

SBC | SUMMIT NORTH AMERICA

SBC Summit North America: The Producers Tell All

When the US announced the state-by-state regulation of sports betting in 2018, it was seen by many as the ushering in of a new era of gaming, an incredible opportunity for both regional and international brands to capitalize on a new market.

Since that fateful day almost 6 years ago, the burgeoning North American market has experienced both its fair share of victories as well as many complexities and setbacks. This has led many in the industry, who wish to strengthen their position in the market, to seek the latest innovative strategies, regulatory guidance, and invaluable advice from renowned industry leaders.

In the lead-up to SBC Summit North America, (set to take place at Meadowlands Exposition Center, New Jersey, between May 7-9), veteran conference producers Aidan Brain (VP Conference Production, SBC) and Jack Richards (Senior Conference Producer, SBC), sat down with us to shed light on the brand new additions to this year's event, the process behind deciding panel topics, and the changing North American landscape.

Q: We're kicking off the conference with the 'Player Protection Symposium' – it has truly become a hallmark of SBC Summit North America. Could you delve into what makes this topic such a hit in the United States in a way that merits a dedicated pre-day conference? And who can benefit from attending?

Aidan Brain: Player protection – better known as responsible gambling (RG) on this side of the pond – is key in the gaming industry. Regulators and compliance teams alike recognize the importance of ensuring gamblers can play without undergoing harm, and there's so much technology out there now to guarantee this. The Player Protection Symposium is the perfect place for operators and solution providers to showcase this and discuss ways to be even safer.

Jack Richards: In 2024, if a new company forms in the gambling industry, they have to go through regulations, and none are tighter than the RG regs that protect the players. If a company concentrates on this aspect first, they're proving to be customer-focused and more likely to win customers who know they are valued. It's a similar story for SBC Summit North America, we're putting RG at the very start of the conversation, and everything else will follow.

Q: I see a new addition to this year's event is the 'Capital Markets Forum'. Why do you believe

valuable addition to the 2024 event and what types of discussions can delegates anticipate?

AB: Gaming is big business! Since sports betting opened up in the US after the PASPA overturn in 2018, the world of Wall Street has started paying attention to the industry's dynamism. This will be an afternoon where institutional investors and analysts will give their insights into the current state of play, something we haven't done before on such a deep level, so I'm excited to see this new addition to our annual roster of activations.

JR: The Capital Markets Forum enriches the 2024 event by focusing on financial and investment trends and economic insights. Delegates can expect discussions on global market dynamics, sustainable investments, fintech advancements, regulatory updates, and strategies for navigating volatile markets; offering valuable perspectives for industry stakeholders. We're working with Earnings +More to deliver a robust program, but remember tickets will be sold separately from the main summit.

Q: I have noticed that this year's conference agenda includes roundtables. Could you share the idea behind this format? What are the topics that will be discussed?

AB: We run market roundtables at most of our events. The format is really just perfect for fostering discussion in a way that audience Q&A just can't achieve during our more traditional sessions. Typically our roundtables have one or two hosts who will launch proceedings with talking points, and the discussions can develop in any way from there. We've had great feedback on this format across all events, as it brings ideas together in a relatively low-pressure environment, which is what we want our attendees to be able to do!

JR: This format encourages diverse perspectives and promotes in-depth exploration of various key industry topics. By gathering experts and stakeholders, the discussions aim to address industry challenges in an environment that encourages active participation and knowledge sharing. There's something for everyone, with dedicated discussions on sports partnerships, tribal gaming, affiliates, Canada, Latin America, and more.

Q: I see you have included a panel dedicated to streamers and social media influencers. Last year, we focused on more traditional forms of affiliate marketing. Have you been noticing changes on that front?

AB: Operators and affiliates alike are waking up to the fact that today's players are just built differently. They have so many different channels of engagement at their fingertips, and social media, obviously, is what makes our world go round at the moment. Some of these influencers, who double up as iGaming streamers, have huge followings. I can't wait to hear what they have to say!

JR: Influencers are the commentators of the current times. In years gone by, we just had sports presenters or casino journalists, but this new breed of expert, 'the Influencer', brings in a whole new generation. Quite often, these influencers are 'doing' rather than 'reporting', so you get a completely different angle from the other experts we're likely to have involved in the show.

Q: Whilst I understand it may be difficult to choose, as conference producers what are the three most important questions that this agenda will answer?

