

LAS VEGAS 2017

G2E

EDUARDO MORALES FROM FICOM LEISURE  
AND AXES NETWORK.

## Skill-Based Casino Games TAKING MUCH OF THE ATTENTION

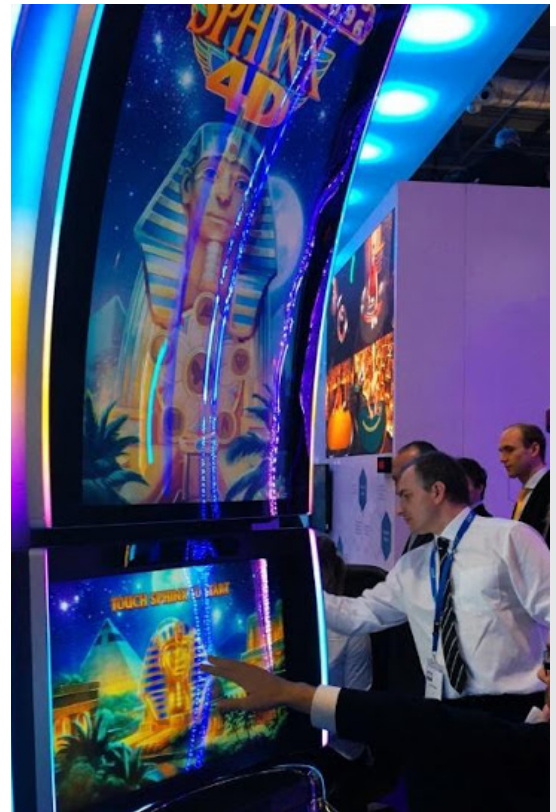
**LAS VEGAS** G2E 2017 was the venue for gaming companies to show off their latest concepts, ideas and their glitziest products.

From year to year, this mostly means **aesthetic changes**. There aren't many alterations to game mechanics or the introduction of new gaming genres, but the 2017 event has been different from other editions.

For most companies, new features tend to be improvements to existing features, or largely inconsequential bells-and-whistles tweaks. A good example of this is the 4D technology or curved slot machine screens showcased at **G2E 2017**.

Every now and then, there's a pleasant surprise and skill-based games were one of them.

Several exhibitors — from giants like **IGT**, **Scientific Games**, and **Konami**, to startups like **Gamblit Gaming** and **GameCo** — prominently displayed their skill-based games at the G2E 2017.



> 4D Sphinx in action

### The slow march of skill-based gaming

This wasn't the first year skill-based games were on display at G2E.

Scientific Games brought **Space Invaders** to **G2E 2015**, and in 2016, skill-based games were in multiple booths. However, they didn't appear to be finished products. They were more of a curiosity, a glimpse at the casino floor of the hazy future.

Despite this characterization, multiple casinos added **skill-based games** to their casino floors over the last year.

## GameCo TRYING TO JOIN the competition

GameCo machines were the first to appear on casino floors.



First introduced at Caesars' three **Atlantic City** properties in November 2016, GameCo machines can now be found in **nine casinos**: from **Foxwoods**, Tropicana AC, and Borgata, to casinos in the **Virgin Islands** and at Sun Dreams in **Chile**.

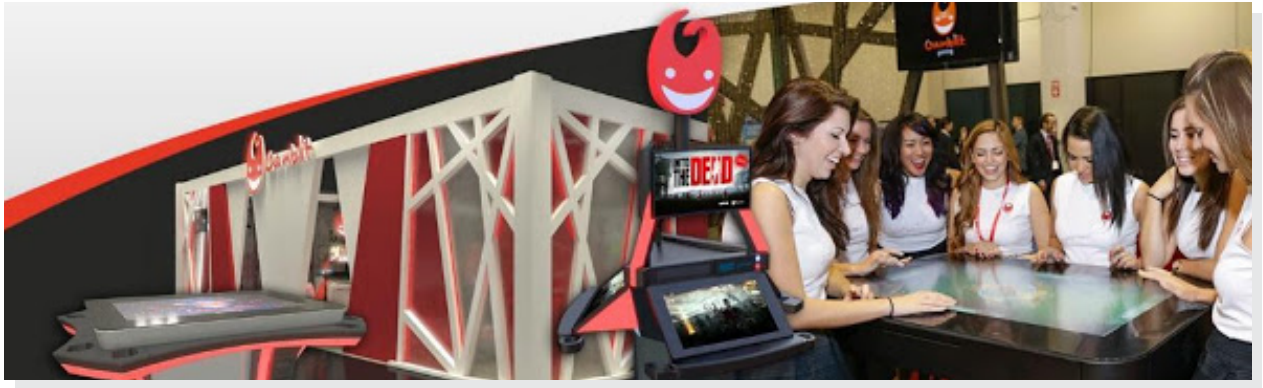
## Konami hops into the market

In February, Konami's **Frogger: Get Hoppin'** game debuted at the **MGM Grand's Level Up Lounge** in **Las Vegas**. Several iterations of the Frogger game found a home at other casinos in Vegas, even though the game hasn't been officially launched.



