A decade's worth of lived experience reflections
Blog four of four: Transparency & Innovation

Throughout August, I have committed to writing four, reflective blogs on my last ten years in the gambling support sector. Blog one considered strategy; blog two considered funding and those who enable it; my blog last week reflected on lived experience, and this final reflection piece considers transparency and innovation.

Transparency

One of the great things about living in the world today is our consistent thirst for transparency. I am so proud that for almost all my career I have been fortunate to work within the third sector, so transparency is very much in my DNA. Often, in the third sector, we 'learn' from the corporate sector, but with regard to transparency, I think the corporate sector is learning (or has learnt) from us. Reading any FTSE 100 or 250 year-end business report today, you'll see much more transparency than ever before. Many businesses use this transparency as a distinction between them and their competitors.

I am learning in my MBA that statutory reporting is consistently evolving worldwide, as you would imagine. However, what is interesting is how business and the third sector respond to this evolution, fuelled principally by consumer (or stakeholder) thirst for transparency. Going beyond any statutory guidance and conducting your affairs openly, bolsters confidence, trust and reassurance. However, there is a cost to administering this openness, which is especially acute for a start-up, so are there any low-hanging fruit to be picked, especially for those in the third sector wishing to model transparency:

Governance: Consider publishing such things as leadership team and board meeting papers, AGM meeting papers, information on how governance is managed within your organisation, your organisational risk assessment, the register of conflicts, your corporate strategy, insurance and other legal documents.

Policies: Why are many organisations so protective over their organisational policies? If they are person-centred, well-thought-through and been scrutinised externally, why not publish them. That would give confidence to prospective employees or board members, your funders and beneficiaries.

Funding proposals: I understand why organisations may not want to publish their funding proposals, but why is this such an issue? If the proposals are focused on bettering society and not inflating core costs, you might consider publishing them to share good practice and boost confidence in the transparency of your organisation.

External scrutiny reports: Securing quality kite marks or accreditations is an excellent way for your organisation to learn and embed practices that give many people confidence. After each inspection or moderation visit, why not publish the unedited report again to share good practice.

I have spent some time over the last week (as it is the subject of a business report I am writing for my MBA) scanning the websites of a range of charities and not-for-profit organisations that offer services in a range of sectors from homelessness, animal welfare, medical, criminal justice, mental health and addiction. In about 80% of organisations, the above low-hanging fruit isn't freely available in the public domain. Or where it is, in about 10% of cases it was well buried within their website. I find this interesting as it's perhaps an illustration where businesses have now taken the lead on the third sector in transparent reporting, as their information is easy to find and navigate on any corporate business website.

Interestingly and reflecting, I actually don't consider the above low-hanging fruit to be all that confidential as it so happens. What would be interesting to see, is which third-sector organisations started to (i) publish their monthly management accounts, (ii) publish their interim reports to funders or donors, or (iii) publish CEO diaries and details of principal meetings they have. That would no doubt get the third sector ahead of business again. Is this unthinkable, probably now it is, but as this blog is about innovation, who will take the lead?

Modelling good governance in any organisation, to my mind always starts with true transparency. This helps to build Accountability; Trust; Efficiency and Effectiveness; Equity and Fairness; Informed Decision Making; Ethical Compliance; Funder Confidence and an improved Public Perception.

Therefore I think there is some work to consider around innovation to demonstrate your organisational transparency, particularly within the gambling, gaming and tech sectors and those organisations that work with them. It is the popularity of these sectors and the impact of their work which will have the greatest personal impact on humanity, which means transparency is an important consideration.

Innovation

Our perception of innovation moves faster the older we become. When we were younger, we were 'living in the moment' and we didn't know anything before per se; however, as we get older, we can look back and reflect (often in shock at how, for example, tech has evolved so quickly). How many of us remember when Steve Jobs launched his first iphone on 09 January 2007. He commented that the iphone was 'a revolutionary product that changes everything'. He was so right; you cannot imagine any product like it before, yet it was only 16 years ago. For those with children now, this future digital world we were in awe of in 2007……. is now their norm and they see the future in ways that many of us cannot understand.

