



License Plate Recognition, Tribal Casinos, and Banned Persons

by Jim Wanser

In tribal casinos we have the right to ban a person from our properties for many reasons. If the guest is intoxicated or unruly on a particular night he might be asked to leave for the evening. He is free to return the next day. This is usually an informal action, but should be documented in case of a repeat offense.

If the offense is more serious then the casino may elect to not allow the guest back for a longer time. It could be anywhere from one day to a permanent ban. The length of the ban should be commensurate with the committed offense. It can also be used as a progressive measure. A first offense might draw a thirty day ban while a subsequent offense may require a sixty day or longer loss of casino privileges. The person being banned should also be advised that if he violates the ban by returning to the property he is liable to be arrested for “trespass.”

An action of this type must be thoroughly documented. A report should be done with an acknowledgement of some sort by the guest. Either the banned person should sign the form acknowledging that he has received notice of the ban, or a copy should be mailed to his residence. This allows the banned person to know how long the ban is for, why he is being banned, and whom to contact for further information.

A second type of ban is the “voluntary ban.” If a person recognizes that he is a problem gambler, he may elect to voluntarily ban himself from the casino. This action helps alleviate the temptation to gamble by removing him from the casino. The guest may elect to make the ban permanent, but the minimum term is usually one year. After the one year the guest may revoke the ban. This guest is subject to the same legal restrictions of the person with an involuntary ban.

Establishing the ban program and documenting each case is only as good as the enforcement of the ban. The casino is responsible to enforce each ban. It is a violation of gaming regulations to allow a banned person to enter the casino. In a small casino where each employee knows every player, enforcing a ban may not be difficult. The banned person walks in and security or tribal gaming recognizes and re-advises him. With the advent of larger casinos the problems multiply progressively. As we draw customers from larger geographical areas, the employees will have difficulty recognizing everyone. A person banned on one shift may not be recognized on the next shift.

It is a nice thing to say that security, tribal gaming, and surveillance can identify each banned person, but is that reality? You may have a book with photos, descriptions, and reasons for a ban, but after a while that book gets large and many

times the banned person is not identified until after there is an incident. Some repeat offenders will be recognized the moment they hit the floor, but the person with a voluntary ban may not be known to anyone but the person who completed the paperwork. The ideal situation would be to identify the banned person prior to their entering the casino. It is not as difficult as it sounds.

License Plate Recognition (LPR) is being used by law enforcement agencies throughout the country. It is also available to private industry and can be used for a variety of applications. With LPR a vehicle’s license plate is entered into the system, either manually or uploaded from an existing database. Any time a vehicle is driven onto the property or into the garage, the casino receives an instant notification by a pop-up on your dispatcher’s computer screen. Most companies require employees to park in a lot away from the building. This allows guests to park closer to the casino. On many properties both guests and employees park in a single garage with employees restricted to certain floors. With LPR employee parking regulations can be enforced with a minimal manpower requirement. Banned persons and “persons of interest” can be handled in the same system. If you have a person suspected of committing a crime on property, when he arrives on property surveillance is notified and can watch him from the time he enters the casino. If your tribal police department has a daily listing of stolen vehicles, this can be uploaded into the system.


The system takes a photo of the vehicle, its license plate, records the data, and notifies your dispatcher. It tells you where and when the person entered or exited the property. The time log also allows you to research incidents after the fact. If a guest reports a larceny from or damage to a vehicle, a surveillance camera may show the perpetrator’s vehicle as it leaves, but LPR will give you the plate number along with their entry and exit times. This information can be attached to your report and given to law enforcement. When an LPR system is installed it can cut down vehicle burglaries tremendously. It will also quickly eliminate the use of your facility as a storage lot for stolen vehicles. By identifying a stolen vehicle remotely, law enforcement can be notified and possible confrontations with your security can be avoided. Quite often a report will be received regarding a missing person. A check on the person’s player’s club card might identify whether the guest is playing a machine, but an LPR search for a license plate will tell you not only whether the person is on the property, but whether they were there during a search period.

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While all these things can make an LPR system more cost effective, think about what it does for your banned person program. Once the banned person is entered into the system from a database or spreadsheet, it will remain active until the conclusion of the ban. The banned person drives past the camera, dispatch is alerted to its presence, and security is standing at the door to greet the offender. LPR takes a lot of the guesswork out of your banned person program. At the conclusion of the ban period the plate is automatically deleted from the system. It also helps the casino avoid the issues involved with discovering a person under a voluntary ban sitting at a blackjack table.

In today’s competitive marketplace tribal casinos need to provide an atmosphere where every guest can feel comfortable that they and their vehicles are secure. LPR is an additional tool for the security toolbox. When the initial cost of the system is compared to the reduced number of vehicle burglaries, issues with banned persons, and other crimes against the casino and its guests, the return on investment (ROI) is very positive. ♣

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