## Gamblit joins the party with skill-based tables

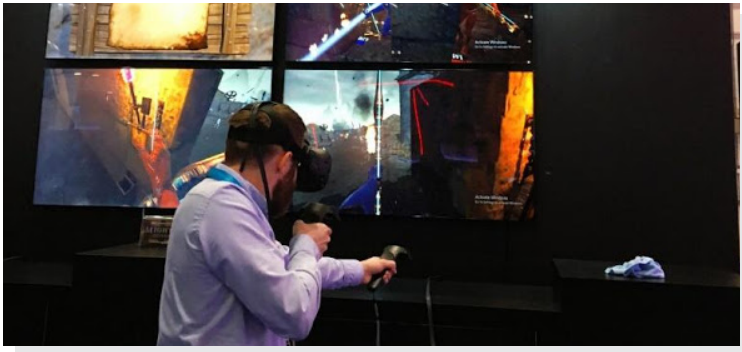
Gamblit Gaming's multiplayer skill-based gaming tables went live at **Planet Hollywood**. Like GameCo's products, Gamblit's tables can now be found in multiple casinos all over the country. The provider has moved forward into more imaginative concepts which can capture the eye of the new players.



## Scientific Games goes old school with Space Invader, while IGT explores virtual reality

Caesars took a second bite of the apple in Atlantic City with Scientific Games: **Space Invaders**. The title landed at **Bally's** and **Harrah's** in June and has since popped up in a few other locations.

IGT is exploring VR concept, a promising project in its early days, as well as new skill gambling concepts which are still in prototype version.





## THE SKILL-BASED GAMES AT G2E 2017

Thanks to the proliferation of skill-based games during the past year, the offerings at this year's expo looked quite different. No longer a mere curiosity, they are now seen as **casino-ready products**. Even though the skill-based games are in a preliminary stage as to performance feedback, many agreements were reached between providers and casinos in order to continue experiment and see how this concept evolves.

I had a chance to look at a number of the skill-based games on display at G2E.

### Match 3 games were underwhelming

Multiple companies have developed **Match 3** (think **Candy Crush**) puzzle games, which are powerhouses in the mobile app world.

Match 3 games **transcend most demographics**. In addition, the game mechanics are the same for most parts. Unfortunately, just like switching from Candy Crush to a competing app, each skill-based Match 3 casino game has its own nuances and wrinkles.

Because of this, the first few attempts at each game were mainly a **learning process**. For example, players don't know what are their special powers until they use it. Often, players had to make an illegal move or lose a great deal while staring blankly at the screen.



The most obvious example of this uncertainty was **Lucky's Quest**. IGT's game allows you to make diagonal movements and directional changes as long as the icons match. Those rules are not traditional.

➤ **Match 3 game in action**

There's also the problem of miss clicks.

Not to pick on IGT, but its game possessed a **major unpleasant glitch**.

Rather than quickly swiping one piece into place to create a match, the game requires you to move your finger across the screen like you were unlocking a cell phone. Of course, your finger doesn't always move perfectly. On several occasions, the player is **punished** for moving its finger too fast, too slow, or crookedly. The execution on an unfamiliar screen at an awkward angle was an issue.

Bottom line: intuitively, Match 3 games should be the most transferrable skill-based casino game, but nobody has figured out a way to **reduce the learning curve yet**.

## GameCo's Nothin' But Net can be an answer ?

GameCo's **Nothin' But Net** is in the mold of **Golden Tee**. Players must select the sweet spot on a slider in order to **sink basketball shots**. Actually, there are two sweet spots, including one on the pass which determines how big your sweet spot is on the shot.

### Nothin' But Net has a lot going for it:

- It's **simple** and **easy to understand**. Unlike the Match 3 games, players, even the most novice ones, will have Nothin' But Net figured out within a shot or two.
- The **pacing** is good, with a short downtime between shots, but not rushed either.
- It can be played **single player or head-to-head** with another machine.
- Most people understands its content: **basketball**.

