



# Journey to a Top-Performing eInstant Game

A new fast play eInstant game is breaking sales records in Kentucky and Georgia by fulfilling a specific experience that players want – and it’s not what you might expect.



**A**s the adoption of digital lottery play gathers momentum in North America, accelerated by the need for social distancing with the coronavirus crisis, the market has enormous room for growth. One fast play eInstant game released this year, Ruby 7s, has proven its ability to boost sales by attracting and entertaining players in droves. But it took a few twists and turns in the design studio to get there.

Lottery eInstants have come a long way from the earliest days when a consumer had to go to a retailer to purchase a code, enter that code into a website on a desktop computer to play a single game, and then return to the retailer to claim a prize.

Across nearly two decades of advances in digital technology and delivery, game designers everywhere have continued to push the envelope, producing games with increasingly sophisticated graphics

and complicated mechanics. As a result, the trend in recent years has been toward ever-more immersive digital play experiences.

But when it comes to what’s selling today in the core category of fast play Instant Win, players want games that feel familiar – and paradoxically, that means staying true to the retail product.

This player insight was one of several that informed the making – and remaking – of Ruby 7s, a new

IGT PlayInstantWin title that has, after an extended period of development, quickly become a top-five game across sales, average spend, total transactions and unique player count.

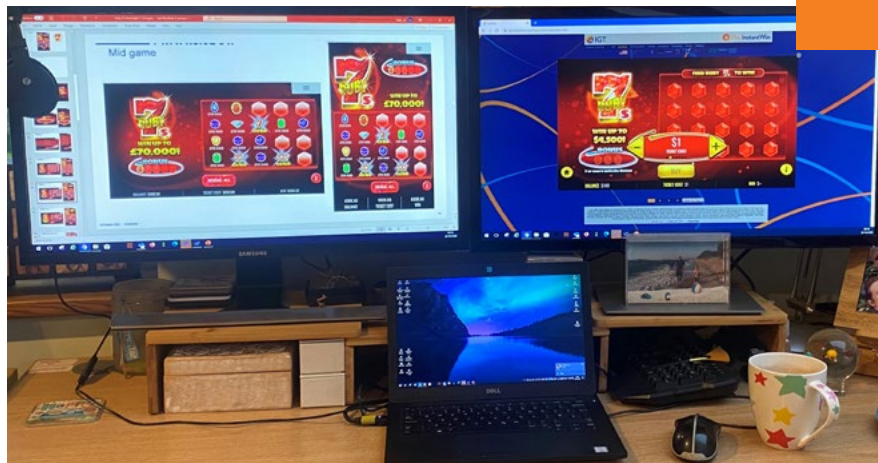
Launched first in Georgia on May 5 this year, Ruby 7s immediately became one of the Georgia Lottery Corp.'s (GLC) best-selling Diggi Games ever, and its launch day was one of the GLC's highest sales days in the eInstant space. Four months on, the game is still played by 40% of the GLC's monthly online players, when it's more typical to see eInstant games drop after subsequent new game launches.

The Kentucky Lottery Corp. introduced Ruby 7s to its Instant Play lineup on July 1, and it became the most successful game launch in terms of sales in the Lottery's history. In the first five weeks, Ruby 7s attracted 356% higher sales than the average game launch in the past two years.

As in Georgia, Ruby 7s remains among Kentucky's top-selling games, and both lotteries keep it in the top row of games promoted on their app and website, so players can easily access it. "The Kentucky Lottery is pleased by the strong launch and ongoing performance of Ruby 7s," said Mike Purcell, Senior Vice President of Marketing and Sales for the Kentucky Lottery. "The game is bright and easy to understand, tapping what we've seen as a Kentucky player affinity for games that include the number 7. It also offers strong bonus rounds to hold consumer interest."

### **The Path to Ruby 7s**

"The whole industry went through a learning curve with digital games, because certainly, in the early days, digital players weren't necessarily retail players," observed Gavin Horricks, IGT Product Manager. "Today, because a higher



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**- Gavin Horricks**

proportion of sales are online, people are just playing in the channel that's most convenient at the time. It has created a new scenario where there's cross-fertilization, and familiarity between games and channels is more important today than it was 10 years ago."

A recognition of this shift drove the original internal brief that put the game on IGT's product roadmap last year, and this insight has only become more relevant with the pandemic, when more players are at home and looking for the retail game experience online. "We had good knowledge of the markets where this game would be launching first," said Horricks. "Our Business Development Team identified key requirements which would make this game a success, and also some of the issues that could prevent it from performing as well as it has."

Horricks, who has worked on IGT PlayInstantWin products for 20

years, noted that "flashy graphics alone don't necessarily make game play satisfying. When you get halfway through a game and you've got no chance of winning due to the design – when players realize there's no way they can collect enough symbols to win – they're not satisfied. We design games to keep players satisfied and in the game until the end."

### **Knowing What to Keep and What to Leave Out**

Although there was no instant ticket to serve as a model, Ruby 7s looks similar to an instant ticket and "scratches" like one. Players understand immediately that the goal is to find 7s. If players uncover a Ruby 7 symbol, they win the corresponding cash amount, and if they find two or three, they win double or triple the amount, respectively. Beyond fidelity to an instant ticket experience, the magic of interactive technology does have its place, giving Ruby 7s' game-play something extra: Players who collect enough rubies enter one or more bonus rounds to spin a series of animated wheels for guaranteed additional prizes.

