



50 \

Q&A

Global Gaming

A Smörgåsbord of opportunity



In a densely saturated Nordic market, Global Gaming is proving successful in its endeavour to simplify bonusing practices and give customers access to instant pay outs. But founder Stefan Olsson is keen to expand his unique offering beyond Scandinavia

Words by | Nicole Macedo

Overlooking the former stomping ground of arguably Sweden's biggest global success, Zlatan Ibrahimović, Malmö-headquartered Global Gaming shares the football legend's ethos of straying from the norm and shaking up an industry that has a solid foundation built beneath it.

With the recent warnings from the UK's CMA over "unfair" wagering requirements, regulators are inevitably going to clamp down on operators' traditional bonusing practices. Global Gaming is developing an entirely new customer acquisition and retention method that does not rely on the use of personal data to bombard customers with promotions.

The operator's flagship B2C brand, Ninja Casino, has caused quite a stir in the saturated Swedish market since its inception last year, and as the company grapples with its new found public listing and swift internal growth, it also has its sights set on continued European expansion.

EGR Intel chats to Global Gaming founder Stefan Olsson about the operator's unique casino offering and long-term ambitions.

EGR Intel: *What are your long-term ambitions for Global Gaming?*

Stefan Olsson (SO): Our aim is to be an established company with operations across Europe. We're striving to achieve that with innovation at the heart, not just in the way of saying that we'll be innovative because that's on everyone's ticker, but to be able to look back in a few years' time and say 'well this was a first for the industry and this is changing behaviours in the industry'. And not just copying others but actually pushing the direction in a couple of places. That's really where I would like to see the company in a few years' time.

EGR Intel: *What is your career background?*

SO: Originally, I worked in a media group in Sweden called MTG (Modern Times Group) where I started and ran the IT department. I'm a developer at heart, being part of the process and seeing an opportunity and trying to solve the technical aspects and then deploying the product, that's really where I realised this was what I would like to do. In 2003, myself and a colleague pitched the idea of going into online gaming. We thought it would be hugely successful as they had all the media channels and opportunities but at the time they were not interested.

We were set on going into this industry and left MTG to go into what was then the poker boom. That's how I met Per Hildebrand who is one of the founders and still a major shareholder of Global Gaming. He's known as a professional poker player here in Sweden and he knew pretty much everyone in the business.

I always end up saying once you're in this industry you almost never go back. It's just too much fun, there are too many opportunities and too many great stories to be told.

EGR Intel: *At your current size who do you consider to be your main competitors?*

SO: That differs depending on how you look at things. If you had asked the same question six months ago, it would be smaller white-label brands and other platforms as we saw ourselves as roughly the same size. Right now in the markets we're currently growing in, both Sweden and Finland, I would say Mr Green and LeoVegas are the ones we are chasing and aiming to beat in the long-run. Looking ahead with us opening up for B2B operations next year, then it becomes a different host of competitors, or who we're striving to reach.

EGR Intel: *Do you consider the firm to be more of an operator or a supplier?*

SO: We have followed the road of starting out as a B2B supplier. One of the brands that was on our platform was doing well on the marketing side, and we had common shareholders in the merger

I would say Mr Green and LeoVegas are the ones we are chasing and aiming to beat in the long-run"

in 2015 and that put us into the position of having a strong desktop product and a good marketing team driving Ninja Casino.

We shifted focus from B2B to B2C but we definitely see ourselves as aiming at the B2B market as well and we are currently recruiting a B2B head of sales. Also next year we will be building a complete team for the support organisation to actually have a very good B2B offering for customers wanting to start using the PayN-Play technology.

EGR Intel: *How much of an impact has the increase in marketing spend for Ninja Casino had on the company in the past year?*

SO: It has had a very good impact and delivered very well. Initially we grew from low numbers and that's always an easier step to take but as highlighted in our Q3 report we have shown continued growth and we are very happy with both the format and the way it has been received.

EGR Intel: *Why did you choose Malmö for your headquarters?*

SO: It's local for us, with the CFO, CTO and core team who have been around for a while located here. We have very good connections with Tallinn and have had good experiences with running operations there before with previous projects. In addition, Malta is an egaming hub where you just need to be.

