

Addressing the redemption conundrum

France represents a great opportunity for a more sensible approach to redemption machines Europe-wide, writes Euromat president **Jason Frost**

OVER the course of the last 18 months, Euromat has been working with its French member AFOR to get legislation changed in France to allow redemption machines to be operated outside of funfairs. With the support of the manufacturing industry - Sega, BANDAI NAMCO, Elaut, Bulldog Games, Adrenaline Amusements, Andamiro, ICE, Raw Thrills and Bay Tek - French operators have successfully put the issue of legal change on the agenda.

Changing the law will open the door to the development of family entertainment centres in the country - good for the French economy but also good for the industry as a whole - as this will help to apply pressure on those other European countries that continue to consider redemption, incorrectly, as gambling rather than family fun.

I saw this first hand on a recent trip to Italy, where authorities have sought to apply strict age controls to a product that has been a staple of family entertainment across the world for decades. What frustrates the industry in Italy is that decisions like this are not driven by the available evidence and with little or no consultation. It doesn't seem to be about dealing with an existing problem, rather it is about preventing something from happening in the future. This is why Euromat is working with manufacturers to put together a code of conduct on redemption to establish some basic principles for sensible operation of redemption machines.

If we can take the lead at European level, then I believe this will help to manage some national concerns about redemption machines and how to deal with them.



Those who forget the past are bound to repeat it

The Italian redemption crisis could learn a lot by looking at a similar situation in the US 50 years ago, writes **Frank Seninsky**, CEO, Amusement Entertainment Management

I WAS brought up in New Jersey and spent many days on the Jersey shore in the boardwalk arcades.

The amusement business there began to be regulated in 1959 following a referendum to legalise gambling for Atlantic City. Once this happened, the regulation of gaming overhauled the regulations of amusements all along the Jersey shore.

Ten years old at the time, even I could understand that wasn't right. I remember through the years how this affected the industry, city by city, state by state. The gambling industry basically looked at amusement games as the competition. Small, unassuming game zones, low ticket value points and they wanted to wipe us out. To be specific, they wanted to wipe out grey area poker and slot machines, but our one-quarter-a-go video games, cranes and Skee-Balls were being lumped in with them.

So, of course, we were in no way competing

with them; it was a perception problem, it was a lack-of-education problem and they have the exact same situation in Italy.

I've been familiar with Euromat since I met Eduardo Antoja, the former president of the association, back in 1995. I did two keynote speeches at Euromat, attended several conventions in Europe and got a firm idea of how these countries worked in terms of amusement and gaming. I learned that their success was hiring universities to do research papers to educate the legislators on the subject.

These legislators don't work in our industry - they can easily get confused about what our industry actually is, what's gambling, what's home entertainment, what's internet gambling, what's off-track betting - they don't have a clue. So educating them is a perfectly good approach, but we also need to educate the gaming operators on the fact that not only



is amusement not a threat, they need it as a complement to their business. Amusement makes peanuts compared to gaming; they are not competitors.

I've also been a licensed gaming operator for 46 of my 49 years in the industry, but I will never neglect skill amusement; it has been a stabilising factor for me - it's my roots. In our casino operations, amusement adds an opportunity for parents to entertain and bond with their kids and have some fun and then go off and enjoy the gaming machines for a couple of hours, adding to the gaming operator's business, not taking away from it.

I'm not saying we have cracked this in the US. It's an ongoing, never-ending battle, but education is the only way to move forward. This isn't just an issue for Italy; it's never too early to start educating your legislators and operators. This is a valuable cautionary tale for a lot of countries, especially in Europe.