

I was employed in the gaming industry for over 8 years. Through my experience within the industry, I have witnessed first hand the behaviour, thinking and consequent effects of a problem gambler. Using the information I have gained through talking to gamblers, I have developed a pro active yet cost efficient approach to help combat problem gambling. I acknowledge the campaign is not of the highest quality as I was working with limited resources on a very limited budget, but I believe the concepts behind it are extremely valuable

Why do most people gamble? What is it that motivates them? Is it that they want to make the publican richer? Is it that they want to make the government more money through poker machine taxes? No, it's because they want to win money. Next question, why is it that the lowest socio-economic areas have the highest incidence of gambling? Is it that these people have more money? No, it's because they see gambling as the answer.

Having worked in the industry and having spoken to a lot of gamblers, in my opinion, **the problem is caused by the perceived solution.** These people believe that they will somehow win enough money on a poker machine to change their lives, enough money to get out of the poverty cycle or enough money to buy nicer things and in general, live a better life. People who apply this way of thinking are in fact digging themselves deeper in debt and denying themselves nicer things they could otherwise afford if they did not gamble.

You are probably saying to yourself, “*but don't people sometimes win on a poker machine*”? You're right... they do sometimes win. However from what I have observed, most money won on a poker machine is put back in trying to win again, or to win more money. Also the actual amount of money it is possible to win on a poker machine is ridiculously low. For example, on a 1 cent machine playing only 1 or 2 credits per line, the most it is possible to win is a couple of hundred dollars. Now if X-lotto had a draw where the maximum prize was \$400, would anyone buy a ticket? Of course not! Yet we have a billion dollar industry based on what is essentially, the chance to win a few hundred dollars. Granted it is possible to win slightly more if you bet more credits per line, however, **if you bet big you lose big.** A \$1000 win isn't really much in context when you've spent over \$20,000 in the last year on gambling. Most gamblers only look at the “small picture”, which is how much they gamble a week, which doesn't seem like much. But when looking at the “bigger picture”, \$20 gambled away per week, equates to over \$1000 a year, \$10,000 over 10 years... etc. There are a lot of people who gamble considerably more than \$20 a week, which will subsequently lead to much higher losses. Now, with the high amount of money people are spending on poker machines and the ridiculously low amount it is actually possible to win, **no regular gambler is ever going to recoup their losses playing on a poker machine.**

Albert Einstein describes insanity as “Doing the same thing over and over, but expecting a different result.” Tell me, did you get rich by playing the poker machines for the last 5 years? Do you think you'll get rich if you play them for another 5 years? When was the last time you heard about a person enjoying financial freedom after a pokies windfall. I haven't, have you? (Well not in Australia anyway)

In recent years the number of \$1 machines in venues has risen dramatically. People have this notion that they win more money on a \$1 machine. This could not be further from the truth. If anything, they win less money. You see it is all relevant, a \$500 win on a \$1 machine is exactly the same as a \$5 win on a 1 cent machine, but who gets excited over a \$5 win, no-one right. When you are betting on a \$1 machine you are staking \$1 per line (100 x 1 cent) therefore making the maximum win on a lot of these machines (\$1000) the equivalent of a \$10 win on 1 cent machine.

Education must play a key role in any gambling reform and by eliminating the misconception that you can get ahead in life through playing the pokies is essential to tackling problem gambling. The campaign I have created deals with these issues in a quick and easy to understand way.

The industry will argue that gambling is a form of entertainment. No different to going to a movie or football game. However, unlike gambling, these forms of entertainment are regulated. You know how much it is going to cost and you know exactly what you're getting for your money.

With gambling however, there is no regulation on how much can be spent. This, combined with the misconception that you can get ahead in life through playing on poker machines, is what I believe is fuelling the massive amount of money people are spending on gambling. Gaming venues are full of misleading buzzwords like "win", "excitement", "fun" "jackpot" etc; these signs should really read poverty, divorce, bankruptcy etc.

Can someone please explain how a person who has lost \$10,000 in a year on poker machines is going to win their money back? They are not! Yet for some reason people believe that this is a possibility.

\$10,000 a year represents the bottom end of the problem gambling scale (roughly \$200 a week).

Now if a person who spends \$10,000 a year is unable to recoup their losses, what chance does some one who spends in excess of \$50,000 have? Absolutely no chance at all! Ask any regular gambler what they have to show for the last 5 years of their gambling? More than likely it will be nothing. What do you think they'll have to show for in another 5 years time? Probably still nothing? What about in 10, 20 or 30 years? Likely not a thing.

I understand you cannot control how people spend their money; however I believe people have a right to make an informed decision that they will lose an astronomically large sum of money through gambling. That in 10 years time they are likely to still be struggling financially.

