

## UNIS to move to new Zhongshan facility

CHINA'S Universal Space is to relocate to a new purpose-built facility the size of 12 football fields, the company's He Zhu confirmed.

Speaking to *InterGame* from his office at the company's current headquarters in Zhongshan, Zhu said the new project will see the company move just 10 minutes away to the 80,000sq.m site next year.

The first phase of construction is to begin next month and is expected to be completed by May or June next year. The first phase will account for 80 per cent of the total project.

Zhu explained that the company's existing facility does not have the capacity needed to keep up with demand for its products and that the new site will enable the company to better serve its large customer base.



He Zhu of Universal Space

## MEI partners FunFair Casino in Ireland



MEI's Paul Brown (left) with Stephen O'Leary of FunFair Casino

IRELAND'S FunFair Casino, both and operator and supplier, has teamed up with MEI to promote the latter's SC Advance banknote bill validator within the Irish gaming market.

The country's lawmakers have been discussing potential reforms to the outdated gaming regulations currently in place. This was a hot topic of conversation at the Irish Gaming Show in Dublin in March, prompting many visitors to consider updates to their machines. At the show, MEI presented the SC Advance on the FunFair Casino stand.

"Banknote reading technology is gaining in importance for Irish gaming operators," said FunFair's Stephen O'Leary. "The introduction of ticket-in, ticket-out technology in the potential regulations makes the SC Advance the perfect solution. We have a strong sales and support team here to support MEI locally here in Ireland."

New euro banknotes are being introduced this year and, coupled with a potential change in gaming regulation, this could mean operators will have to reconsider their cash handling technology, he added.



## Rank trials tablets at bingo halls

MECCA Bingo owner Rank Group is targeting a wider demographic with the introduction of portable tablet devices, reports the *Daily Telegraph*.

The iPad-style tablets are being trialled at Mecca's latest venue in Reading, UK, as the company seeks to make the game more accessible to players who want to eat, drink and chat at the same time as playing along.

Rank chairman and chief executive Ian Burke said the electronic version would hold an appeal to the under-35s: "Electronic gaming offers all sorts of additional benefits to players. I wouldn't describe our handheld devices as an iPad, but it's the same principle."

The group hopes the tablet format will broaden the client base, attracting more men in their 20s into the venues.

## Hungary: casinos benefit from slot ban

A BAN on slot machines in pubs in Hungary, introduced last October, has boosted revenue and visitor numbers in the country's casinos, where the machines are allowed.

Revenue in the casinos owned by state lottery company, Szerencsejáték, rose to HUF2.7bn (\$117m) in 2012 from close to HUF2bn in 2011. Daily visitor numbers climbed to 400 from 250.

Szerencsejáték owns a controlling stake in the Tropicana and a minority stake in Casino Sopron. Its business partner in the latter is Casinos Austria. The number of slot machines at the Tropicana rose from 44 to 86 after the ban was introduced.

There are 60 slot machines at the casino in Sopron. Hungary's only other casino, Las Vegas Casino, owned by the film producer Andy Vajna, has 65 slot machines. Most of the companies negatively affected by the slot machine ban have wound up or have moved their business to other countries.

## UK LBOs 'like supermarkets'

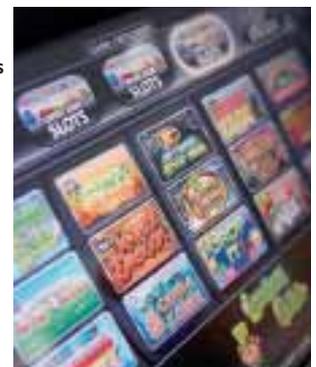
LICENSED betting offices in the UK are "like a supermarket," offering a variety of services and choice to today's gamblers, Neil Goulden, chairman of the Association of British Bookmakers, told *InterGame*.

The growth in use of electronic gaming machines in LBOs does not necessarily mean that the traditional over-the-counter bookmaking service is now outdated, Goulden said.

"There are some people who visit a shop to bet on a horserace or a football match, there are some who visit a shop to play on a games machine, and there are some who do both," he explained. "Often machine players will call in during their lunch hour or after work and play for a while, whereas some sports betting customers will come in for a couple of hours to watch their sport with their friends. It is just part of the ebb and flow of a typical day."

Gaming machines have tended to attract younger customers, he said, but once they have started visiting a shop then they often begin to try out other products as well.

"We are like a supermarket, offering a range of products and letting the customer choose," he added.



## UNIS questions wisdom of competing shows

THE CIAE and GAGA shows were both held during the same week in April and Universal Space had a booth at each of the two Guangzhou shows.

The company's general manager, Steven Tan, told *InterGame* that having the two shows at the same time meant it was "very hectic" for visitors and there seemed to be some "confusion."

