

Building momentum

Fresh from a strong showing at IAAPA in November, UNIS is ready to take EAG International by storm, says Steven Tan

UNIS had a major presence at November's IAAPA Attractions Expo and in London this month, many of the new products launched there will be on show at the EAG International Expo.

Exhibiting at ExCel in partnership with its UK-based distributor Instance Automatics, UNIS will be presenting Pirate's Hook 4, Storm Blaster, Squirt A Gator, Up and Away and machines from its new 47ins cabinet series.

UNIS general manager Steven Tan is anticipating another strong showing at the event.

"UNIS always attends on the Instance Automatics stand and there I meet up with many clients and old friends from across the globe," said Tan. "It will be an exciting lineup of machines that are already showing excellent earnings on test."

The company's sales in the UK and Europe have been "steady" over the past year and, although conditions continue to be challenging, the market is showing signs of improvement generally.

"Operators are very careful about their investments, the machines must be value for money and of good quality to avoid costly down-time and this is where UNIS comes into its own"

"This part of the world has had a really tough time economically during the past year and

UNIS is fully aware that the operators cannot invest in brand new machines when the climate is so poor," said Tan. "Operators are very careful about their investments, the machines must be value for money and of good quality to avoid costly down-time

and this is where UNIS comes into its own. Our machines are well made and, for mid-range priced machines, they look top and perform like top of the range so you get a lot of machine for your money."

The redemption machine market has become very strong for UNIS and this type of machine can be placed in locations as diverse as family entertainment centres, restaurants and theme parks. The company's latest innovation, the UNI Vend System, which enables prize only/prize plus ticket/ticket only configurations, is designed to give operators the flexibility to use the best system for different types of venues.

"We think this development will create new business and encourage different markets," said Tan.

Having enjoyed the company's best IAAPA show in five years, UNIS is keen to bring these inventive, money-making amusement products to the European market and EAG is likely to provide the ideal launch pad. Operators and players here are eager to experience fresh new ideas.

"The market is looking for a variety of product types," said Tan. "Redemption and video are certainly strong markets for UNIS but alongside that, customer are hungry for innovation; something a little bit different,

using different mediums, such as water and air. But the most important thing is the gameplay and quality of the machine. You can have new, different gimmicks, advanced technology and gadgets, but if the machines are not good quality and the gameplay is not fully tested and sound, they will fail once in the marketplace."

With its latest range of games already captured the imagination of visitors to the Orlando show at the end of last year, the stage is set for UNIS to impress the crowds at this month's EAG International Expo and beyond.



German industry seeking positive future

THE German gaming machine industry can achieve a "fair chance for the future" despite facing mounting political pressure, it has been claimed.

Ahead of the IMA show in Düsseldorf this month, Berlin-based AWP manufacturer Bally Wulff has suggested that there could be a positive outcome to negotiations between the industry and Germany's länder, or states.

The authorities are seeking to curb the expansion of the country's arcades by amending regulations to prevent the grouping of multiple licences that has seen the emergence of large arcades housing hundreds of machines, while also imposing other conditions relating to machines themselves.

This has raised concern among operators and manufacturers and is sure to be a topic of conversation at the show.

"We are certain, however, that, both by legal and mostly by political means, we will be able to secure a fair chance for the future," said Bally Wulff head of marketing Francesco Vesco. "Certification is exactly the approach to re-establish confidence in political circles. Although we may have grown attached to them, we must leave our well-trodden paths. The task is to take active part in shaping the future and to present concepts that can serve as a basis for discussions. With the participation of our industry, scientific/preventive and political circles, we want to promote a games arcade of the future offering comprehensive player protection and [that] is economically viable."

The company expects IMA to provide generally positive signals and a sense of optimism.

"We will make a decisive contribution with our products," he continued. "Therefore, we are looking forward to Düsseldorf, a large number of trade visitors and many interesting talks to present our novelties as well as the perspectives our leisure products offer."

IMA is taking place on January 14-17.



Francesco Vesco

Schmidt buys CMI

THE major German gaming machine operator Schmidt Gruppe has bought the money-handling specialist CMI.

Schmidt, based at Coesfeld, near Münster, has 180 arcades in Germany, an obvious benefit for the CMI products, which have been sold into a number of European markets.

CMI is best known for the Multi Cash Terminal, which comes in five versions and will connect to any gambling device to handle any transactions, coins, bills, tickets or cards.

CMI is based at Bottrup, near Düsseldorf.



Steven Tan

China moves towards family-friendly amusements

CHINA'S amusement market is "skewing younger," said Steven Tan, general manager of UNIS.

The market is shifting from a focus on video games to more family-orientated entertainment locations, he said.

"Some companies understand that," he told *InterGame*. "There used to be significant buying power for video games but the market is changing dramatically."

