

Industry

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“Think creatively about how you can get involved”: Sylvia Oates encourages the land-based sector to forge new links with their local communities

HIGH STREETS

Speaking during the **GBG High Street Hub** in April, CEO of Six til Six **Sylvia Oates** observed that regional business organisations and initiatives need to be made aware of the contribution AGCs and other gambling premises make to their area. She laid out various ideas and advice to encourage operators to accelerate their engagement with the local community and help transform perceptions.

Night time industries expert Sylvia Oates, the Six til Six CEO and former chief executive of the Nottingham business improvement district, shared the many ways in which gambling premises can improve the profile and perception of the sector among their local communities.

Speaking during the Gambling Business Group's widely acclaimed High Street Hub in April, Oates observed that regional trade organisations and initiatives need to be made aware of the extensive contribution AGCs, LBOs and Bingo venues make to the high street, with operators urged to expand their engagement with local statutory bodies.

“Informing and educating yourself and your team and keep informing and educating others around you and getting involved,” advised Oates. “Empower local managers and teams to look at the areas they are operating in and finding out the local objectives, crime and disorder strategies, high street regeneration strategies.”

The enthusiastic Oates advised businesses to “put it through AI to understand what the objectives of those strategies are, think about how you as operators can help to contribute to those objectives, and that you are there to be a willing partner and help meet those objectives. Think creatively about how you can get involved.”

And she was aware of how important it was to be noticed by the authorities for all the right reasons. “Informing and educating others is about making sure they know you are there,” Oates notes as she encouraged Agambling operators to try and secure in-person visits from decision makers, as well as pursuing links with exist-



Step up the engagement

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ing trade groups.

Bringing her business improvement district knowledge to the discussion, Oates laid out the options.

“Have you got a BID where your premises are located - if so find out who can be your allies there, so when they go to meetings they speak confidently and positively about you and what you can contribute, even if you aren't at the meetings yourself.”

“Make them realise there is a whole network of people, that they aren't currently engaging with, who can help them with issues.

“Find out and befriend those in the licensing team, night time economy teams, street safe teams etc and invite them in so they become your friends, become your champions - those teams all talk to each other.”

Speaking on the current level of engagement with gambling businesses, Oates added: “Generally BIDs have not even registered that the sector is there. The perception nationally is slightly different from that locally.”

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Time to engage

At a time when the high street AGC sector is under siege from Number 10 Downing Street and a vocal lobby of backbench Labour MPs, engagement is moving to the top of operator agendas.

Every operator knows how much effort goes into their businesses, how important their customers are and how strong their relationships are with neighbouring businesses.

But it's time to scream it from the roof-tops because the likes of Andy Burnham and Dawn Butler MP are doing a number on the UK's AGCs - they have

an evangelical hostility towards the whole gambling industry. And yet they never hear what AGCs, bingo clubs and WMCs do over and beyond the call of duty.

Talking at the brilliant panel session at the Gambling Business Group's High Street Hub, the subject of perception was the focus of discussion, starting first with how the pub sector, literally on the floor over its image, spent years turning their fortunes around. Those lessons were discussed by the panel of David Lucas, Jim Cathcart and Andrew Green and chaired by Coinslot's Chris Jones, with Sylvia Oates going into detail about how pubs turned it around.

Engagement with all the local trade groups, community groups, the police, the FSB and every organisation they could find to spread the message. And that work has never been so important to the AGC sector as it is now.

Oates planted the seeds for the panel attendees of how to start the process. It will take years, she advised, but with every step forward comes a new ally, a new advocate, a new partner and a new perception.

It's worth every single moment of your time, because being talked about in such irresponsible tones by Andy Burnham is damaging your business. Proving him wrong will certainly damage his.

Play Mablethorpe separates retro arcade from soft play

ARCADES

Play Mablethorpe has separated its retro arcade from its soft play after recognising that some adults were reluctant to enter because it appeared to be part of a children's play centre.

In a video update, the operator of Play Mablethorpe explained that a barrier separating the retro arcade from the public entrance had been removed, allowing visitors to access the gaming area without entering the indoor play facility.

The move follows feedback from customers who wanted to play the classic arcade machines but felt it was “a bit strange” walking into a children's venue without youngsters accompanying them.

The retro arcade features a range of classic titles including Virtua Fighter 2, Bubble Bobble, Super Mario Bros, Street Fighter II, Tekken, Mortal Kombat, Galaga, Columns and Super Monaco GP, with most games costing between 50p and £1 for one or two plays.

Visitors can also buy refreshments from the venue's snack bar, while the new layout means dog owners can now visit the arcade area, although pets remain prohibited in the children's play centre itself.

Play Mablethorpe said additional arcade machines expected to arrive in the coming weeks.