Las Vegas is the gambling capital of the world. The beauty of Vegas however is it truly is a tourist destination and it ***DOES*** bring outside dollars to the town. People from all over the world come to Vegas to gamble and have fun. (I have been to Vegas, everything you have heard, seen, read, it's all true. Vegas truly does live up to the hype). Having said that how are these billion dollar casinos being built? This once again just highlights how evil gambling is.

But unlike Vegas your suburban/city gambling venues, rather than bringing in tourist dollars they just steal consumer dollars that would otherwise be spent in small businesses in the local area. Gambling is everywhere in our communities now, so it is no longer a measure to get tourist dollars it simply steals money that should be spent in more productive ways in the local economy.

You no longer have to travel 100's of kilometers to have a bet, you can just waltz down the street, walk past the local coffee shop (who is probably struggling), walk past the charities (probably also struggling), walk past the homeless guy (who lost all his money gambling last week chasing that big win that he hopes will get him off the streets) and walk into your local gambling venue which just deters spending/ job creation in other legitimate businesses.

Regardless if you agree or disagree with my views, I ask you to answer me just one question.

***Why shouldn't people have the right to make an informed decision about gambling?***

The industry will also claim that a drop in gambling revenue will lead to the loss of thousands of jobs and the industry to lose millions of dollars. While they may lose revenue, if anything the reduced turnover would create jobs. If a gaming venue was to increase its turnover by \$1,000,000 it **might** create one job. If this money is not put through a poker machine is it just going to disappear? I don't think so. It will be spent in small businesses, spent on charities, spent taking care of your children. If a small business like a café was to increase its turnover by just \$50,000 a year it would more than likely have to hire another employee. Therefore, by the million dollars being redistributed throughout the community, it would potentially create 20 more jobs than if it was gambled.

I believe just one life destroyed by gambling is one too many, let alone the hundreds and thousands that are adversely affected by the evils of gambling every year.

***What is wrong with the current approach to assisting problem gamblers?***

If you were to walk into any gaming room you would find an array of different signs, posters, booklets, pamphlets, cards etc that are all designed to assist problem gamblers. The problem with pretty much all of these measures is they all offer a "reactive approach". By this I mean the help and advice is available once you have the problem. Then you can call the gambling help line after you have lost all your money, self-dignity, the respect of others and once the problem is well and truly out of control. What measures are in place to prevent people from getting to the stage where their gambling addiction is out of control?

There aren't any measures! Why, you ask?

At present the approach taken by gaming venues to tackle problem gambling is how can we "appear" to be doing something to minimise problem gambling, whilst still protecting our bottom line.

What if the tobacco industry was to take the same approach as the gambling industry? What if they promoted cigarettes as being cool, fun, hip etc. but to justify this they create an organization that you can call once you have cancer and they will tell you "Oh yeah, by the way, smoking causes cancer". Would this be acceptable? Of course it wouldn't, so how come the gambling industry can get away with it?

Cigarettes like most potentially hazardous products must contain warning labels informing consumers of the risks involved with consuming the product. Poker machines create a huge amount of damage in the local community. In the news there are constantly stories of people losing their homes, life saving and committing suicide as a result of problem gambling, but despite all this destruction there is still an absence of any real pro active measures attached to the industry.

I believe that the "gambling, look at the big picture" posters could be used as a warning label and warn players what will likely happen if they continually play on these machines. A few key points to consider about this campaign are:

- \* It would cost very little to implement
- \* It will not have an impact on recreational gamblers
- \* This campaign applies to all forms of gambling (Internet, pokies, Sports Betting, Horse Racing etc)

\* There would be no need to upgrade machine software/hardware in order to implement this campaign.

By no means am I saying don't gamble. I am saying if you want to make an *informed* decision to spend \$50,000 a year, or over \$500,000 over the next ten years, for the chance to win a few hundred dollars, maybe even a few thousand, by all means be my guest. But just think of what else could you do with that money. How much better would your quality of life be if you didn't gamble?

Mr. Xenophon, stated in a Sunday Mail article dated 22 April 2007, in reference to the government's policies towards problem gambling, "they seem to be arguing over what sort of ambulance to have at the bottom of the cliff - *after* the damage is done. What I've always advocated is that we need to fence off the top of the cliff."

I believe the campaign I have created could be that "fence at the top of the cliff" and if executed correctly will give people a reason *not* to gamble excessively and also highlight the "*Bigger Picture*" and give people who are already gambling a reason to cut back and hopefully quit.

Prevention is better than a cure; while we might not be able to save this generation from the perils of gambling, let's hope we can save the next generation.

I believe that through using the campaign I have developed and using the right media, we can help combat problem gambling. Your thoughts and views on this subject would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely