

Thursday, February 14, 2002
Copyright © Las Vegas Review-Journal

Conference focuses on illegal online gaming

By JEFF SIMPSON
lasvegas.com GAMING WIRE

High-tech scans of eyeballs, faces and voices to prevent underage Web betting.

Satellite technology to determine whether an online bettor is wagering from a setting where the practice is illegal.

Those were just some of the techniques unveiled at a Wednesday conference at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

The conference's goal: display technology designed to ease the concerns of online wagering opponents, who fear that the booming multibillion dollar industry has created a new generation of illegal and problem gamblers.

"We think that we have an obligation to do better than land-based casinos do when it comes to keeping people we don't want to gamble from playing," said Scott Walker, president of VirtGame Corp. "If we're not at 100 percent, we're just about there."

Last year, Nevada legislators ordered state gaming regulators to decide whether online betting was feasible from within the state.

The legislation required that "interactive gaming systems ... provide reasonable assurance that players will be of lawful age and communicating only from jurisdictions where it is lawful to make such communications."

Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman attended Wednesday's seminar, saying he wanted to see Internet security methods for himself. Goodman has backed a deal to license use of the city's name and seal to a Web casino.

The online business would gain customers from the marketability of Las Vegas' name and city seal, while the city would receive a cut of the site's action. No final deal has been reached between the city and a Web betting site.

"We don't want to embarrass the city by aligning with a site that lets kids gamble," Goodman explained.

One product on display for the 150 conferencegoers used global positioning technology to determine a computer user's precise location.

Federal prosecutors argue that online wagering is currently illegal from within U.S. borders, although an estimated 90 percent of all Internet bettors are in the United States.

Reno-based Gamet Technology executives said its product, the GeoBio Indicator, could be sold at a bulk rate to Internet casino operators.

"We think they'll sell for about \$75 to companies willing to buy 10,000 units," said Steve Urie, Gamet president. "We think it won't take long for the price to drop to \$50."

The most popular method pitched to prevent underage gambling employed the day's buzzword, biometrics, a technique that uses physical characteristics or behavioral traits to identify people.

Some companies, including Gamet and its GeoBio Indicator, pitched fingerprint comparisons, while others touted the scans of eyeballs, faces and voices

Another company, Biopassword of Bellevue, Wash., verifies a gambler's identity by analyzing a person's typing cadence.



*Jorgen Bertheau describes his company, Conax, on Wednesday at an Internet security conference.
Photo by Gary Thompson.*