Last year the industry stalled due to a lack of clarity over the government's policy towards the sector. Its aim has always been to crack down on illegal gambling and therefore root out operators that offer gaming machines in amusement centres.

"The market is growing again but in a different direction," added Tan.

FutureLogic picked for 10,000-VLT project

TICKET printer manufacturer FutureLogic has signed an exclusive deal with Novomatic subsidiary Austrian Gaming Industries to supply its GEN2 Universal printer for all 10,000 VLT machines for the Romanian lottery.

Novomatic was chosen to be the exclusive supplier of the machines and video lottery system by Loteria Romana in October. In addition to FutureLogic's ticket printer being deployed on all the machines, its desktop TITO/coupon printer CouponXpress will be available at various transaction points.

John Edmunds, FutureLogic's chief sales and marketing officer, said the company was proud to have been selected for such a "prestigious" project.

"We have been working with the Novomatic group of companies for a long time and are extremely pleased that they have chosen our printing products for the Loteria Romana," he added.



The big question

After a positive IAAPA, do you think the amusement sector has now turned a corner and operators are in the mood to purchase new equipment?



"Yes, I feel there is a more positive attitude to the future and this will result in some more investment; new equipment, new systems, new design."

Andrea Bisi,
Embed International

"In the US, the industry very much seems to have turned a corner. There was a far higher proportion of US operators and buyers at IAAPA than we've had in recent years. For us, it is a very positive market and to see that number of guys back out there that we haven't seen for a while is very encouraging. Internationally, the show was a little bit weaker. I didn't see as many European operators there as we have done in recent years. Overall I think the mood is upbeat across most territories, but Europe is definitely lagging at the moment."

There are pockets of growth in places like Turkey, however."

Steve Bryant,
LAI Games



"Generally speaking, yes. But having said that, we at Sega have had a good few years in the past four or five years – last year was our best year in the last 10. So for us, the corner was turned quite a while ago. We worked hard in getting product to market in new and different territories. We had good product and worked with partners such as ICE. As an industry it has turned, but we created our own momentum a few years ago through necessity. It was about looking at new ways of doing business and bringing product to market."

Justin Burke,
Sega Amusements



"We hope so! It is great to see the confidence returning to the industry after a number of years of standing still. I think that the change to Machine Games Duty will start benefiting the smaller operators so we hope there will be more money to invest for the coming year."

John Jennings, JNC Sales

"IAAPA was fantastic for UNIS this time, certainly our best show for five years. I do think that in the US, Canada and Latin America a corner has been turned. There is new enthusiasm and vigour among the industry, it is wonderful to see and be part of. I think that Europe and the UK still has some ground to make up but I am sure over the next year or two this will happen."

Steven Tan, UNIS



"Astrosys International is a global organisation, with sales offices in the UK, Australia, US and Hong Kong. As a group, we exhibit at several trade exhibitions over the year. During these shows, we have spoken to many operators and feel that there has certainly been a positive shift in the way that they are looking at potential new purchases. Despite there being an abundance of machines and components already in the field available for recycling or 'greening,' consideration is still being given to acquiring new machines. Whether or not there will be a significant increase in sales as a result of this interest remains to be seen."

Debbie Malin,
Astrosystems



"The best operators all know that constant investment in new equipment is the life-blood of the industry. It keeps customers coming back and keeps manufacturers in business so that they can support current product and produce new and better games for the future. A stale arcade with the same old games in tired condition will find it harder and harder to compete with one with exciting new games. This is especially true with the changing demographics in visitors, with the focus becoming more family orientated, the mix of machines skews ever more towards redemption and prize/novelty games rather than slot machines/AWPs."

Matt Bland, United Distributing Company



"The theme park sector was actually harder hit than the bar market in recent years, at least in the US, but it has recovered pretty nicely. It's a bit tough to generalise about 'operators' because they are arrayed in such distinct segments. But we would say that amusement parks have come back strongly; arcades are holding their own; tavern operators are struggling in the US, but operators who cater to restaurants, malls, movie theatres and retail stores are doing fine. From our perspective, the most successful operators are always in a buying mood. They continually invest in new equipment. That's why their businesses remain strong regardless of the state of the health of the economy."

Allen Weisberg,
Apple Industries



"If you are close to the market you will know one thing for certain and that is that the market is in a fragile financial position, whether that be in manufacturing, distribution or operating. The recent press from some of the UK pub operators cannot be ignored and is indicative of this position and that the commercial supply model across all sectors needs to be reviewed if we are to return to a healthier marketplace. That being said all of the operators across all sectors know that you need to maintain investment to maintain income levels and as such we are seeing reasonable investment in new equipment."

Simon Barff, Blueprint Gaming



"With the number of new products being exhibited at IAAPA and the orders we have taken, the market has definitely turned a corner for the better. This change is throughout various key markets like Russia or Middle East – even companies in Nordic countries seems to have found the key to their safe."

Kjeld Erichsen,
Namco

