



## What Makes a Casino Comfortable?

What makes a casino comfortable? While this may sound like a simple question and whose answer may seem obvious, it is rarely asked during the design process of a new casino or the renovation of an existing one. Nor is it a particularly easy question to answer. To some, a comfortable casino is one that has a down-home feel. To others it may be a casino that provides an environment that is exciting and energetic. Still to others, it may be nothing more than a place where customers are greeted by friendly and happy employees. In reality, a comfortable casino is comprised of a variety of elements including sound casino design, quality engineering, employee training in customer service skills and a healthy dose of common sense.

In the early days of Indian gaming, comfort was often overlooked in the rush to build and open properties as quickly as possible. As casinos became more popular, operators added more machines to existing space or expanded their properties in order to accommodate as many customers as possible. The

notion of customer comfort played a secondary or even a tertiary role in the operation of the business. What has evolved for many casino operators are properties that are decidedly uncomfortable to be in.

In an effort to better understand the wants and needs of gaming customers, the designers of casinos have begun to ask customers what they need to do in order to make their casinos comfortable. While customers find it difficult to define those aspects that make a casino comfortable, they are quick to answer the question, “what makes a casino uncomfortable?” There is now a sizable amount of research into this area and by examining what makes a casino uncomfortable, operators can easily remedy those problems.

### What Makes a Casino Uncomfortable?

**Air Quality and Temperature** – For the vast majority of casino customers, the two greatest contributors to casino discomfort are air quality and temperature. In particular, a casino whose air smells of cigarette smoke is most often perceived as uncomfortable. Poor air quality communicates a sense of dinginess and casts a pall on the entire property. Both smokers and non-smokers cite poor air quality as a primary source of discomfort. In addition, air temperature also contributes to casino discomfort. Customers often complain about casinos being too cold. These two problems often go hand in hand since, in an effort to remove smoke from the atmosphere, engineering staff will lower the temperature so that fans move the air through the filtration system. The end result is a cold and smoky casino.

**Lack of Excitement and Energy** – A casino that lacks energy and excitement contributes to customers' sense of discomfort. Excitement and energy can be communicated in a variety of ways, from background music to the traditional sounds of winning. The introduction of ticketing technology and the absence of coins has contributed to this phenomenon. While this author does not advocate the reintroduction of coin, operators need to be cognizant that coins dropping into a tray contribute to the overall sound of winning. When installing ticketing systems, operators must add other sounds to the atmosphere. These may include background music or “bells and whistles.”

**No Place to Sit** – People who come to casinos in groups win and lose their money at different rates. Sometimes one person in a party may have extinguished their funds and must wait for others in the party to conclude their gaming sessions. Others may just want to take a break from the gaming action. A common complaint among gaming customers is that casinos often do not offer patrons a place to sit that is not in front of

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a slot machine. Exacerbating this problem are over-zealous security personnel who discourage patrons who are not gambling from sitting in front of slot machines. This is because many casinos do not offer patrons a place to sit outside of the gaming floor. The most comfortable casinos are those that offer patrons a place to sit, whether in a lounge, hotel lobby or other non-gaming areas.

**Tired Restrooms** – Clean restrooms are a given in the casino business. No manager in his right mind would allow a public restroom to go without frequent custodial care. However, old restrooms that are not periodically renovated also contribute to discomfort. To many casino patrons, restrooms that are in disrepair, have old fixtures, are cramped, are damp or lack properly working equipment make them extremely uncomfortable. It is often said in the casino industry that the quality of a property's restrooms defines the quality of its customers.

**No Room to Move Around** – Because of their revenue generating potential, gaming operators often attempt to place as many gaming devices on the casino floor as possible. Often this leads to crowded conditions where people, particularly those who use walkers or other forms of assistance cannot freely move through the property. Even people who have no handicaps find crowded slot floors uncomfortable since their chair backs are constantly being bumped by other customers.

**Unhappy and Disgruntled Employees** – Unhappy, overworked and disgruntled employees play an important role in making a casino comfortable or uncomfortable. Slot floor personnel that are upbeat, can provide attention and service to customers and are not overworked contribute to an atmosphere that is fun and energetic. Conversely, casinos that are understaffed or whose employees appear harried and rushed, creates an unpleasant atmosphere for gamers.

While a new, well designed and master-planned casino offers the best opportunity to create an atmosphere that is comfortable to players, it is not always necessary to wait until a property is replaced to create a comfortable gaming environment. A modest amount of capital, effective employee training and good scheduling can have a great impact on making a casino comfortable. When done right, a casino that is perceived as comfortable is clearly differentiated in the market and will not have to expend an inordinate amount of money on casino marketing in order to command a greater than fair share of the market. Conversely, an uncomfortable casino will always be the choice of last resort. ♣

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