



OH, MEMORIES...

By Stephanie Maddocks

One of my very dear friends recently suggested that I write an article about how much fun casino installations and operations can be. As many industry veterans can attest, there are always interesting scenarios that unfold during the stressful time of a casino opening, not to mention those that pop up to make a normal day a little more challenging and a lot more fun. So, here are a few of my favorite casino stories. *[Note: Names and locations have been changed to protect the innocent and the guilty.]*

Some Like it Hot

One of my best memories is of a new casino installation in the hot and humid southern United States. This was in the mid-1990s, when casinos were opening at a fast and furious pace, and many times, the architects hired didn't really understand the complexities of casino design. At this property the architects had decided to put the server room at the top of the building—an all-metal room with no windows and no ventilation. It was the middle of summer, so suffice it to say the room was like an oven at midnight and hotter than the surface of the sun at noon. We installed the server and warned the casino management that the room was way too hot to house delicate equipment. Their solution was to place a window air conditioner in the middle of the room on a metal folding chair so that cold air would blow out onto the server. We quickly learned that window air conditioners blow even hotter air out the back, raising the room temperature even higher. It was time to go back to the casino management and tell them the A/C idea was not working. Plan B. This time, they gathered a large number of people, gave them all buckets, and told us that the solution is coming. That solution was to send buckets full of ice up to the third floor, fire brigade style, dumping it on the roof of the room to cool it down. I'm not kidding. This went on for a few hours until, of course, the roof began to leak, with water spilling down the walls and dripping from the ceiling ... onto the server. Needless to say, the long-suffering server passed onto the great IT room in the sky, and we never did decide if it was from heat stroke or drowning.

The Paper Caper

Another gem occurred when a new casino was opening in Las Vegas. The night before the casino was opening, the housekeeping staff was told to remove all paper stuck to the slot machines on the gaming floor, cleaning them up so they were all pretty and shiny. Taking the “all paper” instruction literally, the housekeeping staff proceeded to remove the slot setup checklists, the barcode labels for the cash can validation system, the machine numbers, the location numbers and the malfunction disclaimers. They probably would have pried off the machine serial number tags, too, if they’d had the right tools. What a surprise for the slot manager the next day when she came in to discover the entire floor was paperless, numberless and locationless... but it was pretty and shiny!

Cagey Counters

Being a non-math major (economics is all about letters in a formula, not numbers), I sometimes struggle with complex skills like counting to 21 on a Blackjack game. However, nothing prepared me for a casino opening where the cage cashiers were not trained on different denominations of tokens, and instead mistakenly believed that any full rack of tokens was redeemed for \$500. It took me a minute—or two, but hey, I was sleep deprived from the casino opening—to realize that a satellite cage was redeeming full racks of \$1 tokens for \$500, while the other cage was accurately redeeming them for \$100. It didn’t take players nearly as long to figure that one out and form a very long line at the satellite cage.

Mad Money

The first coin and currency drop and count process at any new casino is always a challenge, especially with the volume of money there is to process after a wildly successful first day. In another southern state at yet another grand opening, the coin drop route was mapped and submitted to the gaming commission for review and approval, and it was expected to be a fixed, predictable route. Perhaps it might have been beneficial for the hard count team to walk the route at least once *with the drop carts* to see if they could actually fit down the aisles. On day two, the casino hard drop team attempted to turn the cart down a skinny row of slot machines. Realizing that the cart wasn’t going to fit with the slot stools in the way, they moved them. Then recognizing that they couldn’t make such a sharp turn, they spent a few more minutes maneuvering the cart back and forth until they could align it into position, similar to my “How to Parallel Park a Station Wagon in a Motorcycle-Sized Parking Spot” lesson in driver’s education. Now ready to proceed down the aisle, it would have helped if the team had noticed the column in the middle of the bank, because now the cart was stuck. It became necessary to call upon the slot department to unbolt the bases of the slots and move the entire bank at this point, just to get the cart out—with the hard drop team, security, the gaming commission and the slot technicians all watching. It shouldn’t be a surprise, then, that it took more than 18 hours just to get the coin off the floor and into the count room.

Paint it Black

With the proliferation of gaming in the United States, many casinos opted for “sprung structures,” a fancy term for semi-permanent tents, and they did their best to embellish them so that players didn’t realize they were in an oversized tent. Because there wasn’t duct work in the floor, many times drop ceilings were used to support power and data lines. At one such sprung casino, someone decided that the colored cables and cords were too visible against the black ceiling, and had the brilliant idea of spray painting them

black to blend in. So there went the facilities engineers, armed with boxes of black spray paint, climbing ladders, *shooka-shooka-shooka* shaking the cans, and beginning to spray paint the cables. I guess they hadn’t thought about how the scent of spray paint would affect the guests as they were playing the machines below, until those guests started fainting from the fumes. I guess likewise they didn’t consider how spray paint tends to float downward when sprayed from above—downward onto the machines, slot stools, gaming tables, carpet, food. Maybe some drop cloths would have been nice.

Casino Insecurity

There are always some good security stories, too, like when I pressed my access badge against the soft count door, just to see what would happen while the count was in progress. The light switched to green and the door unlocked. And then there were the weeks that I spent walking past bags lying next to the copy machine in the slot department trailers, only to discover later that they were full of coins mistakenly delivered to the slot department instead of the cage, then forgotten in the rush to open the casino.

Keys, Please

I’ve saved my personal favorite for last. This is the tale of the service call I received at an unpleasant hour of the morning, telling me there was a problem at the club booth. When I inquired as to what the problem was, the clerk explained that he had been drinking a soda on the job (against the rules) and spilled it (no rule covering this one). But that wasn’t the problem, he said. He had spilled it on the computer keyboard. Sleepily, I told him to clean it up as best he could with paper towels and we could fix the sticky keys in the morning. But that still wasn’t the problem, he said. Annoyed now, I asked what the problem was. Well, he said, he had pulled all the keys off of the keyboard in order to clean up the spilled soda. I instructed him, probably not very pleasantly at this point, to just put the keyboard back together. But that *still* wasn’t the problem, he said. I sighed in resignation and asked what the real problem was, to which he answered that he didn’t know what order the keys go back on the keyboard, so he couldn’t put it back together. At that point, I told him to take the whole mess to the adjacent workstation (I kid you not) and put the keys back “just like that keyboard,” then hung up the phone. I guess I’m not so nice at 2 a.m.

So many stories, so many gray hairs. Teams plan, strategize, schedule and have meetings, and inevitably something just doesn’t work out the way it was planned. Fortunately, these stories all ended “happily ever after,” with the casinos open and running smoothly... until the next time something “fun” comes up.



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