Responsible gambling

Q&A: Reinventing the self-exclusion wheel

Daniel Lim, founder of responsible gambling start-up Little Wheel, chats to EGR Compliance about how it might be time for the industry to try another tack with self-exclusion

Robert Simmons | 01 February 2019

Over the last month, repeated questions have been asked about the role that the number of operators available to punters plays in addressing self-exclusion initiatives. GAMSTOP, the UK's national self-exclusion scheme hit the headlines in January when a BBC investigation revealed that players who had previously self-excluded could re-register for gambling sites simply by altering a few personal details during the registration process.

Designed as a one-stop shop whereby gamblers could self-exclude from multiple sites with one click, the implementation of the GAMSTOP platform has become a significant headache for both the Gambling Commission and GambleAware, and the scheme has still yet to formally launch.

But what if you tackled this issue from the other side of the coin? What if instead of multiple identities with multiple operators, you were restricted to one identity in your gambling? This is the approach being taken by start-up firm Little Wheel, who's founder Daniel Lim speaks to EGR Compliance.

EGR Compliance: There are lots of different initiatives to combat problem gambling, what is Little Wheel doing to differentiate itself from existing offerings?

Daniel Lim (DL): At Little Wheel, our vision is a centralised hub where players' accounts are seamlessly connected. A single identity for gambling. We are delighted that problem gambling is in the spotlight. Individual operators have begun to improve their player safety tools. And automated systems for detecting at-risk players continue to develop.

But we know that the average player has 4 online gambling accounts. Problem gamblers tend to have even more. This means that individual operators have a partial view of players' activity. And players must keep track of their accounts manually. In contrast, a single-identity solution provides operators and players with the complete picture.

EGR Compliance: What difference can a centralised gambling identity make to tackling problem gambling?

DL: Firstly, through preventative affordability measures, under which operators must establish appropriate spending levels for their customers. This is a condition of their gambling licence. And deposit limits give players the power to define their own spending caps. With a centralised hub, these operator and player limits are set and applied across all accounts.

They are easier to manage and harder to circumvent. Without this hub, players can hop from operator to operator, rendering limits impotent. A centralised identity also provides a panoramic view of betting behaviour. Players gain a clearer overview of their spending and habits. And operators can steer at-risk players towards safer play faster.

EGR Compliance: When do you plan to launch your software?

DL: We are currently completing a closed trial with William Hill in which we have integrated with their platform and are working with them to define the player journey. The next step is a multi-operator trial, launching in February 2019. In this phase, players can opt in to link their accounts with three operators. Through this opt-in trial, we can prove the effectiveness of our proprietary system for linking player accounts. We are interested in hearing from operators that want to take part, demonstrating their commitment to player safety.

We are also working with the Gambling Commission to incorporate their 'evaluation protocol' for minimising harm. Gaining approval from the regulator would speed up adoption of our solution. Yet, there is an opportunity for operators to self-regulate if they act quickly to embrace single identity.

EGR Compliance: Do you plan to roll out any additional functionality outside of safer gambling?

DL: Beyond our core focus of safer gambling, there are two further categories of features. First, we can provide more efficient compliance. Each operator currently performs their own 'know your customer', money laundering and affordability checks. This is wasteful, duplicated work which could be done once, centrally. There's also the opportunity to remove friction from the player experience. A central, verified account enables single sign-on and one-click registration. We will explore these options with operators and players during our trials.

EGR Compliance: What for you is the cornerstone of any successful strategy to combat problem gambling?

DL: Gambling must be safe for everyone. There is a stigma attached to 'problem gambling'. And the idea of 'responsible gambling' implies that some individuals are irresponsible. This language can be accusatory. We're glad that the Gambling Commission has adopted the term 'safer gambling'.

GAMSTOP, the cross-operator self-exclusion service, has paved the way for industry-wide solutions. And the banking industry has contributed with transaction blocking. But these tools only help those driven to extreme, all-or-nothing measures. Our approach is to build products which are valuable to anyone who gambles, promoting safety from the outset.

Little Wheel | **Online Gambling** | **Problem gambling** | **Responsible gambling**