Despite this, footfall at both events was "encouraging" but the market, he said, is still relatively flat.

"The market has changed recently in China due to a severe crackdown on gaming products. The amusement sector was also deeply affected in 2012. Things seemed to have improved but the customers are still of course wary."

UNIS brought its extensive product line to both events, including its top video game After Dark DLX. The company also showcased products from its partners, such as Raw Thrills.

"We have not made a decision yet regarding exhibiting at the two shows next year, it really depends on market conditions and the timing of them," Tan said. "If the two shows clash again, I suggest we might decide to take space at just one show instead of both."



Steven Tan

## LAI takes home prizes and orders from Las Vegas

LAI Games reported a successful showing at the Amusement Expo in Las Vegas in March.

In addition to a record number of sales taken at the show, the company generated a great deal of interest among visitors with its new line-up of games, including the new merchandiser Balloon Buster.

The company was presented with the 2013 Best of Show Arcade Machine Award by Kevin Williams of The Stinger Report and David Young of BMI Worldwide. Balloon Buster was also honoured for excellence in the Redemption Arcade Game award category.



Kevin Williams (left) and David Young presenting LAI Games CEO Marshall Ashdown with a BOSA Award for Balloon Buster

## AWPs selling well for Tecnoplay

TECNOPLAY'S AWP's are proving to be the company's best-selling line, the company's Mauro Zaccaria told *InterGame* at the recent ENADA Spring show in Rimini, Italy.

"We have software that is selling really well, such as Venice Gold Green Edition and Phantom of the Opera," he said. "The amusement market is going really, really slowly. We had some good sales of Sega's Grid and Adrenaline's Fruit Ninja."

The amusement market has stalled because the industry is still awaiting changes to the law, he explained, noting that video redemption and video prize machines are prohibited, while the prize level payout is set at €20.

The Rimini show is changing to reflect this, Zaccaria said. This year there were far fewer amusement exhibitors than in previous years.



## Namco enjoys Amusement Expo success

WHILE only a few months have passed since November and the IAAPA show where Namco America recorded one of its most successful shows to date, the 2013 Amusement Expo in Las Vegas in March provided the company with another outstanding show.

Preliminary sales numbers look to rival the ones placed in November as domestic locations prepare for the upcoming season, the company said.

At the show, Namco presented its new Dead Heat Riders motorcycle racing game and Pac-Man Ticket Mania, a new version of Pac-Man that dispenses tickets. The latter was developed in response to customer demand.

## Astrosystems showcases new note acceptor in Vegas



ASTROSYSTEMS' GBA ST1-C note acceptor received an enthusiastic response from visitors to March's Amusement Expo in Las Vegas, US.

The company's US office, Astrosystems Inc, promotes the Microcoin coin validator and GBA note acceptor brands within the region and used the expo to present the GBA ST1-C for the first time.

"There was a very positive reaction to the acceptor, with many attendees requesting samples of the unit," Microcoin's Robert Bird told *InterGame*.

He described the GBA ST1-C as a "breath of fresh air" for the industry, thanks to its "sleek, retrofittable" design. Unlike some other units, it does not have an external cable connecting the upper and lower housing of the acceptor, which provides a "very clean presentation."

"A fully illuminated note guide also impressed the attendees," continued Bird, "as did the ability to provide on the spot currency updates via a mini-USB connection. It was noted that the fully enclosed and lockable note cassette would assist with the inevitable note shrinkage that occurs in the field."

In addition to the GBA ST1-C, the company introduced a new mounting for the Microcoin SP coin acceptor, which is designed to allow the unit to be retrofitted into industry standard doors. This, explained Bird, provides a solution for multi-coin markets such as Canada and Mexico.

Astrosystems also won the Best Stand award at the event. "Overall, the show was very busy throughout," added Bird.

# Universal Space

**F**OR Universal Space, the recent economic downturn presented an opportunity to re-focus its efforts on research and development, from which it has launched a host of innovative new products for the amusement market.

UNIS started out in its native China 20 years ago, manufacturing and operating indoor amusement equipment. Having successfully built a major presence within the domestic market, the company looked to expand overseas and a key milestone in this process was the launch of the company's sales offices in Toronto, Canada and Hong Kong.

"Toronto provided UNIS with overseas talent in design and product development, which complemented well with our infrastructure in China," the company's Steven Tan told *InterGame*. "Our Hong Kong office was strategically placed to handle inbound shipments in logistics, etc."

In the early 2000s, much of the company's business was US-based but then the recession hit.

"In many ways," continued Tan, "the US recession presented us with the opportunity to once again focus back to other markets, but also, partly due to the recession, we identified the need to focus more prominently on our own products to ensure success globally."

