

# **Vanilla content will always be second best - argues Reflex CPO**

*Ahead of ICE London 2019, Mat Ingram, CPO of independent developer, ReflexGaming, explains why the commoditisation of content is a race to the bottom*

## **Looking back on 2018 what have been the highlights and the key achievements in the online space for the Reflex brand?**

2018 was a year characterised by strategic and steady expansion for Reflex in the online sector. We went live with five new top tier operators as well as numerous smaller operators courtesy of our existing distribution partnerships which continue to do well for us. We have adhered to our “quality over quantity” philosophy, resulting in six new game titles over the course of the year, all but one emanating from our market-leading portfolio of land-based content. We have forged new commercial relationships, worked with new development partners, and continued to learn a lot. There’s no doubt that 2018 was an important and successful year.

## **How would you describe the main challenges for the online sector – is it facing a case of over supply? Is there a danger of quantity subsuming quality when it comes to games content and what can be done about it?**

For me, the sector is surprisingly slow-moving given its entirely-digital nature, but this is a symptom of the complex distribution routes that are now so prevalent, along with the hugely busy supply chain. Many planets have to align technically and strategically for a relatively simple event to occur, such as a game release. Compare this to our server-managed land-based machines, where I can develop a game in half the time and release it overnight to thousands of machines, but of course in this case I am in complete control of the tech stack and the content strategy, which helps enormously! The over-supply of what I would describe as vanilla, ‘global’ content has turned the previous art of game creation into a production line building commodity ‘widgets’ whose value to the supplier is measured in how low they can get their costs. This must, in turn, reduce quality, however this is not always immediately apparent. There are so many games being released that without any promotional activity (that the bigger suppliers can fund), one game performs much the same as another, thus perpetuating their commodity status. As such, I believe there is an increasing requirement for specialised, ‘hyper-local’ content – by which I refer to games that have been specifically created by suppliers with local expertise and experience for local players. As suppliers, we often have to modify our games anyway to suit local regulations

and language, so there is already an existing idea that games must be localised, but I believe that it is also better for the user if the games with which they are presented are those that have been crafted for them rather than the one-size-fits-all approach that is often used. Reflex have some of the most successful games in the land-based markets in which we compete and we should leverage these with partners who have expertise in distributing hyper-local content.

**Has your thinking on omni-channel gaming changed since ICE 2018 and if so where do you stand now?**

No, my opinion hasn't really changed on this. It may be sometimes difficult to quantify the benefits or produce empirical evidence of them, but intuitively I feel that it has to be better UX for a player to be able to move from one channel to another and play the content they know and enjoy on platforms that support a seamless transition from one place to another. Surely, if the player has a better experience whilst doing this, they are more likely to stay loyal to the retailer / operator and indeed the games? It just seems to make sense to me. This is why Reflex are talking to a number of operators who have both a land-based and an online presence about how we can work together to provide UK-specific, omni-channel games, and we are one of only a few suppliers who can do this.

**How will Reflex be using ICE London 2019 and what does success look like?**

We will be using ICE to showcase our diverse land-based and online product ranges. It's one of the few opportunities we have to put everything together in the same space, and our omni-channel credibility becomes really apparent when you see it all together. The range includes UK and Dutch land-based machines of many styles and categories, through to purely online and mobile content, with the same design ethos running across all channels. The star of our land-base range is the GamePro cabinet which will this year include the new GamePro Max, a sit-down lounge-style machine. Our view is that whatever a player experiences in a land-based environment, they should be able to experience on their desktop or mobile within the confines of the devices. A successful exhibition for Reflex is mostly not about the number of contracts or deals we sign, as most of the hard work has been done on these prior to the show, but rather it is about how many new people we meet and new opportunities present themselves, and judging by the number of meeting requests we have already had, we should be in for a busy few days!

**As an exhibitor do you get the opportunity to spend time walking the aisles at ExCeL and taking stock of the industry and the direction its travelling in – how important is it to do this?**

I think this is hugely important, although being honest, I don't get as much time to do it as I

would like, as I am generally busy on the stand. However, I have a great team who come to the show and who act as my eyes and ears on market trends and important product innovations. I wouldn't say it's a military style operation but we have regular catch-ups whilst the exhibition is in progress and they take me to see the things and meet the people that have caught their eye. I am a firm believer that Reflex should stand independently with respect to innovation and not succumb to parodying the ideas of others, but that said, it is important to know and understand what other market sector participants are doing and why.