

# GAMING

PRODUCTS & SERVICES

## Custom Slots & Signage Tailored to Your Casino

*Game-design experts say it's a combination of visual appeal, action and perceived pay-off possibilities that make a slot machine popular with the players.*

By Dan Emerson

### Internal Importance

Focusing on the inner workings that determine how a slot game is played is the specialty of game developers Kathy and Kent Jackson, owners of Massachusetts-based Precedent Gaming. In today's market, some slot-makers may be focusing too much on the exterior trappings, contends Kathy, who was a board game and toy designer before entering the gaming world. "We're finding a lot of gimmicky tricks, like lighting, sound effects and animatronics," she says. "In many cases, real game-play seems to be lacking. In our market-research interviews, many slots players have commented they are missing the fun of game-play."

One of the challenges for slot designers is that gaming laws require slots to be completely based on chance. For example, "You can't have a feature where the faster the player goes, the more money he makes," Kathy Jackson notes. "Something like that would favor the younger players. We have to keep everything on a level playing field, completely random. However, you can still marry that with game play and strategy -- even though, in the end, strategy is really not so much a matter of mathematics but how you choose to play the game."

To really score, game-designers strive to devise some new twist that can be patented and branded as a proprietary feature. Major breakthroughs in slot design don't happen often, she points out, citing as an example Aristocrat Gaming's introduction of the first multi-line slot machines, back in the mid-'90s.

While a knack for mathematics is a prerequisite for anyone who develops slot machine concepts, slot designers also need to be keen students of player psychology. Even though demographics and brand loyalty play important roles, when it comes down to the basics, slot players are all seeking the same things, Kent Jackson contends: "Players are looking for games which are entertaining and also offer a really good chance of getting a good hit and a meaty pay-out. Players will walk away if a game is boring. You need some kind of anticipation signaled early in the game; it might be the possibility of bonus rounds, the opportunity to win \$1,500 on a quarter machine. You need to keep a carrot out there."