EGR Intel: *What is the full journey a player goes through when using the PayNPlay feature?*

SO: Players log in to their bank using their normal credentials and once the deposit is complete, the money is transferred onto our system, just like on any other site. What we also get is a second call from their platform with a full KYC check collected by the financial institution. That effectively means that we know, with a 100% guarantee, who's behind the electronic identification used. We then know the customer is of legal age and we can check limits in comparison with this entity ID. At that point we can allow a player to start a game instantly.

Just like any other casino, we're definitely not differentiating on the games we're providing as they are from standard providers. The main difference comes from the provider depositing between €10 and €100 that is still under the threshold of €2,000, which under the European regulation can trust a third-party financial institution using their KYC. That means without using additional documents we can actually send you the money back to your account instantly, depending on your bank.

EGR Intel: *Why has this not been adopted across the wider industry as of yet?*

SO: There are a couple of factors to consider here. We're experiencing competition coming from companies that are of a similar size to ourselves, because for the smaller ones it's probably a little bit hard to get this up and running, while the bigger ones are very set in their ways technically. It takes quite a different mindset when it comes to how you interact with your customers.

Traditionally firms will do anything to chase an email address and then convince the customer to continue on the journey of registering, making a deposit and then reminding the customer of their offering after a number of months. We see that customers are getting fed up with push notifications and spam emails even though they at one point approved them. Instead, we want to see ourselves as a service that gives the customer a great user experience, and by doing that we'll also ensure the customer returns when they want to play the next time. That's the angle we're taking in one of our radio adverts currently and that has proven to be a very strong angle, but it also challenges a lot of people's perceptions and how they think about the whole casino experience.

EGR Intel: *You've previously said with your model you are looking to attract more casual players, how do you avoid player churn and boost customer retention?*

SO: Looking at it from a customer acquisition point of view, here in Sweden, you can get as many free spins or welcome bonuses as you want. We've stayed away from that and although we have similar offers we don't advertise them as such. For retention purposes we have similar programmes for VIPs, just like any other casino, but we're also working on features to innovate on rewarding people, but not using the typical tools, as our way of doing retention.

EGR Intel: *How might you extend the instant pay out facility to other markets in the future?*

SO: That's a very interesting puzzle because it takes a licence that is suitable for the region, it takes a functioning bank and/or other payment system as well as



Global Gaming recently launched a new Ninja Casino marketing campaign

The vast majority of online casinos out there in the market [...] are just different variations of bonuses and free spins"

identification services. Where we believe we're ahead of the competition is in mapping out the countries that we can enter next and those we think we can get to in a year based on the maturity level of these different parameters. Recruiting people such as our head of compliance, Nigel Balcarres, is key to this because he knows who to talk to and what can be done.

It's a very interesting time from an electronic ID perspective. There are European initiatives which actually have an impact on the roll-out of this in various jurisdictions. We see it as a good opportunity but also a challenge as we are dependent on various factors and with something new it needs an extra pair of eyes from regulators and banks.

EGR Intel: *Is your current major recruitment drive part of a long-term strategy or as a result of recent rapid growth?*

SO: Yes, it's part of a very long-term strategy for us. We need to support the growth in general, but we're also launching quite a number of internal projects with the aim of being able to deliver on new aspects of the business.

We're looking quite widely. There are certain roles for which you need to have

been in the industry a long time, but when it comes to data analysts, developers or customer journey designers, we don't have a preference for them to come from within egaming or not. Our solution is still relatively new so we don't want to have too many links to what others are doing.

EGR Intel: *How has the recent NASDAQ listing impacted the company?*

SO: One of the main goals with the listing was to give us credibility. When we as a group launch in a new market, having had about 150 shareholders, that could prove tricky when it comes to regulators wanting to do due diligence. Being a listed company definitely adds a lot of trust. It also allows us to think in terms of acquisitions and other structural deals, although that's not on our horizon for the year ahead. We have very clear ideas on where we want to go and putting time and effort into incorporating an external brand or company is not effective for us.

EGR Intel: *Finally, how difficult is it to stand out in such a saturated industry as online gambling?*

SO: If you look at the vast majority of online casinos out there in the market, from a consumer point of view they are just different variations of bonuses and free spins, and they're not fundamentally a different customer experience or reward system. My angle is to try new things, and although 9/10 will fail, the last one will be a good one. 🎲