AB: I think the gaming market in the US is, if not at a crossroads, in danger of hitting a plateau. This agenda is going to try to answer, what's next? How can we engage new audiences without new states opening up? How are products evolving with technology? And is iCasino/iGaming really going to take

off in the same way as sports betting?

JR: As always, we'll have a question with a stringent focus on the near future of the market regarding which States are opening up, regulations coming in, and some acquisitions. From a sports angle, I see a 'state of play' question around the convergence of media and betting; exploring whether we've come to a plateau or if there is an unexplored avenue still to go down. And for emerging technology, I'd throw the question about the future of crypto and the history of NFTs, and speculate how this affects the gaming industry.

Q: A notable feature of the agenda is the 'Tribal Symposium'. Why do you feel now is the time to include a dedicated symposium around tribal gaming and who is set to benefit from this addition?

AB: During the US 2022 fiscal year, tribal gaming generated revenues of 40 billion. That's huge!! Tribal gaming has many distinct attributes from commercial gaming and a lot of it is heavily land-based, which is one reason SBC hasn't focussed on it too strongly in our past conference content. However, it is beginning to compete with commercial gaming in many ways. We also want to provide a platform for such an important industry and culture; we can't speak for the tribal gaming sector but we can certainly give them a podium!

JR: Adding to what Aidan has eloquently put, we're striving to give an accurate representation of the Tribal Gaming community. I think we did a good job last year, but it was only a start; as the numbers show, there's still a long way to go for events to show that accuracy. The Tribal Symposium will be another big step in that direction.

Q: Reviewing the agenda, I've noticed a variety of planned keynotes. In an industry that is constantly evolving, what factors guide your selection of keynote speakers and the topic sessions addressed? Has the process of picking keynotes changed?

AB: There are so many different routes to take when it comes to choosing keynotes. In 2023, we had the likes of Barry Gibson from Entain, a very obvious choice being the chairman of a huge company in the industry. But we also had Frank Abagnale, the subject of the hit film 'Catch Me If You Can', and although he's not in the sports betting world, he's a hugely influential figure and it's always refreshing to have a keynote from outside the industry. We'll continue to mix and match like that for 2024 as we know our audience has a huge variety of interests and tastes, and we like to cater to all of them!

JR: Aidan and I have worked in conferences for many a year, and one of the first things you learn is that the content needs to be balanced between learnings from within the industry and learnings from outside the industry. Both sides of the coin offer a nuanced educational experience, and we're not planning to change that any time soon.

Q: Looking at the agenda I noticed the panel 'Late to the Game? Which Second Movers Will Win In a Saturated Gaming Markets'. Could you provide some insight as to why this is so important? How does the panel aim to ensure a balanced discussion for both newcomers entering the market and established companies seeking to adapt and remain competitive?

AB: So we all know who the 'first movers' are, companies like FanDuel, DraftKings, and so on, who have enjoyed huge success in the US since 2018. Other operators, of which many have come from Europe, haven't been able to get as big a piece of the pie, and so this panel is asking why that is, and how 'second movers' can ensure they take a different approach.

JR: This is a session that will give some insight into how mid-size companies endeavor to join the top table. We'll have some experts who have successfully done so, as well as some upstarts and industry experts. I anticipate this will be one of the sessions with the most takeaways.

Q: *A prominent topic across the agenda is the blurred lines between skill and chance, especially regarding video games, iGaming, and DFS platforms. Why do you feel the lines between skill and chance are increasingly blurred and what is the thought behind including it in the agenda?*

AB: Regulators in many US states see paid fantasy sports wagering as a game of skill, and that's how the fantasy sports vertical pitches it too. After all, players must take into account a myriad of statistics, facts, and game theory in order to be competitive (direct quote from the Fantasy Sports Gaming Association). However, many in the wider sports betting industry consider daily fantasy sports (DFS) to be just as much a matter of chance as betting on live sports. For that reason, they think it should be regulated in the same way that sports betting is. This has been a controversial topic of late, and we like a little bit of controversy, and we love a debate, so we're including it in the agenda. I just hope it doesn't get too heated!

JR: Games nowadays aren't just about luck; they're a mix of skill and chance. Video games, iGaming, and DFS platforms blur these lines with algorithms and player strategies. Talking about this on the agenda tackles how rules and ethics keep up with this evolving entertainment landscape. Highlighting those ethics helps the player to decide on the fairest opportunities – and then we're back to the acquisition question all over again. It all links!