There are some very bright minds and amazing entrepreneurs who are forging the next evolution of the digital future for all humanity, and there is much to celebrate. Having spent the last year attending, speaking or having display stands at tech conferences in particular, the future world (and that's only in the next ten years) will be awash with tech innovation that will further fuse together humanity with digital technology, bringing about a greater interdependence. Looking further ahead to the next twenty years and personally, I cannot wait to see, that some aspects of life as we know it now, will be unrecognisable to us. We talk a lot about the 'known unknowns' in business, the evolution of technology illustrates this like nothing else.

So when I consider the next evolution of the digital future, what am I thinking about:

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR): VR and AR will transform how we experience entertainment, offering immersive storytelling, gaming, gambling and interactive experiences.

User-Generated Content: User-generated content on platforms like YouTube and TikTok will play a significant role, allowing anybody to become creators and influencers, which is very interesting for web3, but risks some users will use this to spread miscommunication and deepfakes.

Gambling & Gaming: Both will become more immersive and interconnected, with advances in graphics, AI, monetization and cross-platform play.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): AI will personalize content recommendations, enhance content creation, and even enable AI-driven actors and characters.

Blockchain and NFTs: These technologies will revolutionise ownership and monetisation of digital content, including music, art, gaming and gambling content and virtual real estate.

Interactive Narratives: Entertainment will increasingly offer interactive narratives, blurring the lines between gaming, gambling and storytelling.

All of the above is happening right now and it is incredibly exciting. However (i) how much of this do you know, (ii) what are the potential risks and (iii) who is taking an interest in these risks right now to minimise harm. In the recently published PWC UK Entertainment and Media Outlook report, looking ahead to 2026; the UK market is set to lead Europe in this space and therefore there is a unique opportunity to ensure consumer protection is considered (and embedded) within technology. Humans always get things wrong or play the slow game over the prospect of significant commercial gain, but what are the potential risks. Like the next evolution of the digital future, many of these risks are already in play in society today:

Addiction and Mental Health:	**Loss of Physical Interaction:**	**Digital Divide:**	**Environmental Impact:**	**Cultural Homogenization:**
Excessive screen time and addictive features in digital entertainment can harm mental well-being, particularly among young, vulnerable and older people.	Over-reliance on digital entertainment can lead to decreased face-to-face social interaction, potentially impacting relationships, career prospects and mental health.	Not everyone has equal access to high-quality digital entertainment, which can exacerbate societal inequalities.	Data centres and the energy consumption associated with digital entertainment can have a significant environmental footprint.	Globalized digital entertainment can lead to the homogenization of culture, potentially erasing local traditions and identities.

There are some organisations looking at these risks right now and offering consumer advice or awareness which is great. However, I would propose we need to consider bringing awareness and education into a Web3 environment as that is where consumers are migrating to, therefore any awareness or education to minimise harm has to be within there. If we do not consider this, there will be a huge number in society who will never see the help or support available as their version of the internet and digital entertainment is different to what we (as perhaps older adults) are seeing now. Additionally, to truly engage the new breed of digital consumers in harm minimisation approaches, we also might consider how consumer awareness needs to evolve, especially around content, language and environment.

- Awareness, education and research focused on emerging and gambling gateway products.
- Bringing academically evaluated awareness and education into a Web3 environment
- Engaging consumers in a new breed of digital harm minimisation
- Using evidence and technology to evolve education and awareness

It will be of no surprise to you to learn that this is where ESG Gaming is positioning itself. We are fortunate to be working with some amazing organisations, academics, businesses and entrepreneurs who are Web3 pioneers. Consumer protection is the glue that holds us together, and right now we have a focus on gambling and gaming within this environment.

I'll be publishing regular content going forward as to how our journey is going, what we are getting right, what we are getting wrong and our learning. We are keen to continue our engagement with others who are actually delivering consumer protection within evolving technology right now, to bring about awareness and education directly to the consumer. Additionally, we are keen to understand how technology can solve some real-world issues we face in society today, such as loneliness and social isolation. Technology can cause these feelings. However, can technology be used to solve these feelings, but in a safe consumer environment?

There is a lot to do and a lot to learn, but if you are in this space we'd love to hear from you (PS, no sales calls or random messages on LinkedIn please)…….