

“Our goal with the X table is to make the poker playing experience as real as possible.”

To minimize poker room queues, casinos are taking a cue from restaurant reservation systems and adding automated table games

By James J. Hodi

Packing ‘em In

Poker is no longer considered the loss-leader on the gaming floor it was just a few years ago. Televised poker tournaments have fueled such a high demand for poker, and the problem at many casinos is no longer filling all seats at all tables, but seating all players itching to try their luck against others like themselves.

Thanks to some new technologies and products, poker rooms can now better meet player cravings for the game, and boost bottom lines in the process.

According to poker room managers across the United States, Texas Hold ‘Em remains the king of poker games, especially among the younger players who have entered the market during the past five years. In parts of the country, Omaha Hold ‘Em is starting to catch on, while Five Card Stud is making a modest return. But while Omaha Hi-Lo seemed to be gaining traction a year ago, Mike Smith, director of poker operations at the Seminole Hard Rock Casino in Hollywood, Fla., reported that the game peaked last summer and is now declining in popularity.

With people lining up most of the day to play poker, the challenge for casinos is to get them seated with minimal delay when a current player relinquishes his seat so as not to reduce revenues generated at the table.

“In the past, players would have registered with a poker room employee, who would write the person’s name in a book. When a seat opened up, the employee might have cuffed his hands to his mouth and shouted the name of the person at the top of the list, or announced the name on a microphone,” Smith said.

But there are now better ways to seat poker players that enables them to patronize other parts of a casino instead of waiting for a seat at the table.

New Technologies

The newest automated poker table is the DTS-X—or simply the X Table—introduced at the 2006 Global Gaming Expo in Las Vegas, by DigiDeal, based in Spokane, Wash.

An outgrowth of its DTS automated table that requires a dealer, the X Table provides larger screens—a 15-inch touch-screen at the 10-player positions and a 46-inch screen in the center for displaying the pot and community cards—than other models.

“Our goal with the X Table is to make the poker playing experience as real as possible,” said Dave Krise, vice president of design and development at DigiDeal. “A virtual 3-D environment created on the screen gives chips and card depth. When betting, you can actually slide chips into the pot.”

Once a seat has been assigned to a player, only that player can play at that location. To activate a playing location, the player must input a special personal identification number supplied by the casino to input money and initiate play. DigiDeal also offers the X Table in eight-, six- and

four-player versions.

All three automated tables come with free-standing kiosks that enable players to sign themselves up to play at the table of their choice. With PokerTek's Waiting List Kiosk, poker aficionados need only swipe their player cards in the kiosk and follow directions on the screen. When the desired seat becomes available, the device reserves it for the player, and then directs him to it.

All three also offer computerized management systems that monitor table action, allow supervisors to set game limits and record information on player behaviors and preferences that can be used for player comping and future individualized promotional strategies.

"The major advantage of dealerless, automated poker tables is that they speed up the game," said Lightning Poker's Skotarczak. "You can play about 50 percent more games per hour, thus boosting poker revenues accordingly."

"Automated tables also enable casinos to offer poker action at odd hours when it wouldn't be cost effective to have live dealers on duty," said PokerTek's White. "You can thus serve a niche market more economically."