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The ART of Data-Science: Turning Information into Insight, and Insight into Growth

Left to right:
Stephen Durrell, Monika McMahon,
Shannon DeHaven, Rob Wesley, Khalid Jones

Moderator: Stephen Durrell,
Executive Director, Kansas Lottery
Panelists:

Shannon DeHaven, Senior Vice
President of Digital Engagement,
Pollard Banknote

Khalid Jones, Executive Director,
Virginia Lottery and Lead of the Mega
Millions Consortium

Monika McMahon, Senior Director of
Digital, Allwyn North America

Rob Wesley, Vice President of North
American Customer Development,
Aristocrat Interactive

Stephen Durrell: If entertainment were purely data-driven, every movie would be a hit. Data is indispensable, but insufficient. The challenge lies in applying data science to the emotional, experiential, and culturally embedded patterns that shape human behavior. CRM, KYC, AI, and advanced analytics have become mission-critical to sustainable lottery growth—but data alone is not enough. How are lotteries combining analytics with human judgment to deepen player connection, enhance experiences, reduce attrition, and drive sales? This session explores how digital engagement, player registration, and connected relationships are transforming lottery into a more interactive, insight-driven enterprise.

From Rearview Mirror to Steering Wheel

Over the past decade, the role of data in lottery operations has undergone a fundamental transformation. As **Shannon DeHaven** described it, data has moved “from being in the rearview mirror to being a steering wheel.”

A decade ago, most lottery analytics were backward-looking. Teams relied on static dashboards, daily reports, and basic segmentation. The central question was: What happened yesterday? Which games sold? Which campaigns worked? What didn't? Even the more sophisticated tools, like focus groups and surveys, were limited by a fundamental flaw: they captured what players said, not what they did.

“Players tell you what they think,” **DeHaven** noted, “but what they think isn't always what they do.”

Today, the paradigm has shifted. Modern data stacks, real-time processing, and machine learning have transformed analytics into a forward-looking discipline. Instead of asking what happened, lotteries can now ask what will happen, and intervene accordingly. Which player is about to churn? Which game should be recommended in the moment? Which message, delivered on which device, will resonate most effectively? When is an RG prompt called for?

This is not just a technological evolution. It is a cultural one. “It's not about making fancier data models,” **DeHaven** emphasized. “It's about becoming more curious... moving from hunches to hypotheses.”

Data, in this sense, becomes the connective tissue linking revenue growth, player experience, and responsible gaming. But that connection only works if organizations are willing to rethink how decisions are made.

The Shift from Product to Experience

Rob Wesley pushed the conversation further, arguing that the explosion of data is not just

changing how lotteries analyze performance. It is changing what lotteries are.

Historically, lottery has been a product-centric business. Success was defined by the strength of the games themselves: the ticket design, the price point, the prize structure. But that model is increasingly outdated. “We should become a player-centric, experience-centric industry,” **Wesley** said. “That is what matters now. That is what is expected.”

This shift mirrors broader trends across entertainment and consumer industries. Players are no longer passive participants. They expect engagement, personalization, and continuity across channels. They expect an ecosystem, not a transaction.

And yet, herein lies a tension. While technology has advanced rapidly, organizational structures have not kept pace. Lottery organizations, by nature, tend to be risk-averse, hierarchical, and deliberate (sometimes even slow-moving). The tools for speed and agility exist, but the culture often resists them. “To leverage the technology and the data,” **Wesley** said, “it's about having a higher risk tolerance, pushing responsibility down to be shared by the teams most involved in the work, and being able to move on the decisions they make.”

The limiting factor is no longer data. It is making the decision to act on the data-driven insights and plans.

The Problem with Listening Too Closely

If there was one theme that surfaced repeatedly across the panel, it was skepticism, bordering on distrust, of traditional research methods.

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The Inevitable Shift to Digital

Tell us about the transition to a digital-only distribution and connection to the player.

Silje Tysse: In Norway, this transition has always unfolded organically, as natural transitions that players readily adapt to. Today, around 94–95% of play is digital, with the majority occurring through mobile apps.

