

Anniversary Gambling Business Group Review

Gambling Business Group

Peter Hannibal:

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PETER HANNIBAL CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Gambling Business Group celebrated its 12th anniversary this summer and in the years since industry luminaries Peter Hannibal and Nick Harding founded the organisation, it has grown to over 100 members spanning dozens of retail, production and service sectors. Building partnerships with bodies like the Institute of Licensing, UK Hospitality and BBPA, and strong lines of communication - in both meanings of the phrase - with government departments, regulators and local authorities, the Group serves as one of the primary ambassadors of the UK's land-based gambling sector. Chief Executive **Peter Hannibal** talks to Coinslot about 12 years of growth and engagement.

Coinslot: You're now one of the most established trade bodies in the industry, in fact, the Gambling Business Group is currently the third oldest in the sector. Did you imagine GBG would have evolved to this level in its 12th anniversary year?

Peter Hannibal: The short answer is 'no'. We set out in 2013 to support the licenced gambling sector in areas where it wasn't getting the necessary support at the time, and these areas were being identified to us by the members themselves.

Ironically, this MO has not changed in principle over the years as our Members are even today telling us where they have new areas that need our support.

But it's important to recognise how much the gambling landscape has changed in that period. The technological evolution, the shift from land based to online and the turnaround in both governments and regulatory change has been intense.

It's been a challenging 12 years and to be fair, I think the next 12 is going to need even more vigour from trade organisations like our own.

Coinslot: Talk us through the early years - the objectives, your target membership, the skill set you were delivering?

Peter Hannibal: To be honest, we didn't have a target because our base membership was already present in a Gambling Working Group within Business In Sport and Leisure (BISL), our predecessor organisation. We simply grew organically from there.

Back then, BISL was a highly regarded organisation, but of its time. Its roots were set in the 1985 'leisure sector' and representative bodies were very different then - we're talking Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister!

But when I joined the body, it commanded considerable respect in the business world and we were able to expand it into growing areas of interest such as gambling operations and licensing.

Nick Harding and I ran the Gambling Working Group and when BISL ceased operating we simply took those loyal gambling members and created the GBG.

Both Nick and I have strong operating and machines backgrounds and we applied all of that practical knowledge and experience to the requirements of the GBG Members, and the rest is history as they say.



Coinslot: In terms of key developments, what were the big evolutionary changes for GBG over the 12 years?

Peter Hannibal: The common denominator for most of our activities over the years has been gaming machines. Whatever sub-sector of gambling we focus upon, machines are ever present - as they have been in most of my own career.

So, the early days of the GBG were highly machines focused and it was in those early days that we quickly understood the need for separate machines meetings as the subject was beginning to dominate our members meetings.

All of this was being made even more necessary by the digital revolution taking place in machines technology and manufacture.

Having all of the main manufacturers in our membership, we were soon able to establish ourselves as the centre for technical standards development and our Machines Tech Forum has played a critical part in the production of these standards over the years.

We have always focused needs of Licenced Gambling Premises as a collective group, which we tend to refer to these days as 'land-based' gambling.

With our membership encompassing AGCs, bingo, LBO and associated supporting financial, legal and compliance services, it

was very clear that corporate social responsibility would be at the heart of everything we do.

And given our roots in the Business in Sport & Leisure body, partnership working was already built into our DNA. From the very outset we were convinced that this engagement was key to raising standards on the high street - our successful relationships with organisations such as the Institute of Licensing, and more recently BBPA and UKH are testament to that.

Coinslot: Looking at the present industry landscape, where does GBG fit in terms of its membership, its services and its skill-set?

Peter Hannibal: When you have members paying annual subscriptions, you must never take it for granted that they will carry on paying next year.

So it is critical that we remain relevant and we must keep on adjusting our strategy to the ever changing landscape.

If we stop doing this we will lose our relevance and lose members.

One of our USPs throughout our 12 years right up to today has been that our Exec Team have had hands on experience of operating and regulating gambling.

We know machines and how

they work, and we have operated businesses ourselves, and we have worked with the Commission and also with licensing authorities who are responsible for regulating high street premises.

And crucially, we have a strong grasp of the requirements of the gambling consumer. We provide all of our services against this hugely important backdrop.

Coinslot: 12 years on, how is GBG shaping up to the next phase of its existence?

Peter Hannibal: Over the next six months or so, the GBG is going to adjust its resources to meet the requirements that we have clear sight of over the coming five years.

It is no secret that this current Government is no friend of Licenced Gambling, so we have to be very cautious until the next general election.

Politics aside, we have a fairly clear view of what changes are likely to come our way in the short to medium term and those changes are going to require a slightly realigned service from us if we are going to deliver them effectively.

Along with our Members, we will continue to review our strategy every quarter and realign it every anniversary. This is how we remain consistently relevant.

It's fair to say that a lot of work



Facts matter

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that business organisations do will be responsive - and it's probably a huge understatement that the Government, the Commission and the new licensing legislation will certainly drive much of that responsive activity.

But GBG also keeps a strong focus on proactive works and that is a key factor too. Our relationship with the Institute of Licensing is a perfect example of that. That was a partnership borne from thinking out of the box and it probably serves as one of our most important initiatives.

Our Members' technical standards knowledge, the legal and compliance expertise - that also keeps us on a progressive path. Our Members are constantly engaged in research and development and that requires forward thinking and a vision of how it sits in the licensing, regulatory and legislation framework.

Coinslot: On a point of posture, GBG has managed to stand out as one of the most straight-talking bodies. You have a slightly fearless approach - in particular, you're not afraid to call the authorities to account. Is that a result of the changing power afforded to the bodies that you have to deal with?

Peter Hannibal: There are two parts to my response to this

question.

Firstly, we believe that we have an obligation to our Members to say the things that they want to say but are not in a position to say freely for fear of reprisals.

We represent our Members as a collective, but we are not hampered by a licence we might lose or an impending licence inspection/review that may carry new 'conditions'.

We also have a self-imposed obligation to the industry as a whole to 'fact check' as much of the misinformation (disinformation!) and misleading 'facts' that are put out there by dishonest actors, and call it out accordingly.

Secondly, and in particular response to the underlying part of your question, in 2016 the Industry's relationship with the Regulator took a dramatic turn from a progressive 'working together for continuous improvement' style to one bordering on adversarial. It has been in response to this change that we have become more robust in holding people and organisations to account on behalf of our Members.

One final but very relevant point on this is that we have the confidence that we know what we are talking about because of our knowledge and experience.

We also only use facts and proper evidence, unlike many we have to deal with.

And most importantly, what we don't know we find out - quickly.

Coinslot: What next for the GBG?

Peter Hannibal: What we know about 'the next' for the GBG which we have already discussed earlier.

It's what we don't know that's just as important. And what we don't know about is mainly in the areas of Politics and Prime Ministers and Secretaries of State.

We have no idea what is really going on in their heads and what is going to happen to things like MGD, Aim to Permit, Triennial Reviews, Business Rates etc.

There's a great deal being said and a lot of talking to their specific bases, but the detail and implementation strategy is not so clear.

All of these comments and declarations have the potential to seriously damage our Members and their businesses and probably the consumer proposition. But, there is only so much influence we can collectively have on the outcomes.

This is our greatest challenge and is where the industry - and I am talking all corners here - must pull together for the proverbial 'greater good'. But above all, we will keep on doing the right thing for the industry and its consumers.