The development of trust in online gaming
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It has often been said by those in the marketing field that every great brand has an outstanding feature at its heart. What's more, a product needs time to be promoted and communicated consistently to become a brand. Repetition appears to be one of the keys to establishing brand success. However, what really determines a brand - and this is especially important in the online gambling arena - is trust.

Trust is critical in e-commerce. Without trust, there is a risk that online commercial sites could obtain a bad reputation - that it is an unsafe, risky place. For many Internet gambling operators and other online commercial organisations, the mechanism to establish trust has been to pursue a 'clicks and mortar' approach of combining an offline presence (and brand recognition) with online presence.

Trust is of paramount importance in getting people to gamble online. Players will be more likely to gamble online with those companies that are well established rather than a little known company operating out of the Caribbean. Successful brands have a 'trustmark' rather than a trademark. This is an apt gauge for social acceptability and social responsibility. However, getting transferability and connections across brands in the 'mainstream' is one the key issues.

'Trustmarks' are now becoming one of the major reasons why consumers prefer one particular product to other non-familiar ones. They communicate the message that customers have not been let down by the product and they can reduce anxiety by using it. Again, this is especially important in the gambling business.

So, how do these services establish trust? Initially, it was argued that the Internet would provide a level playing field for small and large retailers alike. However, given the need to establish trust, it would seem that organisations with an existing reputation are at an advantage. Research into online book purchases and flight bookings has found that the perceived size and reputation of the company determines consumers' likelihood of purchasing from it. The reason for this is that increased size and reputation leads to higher trust, which in turn influences the perception of risk and the willingness to buy.

Recent psychological thinking proposes a three-stage model for understanding how people assess the trustworthiness of a commercial website (Sillence et al, 2006). The first stage assumes that people are faced with a large number of potential websites and thus engage in rapid, heuristic analysis based on the design of the site, rather than the content. During the second stage, people engage in a more systematic analysis of the content of the site, and it is during this stage that people are influenced by the apparent integrity, benevolence and expertise demonstrated. The third stage is a relationship development and integration stage (i.e., people's continued use of a site, personalisation and the integration of experience).

A critical part of the first stage of assessing trustworthiness of a commercial website relies on its design. Studies have found that people can judge the visual attractiveness of a website within 50 milliseconds. Furthermore, there have been a number of studies that have identified the critical design elements during this early stage. These findings of the elements found in trustworthy and untrustworthy sites are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Elements used for trust evaluation on Internet websites

	Creates Trust	Creates Mistrust
Design	- Good contact information, 'real world feel' (e.g. use of photographs) - Seals of approval (e.g. *TRUSTe*) 'Professional' look and feel on all web pages	- Adverts - Small text - Poor layout & design (too complex or amateur) - Spelling mistakes - Broken links - Slow to load
Content	- Others' viewpoints (reviews, independent assessments) - Simple language - Privacy, security policies, customer relations information - Does not mix content and advertising	- Too much jargon, confusing terminology - Sales pitch - Mixes advertising with content
Relationship Management	- Privacy, security policies, customer relations information - Personalised services, tailored design	- No information and/or policy on customer complaints procedure - No attempt to personalise users' experience

(Adapted from Whitty and Joinson, 2008)

People may also adopt different techniques in assessing trust according to their experience of using the Internet and their own expertise. For instance, it has been found that 'experts' assess commercial websites using reputation and an analysis of the information quality, while the more general consumer is more swayed by the attractiveness of the website design.

Trust is an historical concept because customers need repeated interactions coupled with good feelings to build it. The good news for companies - including the online gaming industry - is that customers do not have to have experienced the product. Customers might engage in things because others have used or engaged in the product for years. Although little studied in gambling settings, trust is thought to be an important variable in both the initial decision to gamble and the maintenance of gambling behaviour. In a recent study carried out by our International Gaming Research Unit (IGRU; 2007), four-fifths of Internet gamblers (79%) considered the Internet a trustworthy medium of gambling. However, most Internet gamblers preferred to gamble on websites of well-known and trusted 'high street' bookmakers (90%).

One of the most important things about brands for the gaming industry is that they help consumers define their self-image and who they are - at least on some psychological level. For some people, this 'personal branding' may be more important than their social identities within a community. For example, the car they drive or the newspaper they read, are particularly strong cultural indicators of what sort of person they are. Where they gamble and on what games can be an extension of this. However, total trust acceptance may also lead to an uncritical assessment of acceptability by the punter. For instance, some trusted non-gambling websites now provide links and endorsements to either their own gambling sites, or those of affiliates. My own research unit

recently highlighted a case of an online problem gambler who had been led to an online gambling site by watching a popular (and trusted) daytime television programme that promoted its own online gaming site.

As mentioned above, 'trustmarks' are likely to be important in relation to social responsibility and the perception of it by players. In our research studies conducted with online gamblers around the world (International Gaming Research Unit, 2007; Wood & Griffiths, 2008), we found that many of them feel that responsible gaming practises demonstrate that a gaming operator has integrity, and that they care about their customers' wellbeing. Many of the players did not want their winnings to come from players who could not afford to lose it. They reported that responsible gaming practices allowed them to feel comfortable that their winnings had not come from people with gambling problems. Given that one of the biggest obstacles that prevent people playing online is a lack of trust of operators, this is a significant and important finding that gaming operators should take note of.

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Professor Griffiths is internationally known for his work on gambling, winning many awards including the American 1994 John Rosecrance Research Prize for "outstanding scholarly contributions to the field of gambling research", the 1998 European CELEJ Prize for best paper on gambling, the 2003 Canadian International Excellence Award for "outstanding contributions to the prevention of problem gambling and the practice of responsible gambling" and a North American 2006 Lifetime Achievement Award For Contributions To The Field Of Youth Gambling "in recognition of his dedication, leadership, and pioneering contributions to the field of youth gambling".

He has published over 200 refereed research papers, a number of books, over 50 book chapters and over 550 other articles. He has served on numerous national and international committees (e.g. BPS Council, BPS Social Psychology Section, Society for the Study of Gambling, Gamblers Anonymous General Services Board, National Council on Gambling etc.) and is a former National Chair of Gamcare.