This was not driven by aggressive migration strategies. We did not push players to abandon retail. They simply chose digital because it is more convenient and fits into their daily lives. Our players became omnichannel-customers. At a certain point, that shift becomes decisive.

For us, the decision to phase out land-based terminals by 2028 was primarily a consumer-driven business decision. When retail playership drops below a certain level, it no longer makes sense to invest

in new hardware and IT infrastructure to support retail sales. The cost cannot be justified, especially when consumers overwhelmingly choose digital channels because they offer better capabilities for both engagement and responsible gaming.

This does not mean that retail is obsolete or that others should follow this path. It simply reflects a natural evolution for us in Norway. Other markets do seem to be moving in the same direction, though at different speeds. The trajectory is clear, even if the timeline varies.

Lessons That Travel

Lastly, as other lotteries think about Norsk Tipping's methods and strategies, what should they take away; and what should they not assume?

Silje Tysse: It is important to emphasize that there is no singular “best-practices” model that applies to everyone. It is not practical to think that Norway’s model

should be replicated in other markets. Every country has its own cultural context, gaming history, competitive environment, and regulatory framework.

The key is to identify principles that are transferable. Building relationships over time matters. Registration works best when it is built over time and positioned as a benefit. Trust is essential. Without trust, even the best-designed system will struggle. Data is powerful, but only when used responsibly. And the future of the industry lies in relationships, not transactions.

The most important shift may be conceptual. Lottery is no longer just about selling tickets. It is about managing a long-term relationship with the player — one that balances engagement, enjoyment, and responsibility.

Paul Jason: Thank you, Silje Tysse. What an extraordinary journey and glimpse into the future of the industry. ■

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Khalid Jones illustrated this with a simple but powerful analogy: the transition from BlackBerry to iPhone. At the time, surveys suggested that users preferred physical keyboards and would resist touchscreen devices. “We all said, ‘I’m never going to switch from my chicklet keyboard,’” Jones recalled. “And of course, people did the exact opposite.”

The lesson is not that players are dishonest, but that they are unreliable narrators of their own behavior. They respond to surveys based on what they believe, what they aspire to, or what they think they should say, not necessarily what they will actually do.

This disconnect has real consequences. **Jones** shared that scratch-off products selected based on top-performing survey results often delivered only average performance in market. In response, his team adopted a deliberate counterbalance: for every data-driven decision, they would also launch a product based on intuition. “For every scratcher you pull from survey data,” he explained, “I want one based on your intuition.”

The result is not a rejection of data, but a reframing of its role. Data should inform direction, not dictate it.

Interestingly, the dynamic shifts in digital

environments. In iLottery, where behavior can be observed in real time and at scale, data becomes far more reliable. “Players tell me what they like,” **Jones** said, “and I don’t have to worry about them misinterpreting their own motivations because they’re actually speaking through their behavior.”

This creates a bifurcated model: intuition and experience play a larger role in slower, less observable channels like retail, while data takes precedence in fast, feedback-rich digital environments.

Rethinking Research: From Surveys to Signals

Monika McMahon described how this realization has led to a rethinking of research methodologies. Traditional focus groups, long a staple of product development, are increasingly seen as flawed. “It’s like going to the doctor,” she said. “They ask how often you exercise or how much you drink, and you tell them what you think they want to hear, or what you’d like to believe about yourself.”

In response, her team shifted toward a more granular, component-based approach. Instead of asking players to evaluate entire

tickets, they analyze individual elements—design features, themes, mechanics; and use data analytics to recombine the most appealing components.

The results have been striking. A \$50 ticket developed using this approach sold out in half the expected time.

On the digital side, the feedback loop is even tighter. A/B testing allows teams to experiment continuously; changing a button color, a message, or an offer, and immediately measure the impact. This is where data delivers its greatest value: not in predicting success with certainty, but in accelerating learning.

The Tyranny of Too Much Data

As data becomes more abundant, it also becomes more overwhelming. The challenge is no longer access to information, but curation and prioritization. “We have so much data now,” **Jones** noted, “that figuring out what’s important and what’s not is the current challenge.”

This overload can lead to misinterpretation. Conclusions are derived from patterns. Correlations are mistaken for causation.