The US now accounts for around 10-15 per cent of the company's business, due to an "upsurge" of sales in the local Chinese market and its steady growth across the global market. The US remains an important focus, however.

"At the end of the recession we launched many new titles and it was at this time that we decided to recruit Debbie Gonzales as US sales manager to enable us to have more of a direct presence in the US. UNIS also opened a spares and after-sales centre in Dallas to better serve its local customers.

The US market is far from out of the woods just yet, though, and Tan suggested that there has yet to be a full recovery. There are some bright spots, however, such as family entertainment centres, prize merchandisers and redemption games.

"Prize merchandisers have previously shown tremendous innovation and potential but changes in legislation now might affect this genre of product. Redemption games continue to be successful for most operators. Video games continue to be an interesting genre, but to justify a good return in their investment operators need to pick the best earners."

So there is a future for video games? "I am sure that the market for redemption

machines will continue to grow, I consider that this is already affecting video games sales and development since most redemption machines cost less and earn much more," said Tan. "There will always be a place for video game machines, but I think operators will choose a maximum of between one and three titles to add each year, severely curtailing the potential for this genre."

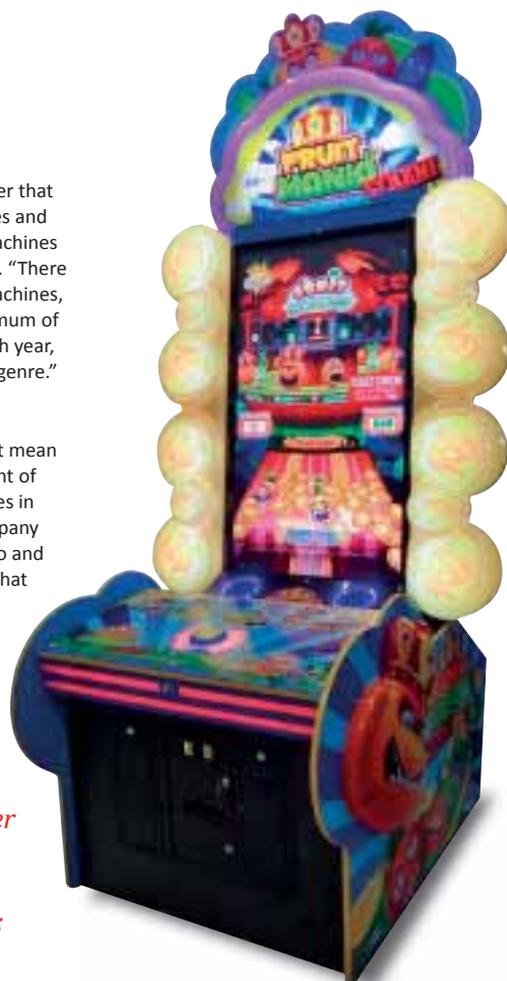
Although the company has enjoyed tremendous success with its range of redemption titles, this certainly does not mean that UNIS is abandoning the development of video games. The demand for such games in China, for example, means that the company continues to believe in the value of video and invests in its development accordingly. That said, redemption is the company's "core focus," Tan added.

The amusement market is constantly evolving as tastes change and new regulations are introduced. This means that products of all categories must evolve with it.

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"The US market is the frontier for new development," said Tan. "As a supplier to this market, we need to be aware of changes; alongside this we also need to push the boundaries and introduce new products with interesting and innovative game play. There will be changes in legislation that could affect our industry and products – we need to always bear this in mind when undertaking research and development."

One area being pioneered by operators in the US is the use of social media as a means of communicating with their customers and reaching out to potential new



ones. Here too, UNIS is ensuring its games stay ahead of the curve to help operators reach this wider audience.

"As a factory we would support them to ensure that our games, where possible, can integrate onto any platform that encourages this, from something as simple as QR code promotions to integrating software that will allow social media apps to be utilised. We are currently working particularly hard on some of these platforms."

Perhaps less technologically advanced, yet no less effective in terms of its marketing pull, UNIS also promotes its game machines through tournaments and special events.

"We have carried this out successfully in both our local market and in international markets. This type of promotion has been very popular and now we are steadily introducing events and tournaments to the US scene as well."

Over the last two decades, Universal Space has built an enviable reputation for delivering quality gaming experiences, yet the company refuses to rest on its laurels. The US presents a number of opportunities and the years ahead will see the company further strengthen its ties with the market.

"Our primary focus for the US market," said Tan, "is to build and strengthen our brand through great, innovative products. Hand in hand with this, we want to ensure that we establish a good reputation for customer service and support.

"Our aim for UNIS is to balance all markets globally."

