

The mighty mite of the gaming site:

Lotteries and retailers should expect more from their site controllers.

by Dave Rolince, Sr. Product Manager, Systems Division, SPIELO International



As lotteries step up the level of sophistication in their gaming programs, the demands placed on the local site controller are also increasing significantly. What was once a passive “middleman” between the VLT and remote central system can now provide interactive, multipurpose features to enhance a gaming program’s stability and success.

In distributed VLT gaming environments, the site controller is a small but critically important device located at each gaming retailer site. The site controller continuously monitors the operational status of VLTs and transmits vital game play data to the lottery central system located at lottery operational headquarters. It does all this remotely, because operational headquarters could be located hundreds of miles away from a given retailer site.

Initially, the main purposes of a site controller were to:

- Provide secure communication between VLTs and the central system
- Validate cash-out tickets printed from VLTs
- Monitor and capture VLT events and meters, and transmit this information to the central system
- Access reports on sales, invoice data and VLT events
- Perform control functions such as enabling and disabling VLTs

However, lotteries are raising the bar. A site controller must take on additional functions as a local host that requires real-time, two-way interaction with the central system. It also must be physically robust to withstand use in a bar environment (for instance, it should be spill resistant and not have a keyboard). As well, it should be tightly integrated with the central system to achieve the expected level of performance. You can’t simply put any off-the-shelf PC in place and expect it to perform to the standards and complex demands of today’s gaming operations.

So what are these new site controller functionalities, and how can they enhance a gaming program?

Site controllers’ newest capabilities can be grouped into two categories:

- Retailer Point of Service (POS) and
- Value-Added Applications

Retailer Point of Service (POS)

Since income from gaming is often a significant share of retailers’ business, retail operators are playing a larger role in the gaming operation and seeking richer data about their part of the process. They’re asking for analyses, such as profiles and trends of VLT revenue and game play, to better manage their businesses. The site controller can offer access to business intelligence reports that might be available from the central system over a channel such as a lottery web portal.

As a retailer POS terminal, the site controller can also be used to cross-sell lottery products, such as quick pick tickets, Keno, and PowerBall. And for advertising purposes, an external LCD driven from the POS terminal can display the latest draw, or the current status of the multi-level progressive game operating on the VLTs in the next room.

As player cards gain popularity in VLT environments, the site controller POS terminal can be used for player registration, ID verification, and the addition of credit to a player’s eWallet account.

The site controller also offers a convenient conduit for communication between the retailer and the central system in the form of email, text messaging, and access to a dedicated, lottery-managed internet portal offering web-based services.

Value-Added Applications

In parallel with expanded retailer POS functions, site controllers in a distributed wide-area gaming network need to host a broad range of new and value-added applications, which had traditionally been hosted on the central system.

As more lotteries adopt the Gaming Standards Association (GSA) standards in their distributed gaming networks, the site controller becomes an ideal candidate to take on the role of local host to the VLTs at the retail sites. This way, the site controller would support the Game to System (G2S) protocol in the local network, as well as the rich set of classes and new functionalities offered by the protocol.

Multi-player games are gaining popularity in lottery jurisdictions as a way to generate increased player excitement and entertainment. These games include progressive, tournament and community formats where players vie for wide-area and local jackpots. For local outcome games, the game controller function must be based at the gaming site. For wide-area participation, these local controllers must be able to communicate amongst each other. In this case, the site controller hosts the game controller function.

A wireless retailer site offers lower infrastructure costs and flexibility to reposition gaming equipment anywhere at the site at any time. This added convenience also requires strong security policies to guard against unauthorized access and hacking. To maintain a high level of security, site controllers in a wireless retailer site must be able to provide wireless access, data encryption, and port authentication.

As a diagnostic center, site controllers can continually monitor the operational health of all gaming assets on-site. Proactive diagnostic applications monitor device attributes such as CPU temperature, critical voltage levels, and data storage capacity. Such information can enable the early detection of imminent failures in devices, and can quickly alert field service technicians to help minimize downtime.

A Greater Role

The range of functionality expected from today’s site controllers reflects lotteries’ needs to improve the player experience and maximize the gaming operation’s efficiency. From its humble beginnings, the role of the site controller has evolved into an interactive, multi-purpose, high-performance extension of the central system – clearly a mighty mite. ♦

Dave Rolince can be reached at david.rolince@spielo.com