Of all the skill-based games, Nothin' But Net looks like a favorite.

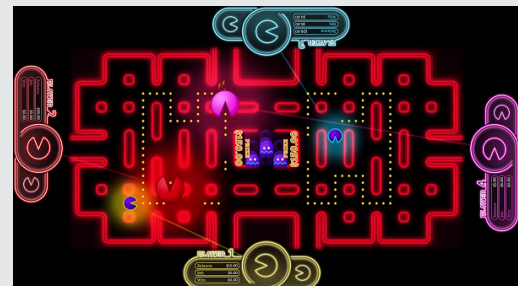


## Gamblit's table GAMES TAKE A TWIST

Gamblit's games are highly polished. The gaming tables are sleek, and the games are really well designed. That being said, the most impressive aspect of Gamblit's games is the **atmosphere** they create.

Gamblit pulled off the impossible with **Pac-Man**, and even more with **Deal or No Deal Poker**. These games can generate the excitement and energy you usually find at a hot craps table or from the roar of the sports book during a major event.

With a slow start in the original games, which have not produced the expected standards, it looks like Gamblit took a switch into arcade more visible and reality with PAC MAN including a gambling twist. Another interesting title is Deal or No Deal Poker which is a great concept leveraging the famous Tv show. Both of these games were squeezed largely by UK gambling manufacturers both for the Award With Prize and gambling machines segments.



For instance, not only is there a **winner for every hand** of Deal or No Deal Poker (a “grab it” poker game), but after the hand is over, the computer shows the potential money in several cases. This includes the one selected by the player at the beginning of the hand.

The winner then decides if he or she wants to open the case or take the deal offered by the machine. Once decided, the computer reveals the case, and the player is either relieved or there is a collective “oh!” that erupts from the table.

Gamblit is expected to launch something called “TriStation” by the end of the month. TriStation solves the multi-player problem by offering a selection of single-player skill-based video games that are a blend of Gamblit-created original content and partner games.

#### The current list of TriStation games are:

- Cut the Rope
- Jetpack Joyride
- Into the Dead
- Doodle Jump
- Catapult King
- Playboy Pinball
- Breakneck
- Road Redemption
- Smoothie Blast
- Match3volution
- Lucky Words
- Slice of Cake
- High Orbit

Finally, it wouldn't be surprising to see single player versions of its Pac Man and Deal or No Deal Poker games, with CPU players filling in for humans in a near future.

#### Thoughts on startups vs. the big boys

With some exceptions, the larger companies' skill-based games remind of a blockbuster movie converted to 3D, whereas the startups' skill-based games were originally shot in 3D and **feel less forced**.

To continue with the movie analogy, as skill-based games gain more traction, it will be interesting to see if it's the **blockbusters** made by IGT, Konami, and Scientific Games, or the **critically acclaimed** products of GameCo and Gamblit that win out.

So far, the startups have spurred the spread of skill games in casinos. That success has now attracted the attention of the gaming giants, who might be looking at increasing their skill-based budgets or simply **acquiring** their upstart competition.

It is the cash box that will tell if the new concepts, new contents and not so new ideas and contents adapted to the skill gambling version can add up a complementary if not substantial income to the casino floor... So far so good for the innovation initiatives, and like any new products, it needs to go through the classic test and error process until they find the right combination/equation to blend with the new gaming/gambling demand of new generations of players. Gamers whom for now are busy and intensively being active in interactive and social gaming content and sports betting, all mainly through their mobile devices and digital technology channels.



Bringing them to the brick and mortar casinos so they can find an offer that matches their likes is what is being put in place mostly by start-ups. The giant gambling providers are watching carefully while they also do their own developments keeping an eye on the most innovative trends.

In the meantime, the gambling casinos and gambling halls core business will continue to be the classic slots within its constant innovation and creativity, more to do with technology than with the game rules, since these will be maintained as the root of success in gambling. The “new” concepts including skill features or even using a skill content with random features will accompany the casino and gambling offer, not under a substitution effect but under a complementary offer to bring a wider range of player profiles as the new generation continue to evolve jointly with the mobile and digital channels. It will be how well the brick and mortar business is able to accomplish a real multi-channel (omni-channel) combination in order to reach out a bigger universal customer demand.

No question that it is how the offer is composed with a variety of content, product and format, to achieve success in that strategy.

**Eduardo Morales Hermo | G2E Las Vegas 2017 | 17 October 2017**

Source: Las Vegas G2E Visit – Providers/Manufacturers info – LVJ reports