Firm hopes to be 1st with skill-based slots

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A New York firm hopes to be the first in the world to install skill-based slot machines on casino floors in which the main determining factor in how much a player can win is his or her ability to play the game.

GameCo told The Associated Press on Tuesday that it is ready to put machines in the three Atlantic City casinos owned by Caesars Entertainment as soon as the first week in October, pending approval by New Jersey gambling regulators.

But it is in a race with rival firm Gamblit, which earlier this month announced plans to put similar machines in California and Nevada in October, also at Caesars-owned casinos.

The machines have an element of randomness common to regular slot machines in terms of the environment players are presented with. How well or poorly they maneuver their way through the game will determine how much they might win.

They are aimed squarely at millennials and those who like playing games on social media networks or on their phones, and who may be less inclined to play traditional pushbutton slot machines.

"There's a great focus on being first," GameCo CEO and co-founder Blaine Graboyes told the AP. "Certainly we'd like to be first for ourselves, our investors and our customers. But we're interested in this being a long-term proposition."

Both companies are awaiting approval from gambling regulators in the respective states in which they hope to launch. Other manufacturers working on similar products include IGT and Nanotech Gaming.

In Atlantic City, GameCo plans to deploy three triple-unit carousels at Caesars, two at Harrah's and two at Bally's, with a total of 21 playing stations.

Titled "Danger Arena," the games give the player a brief tutorial, make sure the customer knows how to use the controls and that they are working properly, and then presents the customer with a map, or game scenario. This scenario will vary randomly, and constitutes the element of chance or randomness that is the hallmark of traditional slot machines. It is then up to the player to maneuver through the playing field in 45-second increments.

"If you take out six or more robots, you're in the money, and if you take out 10, you get the highest payout," Graboyes said.

Each game also includes a secondary random winning opportunity, with a possible instant cash win ranging from $1 to $5,000, he added, so that even poorly skilled players have a chance at winning.

The company is seeking licensing in Atlantic City through the Division of Gaming Enforcement's New Jersey First program, which speeds approvals for new gambling products if they are introduced first in the resort town.

"We are glad to have the opportunity to review GameCo's skill-based game through our New Jersey First program," said DGE Director David Rebuck. "That program allows products that are submitted to our DGE Technical Services lab before any other jurisdiction and that meet our high regulatory standards to get out onto the casino floor expeditiously."

Gamblit plans to debut its machines at Harrah's Rincon in southern California. After field trials, Caesars Entertainment anticipates putting machines with 125 Gamblit gambling positions into multiple Nevada casinos, and intends to put 100 more positions into additional markets in early 2017.

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