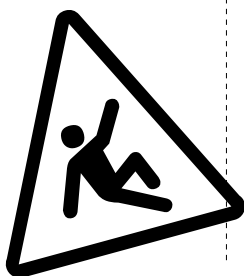


MRGC – Promoting Responsible Gaming



An addiction to, or obsession with, something is a condition that is a concern for those around the persons affected and by society in general. Such conditions lead to serious problems within families, with friends and it also boils over to society becoming a cause for concern to the general public. The majority of people are able to enjoy the things around them without getting addicted or obsessed.

However, there is always that small percentage that tend to be unable to control themselves and end up losing control and get addicted.



We've all heard of adrenalin junkies, shopaholics, chocoholics, compulsive eaters, speed junkies, bookworms, etc. These people need help to identify the fact that they have a problem; they need to know what to do if they do have a problem and have to be pointed in the right direction for assistance to combat their problem. First of all we must understand that everyone has a right to smoke, drink, shop freely, indulge in their hobbies (as long as they are legal!!), and also to gamble and/or bet amongst other things. The laws of countries do impose limitations on age, location, seasonal restrictions (e.g. hunting) whilst some religions do not allow alcohol, pornography, gambling and even charging or paying interest on money. Some countries even block websites which allow freedom of speech. Who is right; who is wrong? All we can say for sure is that in modern, civilized societies people are permitted as much freedom as possible to live their lives as they choose within the parameters of the law and where no danger is posed to other members of society. We have learned how to accept euthanasia, same sex marriages, abortion, divorce and other activities or actions previously thought to be unacceptable to our culture. Of course certain factions of society and certain religions still oppose a number of these issues, however, they are still deemed to be legal if carried out within the specified parameters of the laws of that country. Why are we talking about these things? What have they got to do with gaming? The only reason we are mentioning them is to put the whole matter of online gaming into proper perspective so that certain biases are overcome before we can seriously talk about responsible online gaming, the right to offer online gaming products and protection of vulnerable persons.



Gambling is all about risking something of value to win something else of value, normally of greater value. People do it because it gives them a buzz; an adrenalin rush, and ... Gambling is not only playing at roulette or playing slot machines or betting on football or horses.

Every week people who say they don't like gambling buy lottery tickets, play bingo at the local band club, play rummy at home with friends, buy raffle tickets, and a number of other ways of creating their own rush. These people could be said to be in control of their emotions and spend only the money they can afford. They are in general responsible gamblers. You do however get the odd persons who buy more lotto or lottery tickets that they can really afford hoping they can win the big prize, sometimes at the expense of skipping basic necessities for the family!



The fear of the online gambling phenomenon has been created for a number of reasons, most of them politically and financially motivated, without any scientific studies whatsoever to back these claims. The main excuse used by those opposed to the industry is that online gambling has brought gambling into the home and will lead to greater addiction and consequently more problem gamblers will be created to the detriment of the families and society in general. There is no scientific study to substantiate these claims. On the contrary the latest studies have shown that there has been no increase. Without a doubt, more serious studies need to be carried out to determine whether online gambling has increased the problems related to gambling addiction. The jury is still out on this one. However, everyone agrees that gambling can be a problem and needs to be handled with care.

That is why strict and sensible regulations need to be implemented and followed. Prohibition is not a solution and will only create an underground industry that will be ruthless and will encourage excessive gambling without any code of ethics or any respect for a person's right to quit and seek assistance.

Responsible gaming is a matter taken very seriously by the Lotteries and Gaming Authority of Malta and also by the Malta Remote Gaming Council. There are a number of measures that an operator holding a Maltese license is required to implement. The MRGC also encourages its members to take responsible gaming extremely seriously and has reached an agreement with internationally respected and well reputed specialists to provide various workshops for its members on the subject.

The first measure implemented in the Maltese regulations is that operators are required to carry out age verification checks on registered players and not allow persons below the age of 18 to register and play (whether for real cash or for play money). Operators are also required to have responsible gaming messages on their home page and links to organisations that provide assistance to problem gamblers.



These measures are only the first steps to advise customers about the risks of gambling and also how they can identify if they have a problem and what they can do and whom they can contact in order to get any assistance they need.



The regulations go even further and require that the actual gaming products offered by their licensees provide their customers with the possibility to restrict the monies they gamble and the amount of time spent playing online. These are definitely of benefit to players who find it hard to control themselves but would still like to enjoy online gaming. The controls they can implement to protect themselves depend mainly on the type of online gaming product they enjoy. Casino games, such as slot machines and roulette tend to be the repetitive type where the player loses track of time and money that they are wagering. These types of products are required to have a reality check available which is a pop up that stops play; informs the player of the amount of time he has been playing; and how much he has won and/or lost. He is also then required to confirm whether he wants to carry on playing or not. This type of control cannot, for example, be implemented in a poker or skill games environment, and is not as necessary as these games have stops between one game and another and the player is very conscious of wins and losses and his balance.

These controls do not apply to sports betting environments either. To protect players who prefer betting on sports betting other measures such as bet limits and limits on losses for a period of time are normally implemented and are just as effective. Poker and skill games players normally would only use the limit on losses measure, or totally bar (self-banning) themselves from playing at all for a definite or indefinite period of time. Another measure to protect problem gamblers is to stop them from removing any self imposed limits is to restrict them from removing said limits before a cooling off period has expired.

Apart from the above measures, although not specifically required by law, training of the employees who deal directly with these types of customers on how to handle them is also a positive step being taken by the larger operators who encounter these types of problems more frequently.

The above type of measures, apart from the self-banning and age limitation, cannot be imposed in a land based environment. Recent research has also showed that private operators are taking responsible gaming more seriously and have implemented more measures than in most state run monopolies.

The MRGC has provided a number of workshops for such training to members and non-members at a highly subsidized price throughout the year 2009. The possibility of negotiating similar deals with organisations specialising in the provision of such training is being considered for 2010. The MRGC may also consider imposing responsible gaming training on its members in the future, such is its commitment to promoting responsible gaming amongst the Maltese licensed operators.

