

Why Some Locations Outperform With the Same Games

If gaming success came down to simply having the “right” machines, performance would be easy. Install the newest titles, plug them in, and watch the revenue roll in.

But that’s not reality. Across Illinois, we see it every day: two locations with nearly identical game mixes, operating in similar markets, producing wildly different results. One thrives. The other struggles.

And it begs the question every business owner eventually asks:

“Why do some locations outperform with the same games?”

The answer isn’t luck. It’s not magic. And it’s almost never just the games themselves. It’s everything *around* them.

Gaming Is a Business—Top Locations Treat It That Way

High-performing locations don’t treat gaming as background noise or “extra revenue.” They treat it like what it is: a serious business driver.

That mindset shows up in the details. Machines are clean, gaming rooms are comfortable and welcoming, and player issues get addressed quickly. The gaming area feels intentional, not like something that was squeezed into leftover space.

Lower-performing locations often assume that if a game is installed, it will eventually “figure itself out.” Strong locations don’t wait. They monitor performance, ask questions, and make adjustments. They understand that gaming revenue is earned through attention, not autopilot.

Placement Matters More Than Most People Realize

A great game in the wrong spot will almost always underperform.

Top locations think strategically about where games live. They consider sightlines from entrances, proximity to the bar, traffic flow, lighting, noise, and player comfort. They know that players are far more likely to sit down when a machine is visible, approachable, and feels inviting.

Underperforming locations often place games wherever space allows. High performers place games where players naturally go—and where they naturally pause. Same cabinet. Different location. Different result.

They Actively Promote Play

Here's a hard truth: players don't always know what's new, exciting, or worth trying unless you show them.

Locations that outperform don't rely on players to discover games on their own. They use signage, both paper and digital to highlight new games or game themes. They connect loyalty to gameplay and give players a reason to engage without making it feel forced. The bottom line though is simple: they talk it up!

This isn't about aggressive selling. It's about visibility and invitation. When players feel welcomed into the experience, participation follows. When nothing is highlighted, nothing stands out. Momentum doesn't happen by accident.

They Know Their Players—and Adjust to Them

No two player bases are identical. The best-performing locations understand who their players are and respond accordingly.

They pay attention to what resonates locally. They notice when key players show up, how long they stay, and which games generate repeat play. They don't assume what *should* work—they respond to what *does* work. And this goes beyond just the game mix, it makes it's way into the food, beverages and even décor of the environment.

Most importantly, they adjust. Game mix, placement, and promotional focus evolve over time and nothing is locked in forever. The locations that outperform are the ones that stay flexible.

They Rely on Partnership, Not Guesswork

This may be the biggest separator of all.

Top locations don't want a terminal operator who drops off machines and disappears. They want a partner who watches performance, brings insights, makes recommendations, and helps them act on the data.

When decisions are informed instead of guessed, results improve. When adjustments are proactive instead of reactive, revenue stabilizes and grows.

The games don't change—but the outcome does.

The Bottom Line

When two locations have the same games but different results, the difference is rarely hardware.

- It's execution.
- It's attention.
- It's engagement.
- It's partnership.

The machines are just tools. The locations that outperform are the ones that know how—and when—to use them.

5 Simple Strategies to Increase Game Performance

(Without Adding a Single New Machine)

When a location underperforms, the first instinct is often to blame the games themselves. But in most cases, performance issues aren't caused by the cabinets—they're caused by what's happening *around* them. Here are five simple strategies that consistently make a difference—without changing the game mix.

1. Are Your Games Positioned Correctly in the Business?

It's not just *where* the games are—it's how they fit into the flow of your location.

High-performing locations ask:

- Are games easily visible from entrances or high-traffic areas?
- Do guests naturally pass the gaming area, or is it off the beaten path?
- Does the layout invite players to sit down—or make gaming feel isolated?

Games that feel like part of the experience outperform games that feel tucked away. Even when cabinets don't move, evaluating how the gaming area integrates with the rest of the business can uncover missed opportunities.

Positioning isn't about rearranging—it's about intention.

2. Create an Environment Players Want to Stay In

Game performance is heavily influenced by atmosphere.

Top locations pay attention to:

- Background music that fits the mood (not too loud, not distracting)
- Pleasant scents and overall cleanliness
- Easy access to drinks, food, and service without leaving the gaming area

When players are comfortable, relaxed, and well-served, they stay longer. When they feel rushed, distracted, or disconnected from service, sessions shorten.

Comfort extends play. Convenience sustains it.

3. Promote the Experience—Not Just the Games

While promotions can't be tied directly to play, they *can* be clearly promoted to everyone in the location.

Successful locations:

- Use signage to highlight promotions, events, or loyalty rewards
- Reinforce messaging throughout the business—not just near the machines
- Make sure players know there's value in participating—talk it up!

Promotion isn't about pushing play—it's about awareness. When guests understand what's happening, participation follows naturally.

You don't need to push gaming—you need to highlight it.

4. Own Performance—Focus on Trends, Not Short-Term Noise

High-performing locations take an active role in monitoring game performance, while avoiding overreaction to short-term fluctuations. They focus on:

- Reviewing performance trends over longer timeframes, not isolated weeks
- Recognizing consistent patterns of engagement rather than temporary spikes
- Using trend data to guide thoughtful adjustments instead of reactive decisions

By prioritizing long-term insight over short-term noise, these locations manage performance with confidence and intention.

Weekly swings create noise—long-term trends create clarity.

5. Keep Employees Informed and Engaged

One of the most overlooked performance drivers is staff awareness.

When employees know:

- What games are popular or new
- What promotions are running

- How to answer basic customer questions confidently

...players feel more comfortable engaging.

Staff don't need to sell gaming—but informed, confident employees naturally create more interaction and curiosity.

Knowledge builds comfort. Comfort builds participation.

Why These Strategies Work

None of these require new machines, major investment, or operational disruption.

They work because they focus on:

- Visibility and flow
- Atmosphere and comfort
- Awareness and communication
- Consistent performance management
- Staff alignment

When those elements are dialed in, performance improves—even with the same games.

Because the locations that outperform usually aren't doing more—they're doing the fundamentals better.

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