivering real-time alerts to venue staff for age verification failures and for the digital recording of all incidents. ITL's solutions have literally helped revolutionise the whole age verification process. And vitally, for licensing officers, it's another protection programme that keeps gambling venues safe. That technology is now used in many other high street retail settings."

## How can it help?

Age estimation technology reduces the burden on staff to make a personal judgment about a person's age. These interactions can be uncomfortable, sometimes leading to disputes. These solutions take much of that pressure away from the interaction as it is the software that triggers the need for an age verification.

ITL were involved in a Home Office Sandbox trial in 2022, which found that technology can reduce confrontation during the age check process. Staff have seconds to make the split decision, and human judgment is affected by a number of factors. The technology takes the onus off the till operator / member of staff and puts the onus on the device.

These findings were echoed in an October 2024 a survey by the Federation of Independent Retailers (FED) where 47% of its members reported that their employees had been threatened or suffered abuse and violence when asking for proof of age. FED members that introduced MyCheckr reported a reduction in confrontation with staff.



ITL's Primary Authority Partnership with Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards provides licensing officers and trading standards officers, as well as the businesses themselves, with an additional layer of reassurance that the technology can legally be implemented for both manned and supervised self-service tills to help businesses comply with age restricted legislation.

## How does Age Estimation work?

ITL's age estimation solution anonymously estimates a customer's age by analysing their facial features and does not require any cues or specific gestures or interactions from the customer. This makes the transaction smooth and provides a useful aid for staff in the vital age check process who will only have to check ID if the device detects someone potentially underage.

No data regarding the individual is stored in this process.

## Does the camera ever lie?

Andrew O'Brien, Head of Biometric Technology at ITL advised that "our estimation range has obtained independent certification (ACCS 1:2020 Technical Requirements for Age Estimation Technologies). This confirms that our products can be confidently deployed in a Challenge 25 scenario."

## What about GDPR?

Here Andrew explained "The data used is not classed as 'special category' as it cannot be used to uniquely identify an individual. ITL's age estimation systems are anonymous, none of the images are saved and all information is deleted immediately. These AE products therefore sit outside of the GDPR".

The issue of how to prevent youth access to age restricted products is a global one and age estimation technology is the future, with the UK and companies like ITL leading the way.

AE and AV take away the risk. These technologies are clear and concise and make it easy for staff to ensure they are complying with the regulations and requirements in place and that customers are being protected by pioneering technology coming to a high street business near you. ●



The Gambling Business Group (GBG) is a representation of B2C and B2B gambling organisation members from all sectors of the UK Gambling Industry.