Typically, after IGT assigns a development slot to a new PlayInstantWin title, a single producer oversees the game from the initial request through to sign-off



from Quality Assurance (QA). In the case of Ruby 7s, there was much longer development time than usual, and two producers shared the work: Carlo Bush brought the concept to the green-light stage before handing over production to Jo Mills, who had previous success with games like EmotiCollect.

Reflecting on the discarded concepts and changes to both theme and mechanics required to reach the game's final design (see Figure 1), Horricks notes that the studio learned to adhere to the original brief in order to maintain an easier and more intuitive player experience – and resist the temptation to layer in complexity where it might not add to the game's success. For example, players can find it difficult to pick out symbols quickly on top of very complex backgrounds. Internal reviewers rejected several concepts for being too busy or not close enough to a physical product. “With this game, we connected the producers and the larger team more directly with the market requirements they were trying to meet, and we continue to apply these lessons,” said Horricks. After four rounds of refinement, the design cleared concept review, but the de-cluttering process wasn't over yet.

### Testing and Refining

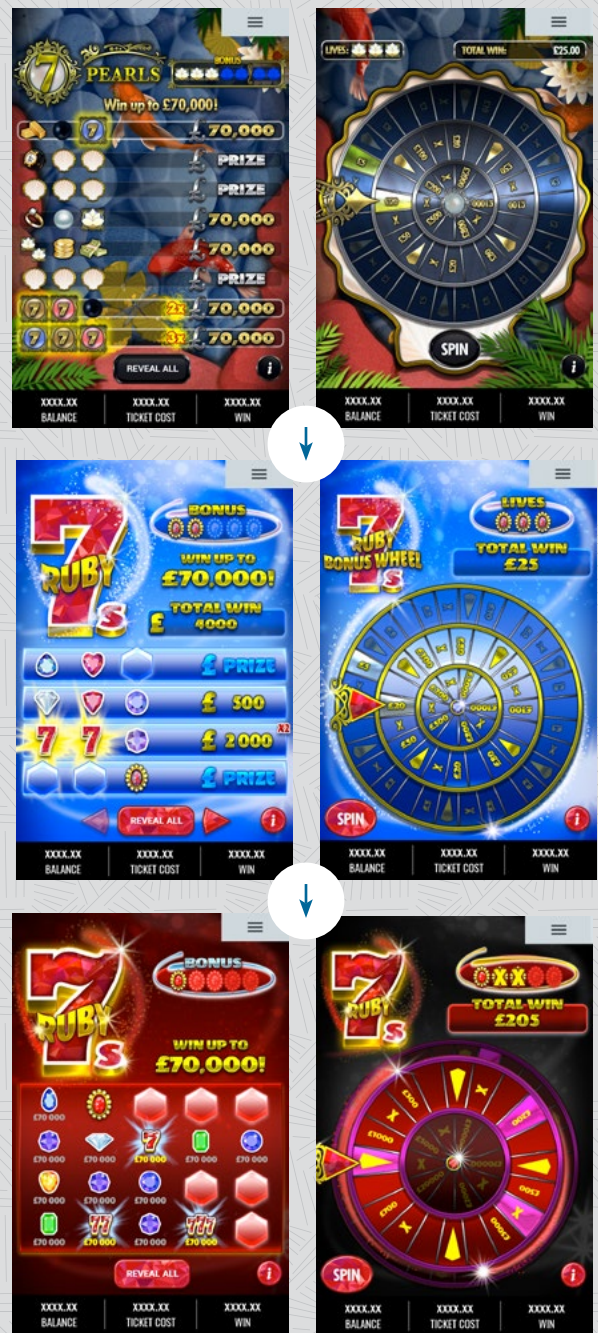
Just prior to releasing the game, IGT performed player tests and made further changes after judging the game mechanic to be too complicated. “Again,” said Horricks, “where you might normally try to pack as much as possible into a game – let's have two bonus features, let's have six different ways of winning and an accumulator – we learned to interpret the brief literally. Some popular games are complex, with lots of different ways of winning, but Ruby 7s wasn't that. It was about simplifying everything down to bring together the right concept for the North American market, the intended primary market for this game.” Even so, the game's appeal has carried over to customers in international markets, where Ruby 7s will launch in 2021.

As the game moved through development, a new animation tool gave Ruby 7s an increased frame rate and smoother graphics. Finally, before the game entered QA testing, the studio redesigned the bonus game to remove some re-spins on the wheel, another refinement that made a big improvement in player satisfaction.

Following the game's success in Kentucky and Georgia, IGT is developing a slate of new games that apply the insights from building Ruby 7s. And with the growing brand recognition for original games like Ruby 7s, the company is now actively engaged in developing physical instant tickets based on PlayInstantWin titles – a reversal of the usual sequence.

“Instant tickets and eInstants are core lottery products designed to appeal to a broad spectrum of players,” said Horricks, “and we will continue to ensure that in a changing world, players will always have the best choice of content from our customers.” ●

Figure 1



Ruby 7s progressed from a “Find the 7s” concept to a record-breaking instant win title through a series of steps that refined the game mechanic and removed noise and clutter. Originally, the game did not look close enough to a physical instant ticket. Early designs featured pearls and a background with a freshwater pool and fish, as well as a “charm” theme – all judged to be too busy. Further refinements led to the use of rubies as a theme, tapping into the popularity of other gem-themed games, as well as changes to the row mechanic and bonus chest. The London design studio completely reworked the bonus wheel mechanic and further improved the user experience. Finally, designers “tuned” the game for color and brightness, then added floating and shimmering background effects.