

PEAK EFFECT

SPOTLIGHT ON PEAKBARTOP™

By Christine McCrory

An Interview with Darnell Johnson

Sr. Director Product Management, Poker



IGT's new hardware solution, the Peak cabinet family, has set a fresh standard for hardware in nearly every gaming category, and the first on the scene was the PeakBarTop™.

To get a better understanding of what the PeakBarTop™ has to offer and how the process of research and development went, I sat down to talk with Darnell Johnson, the Senior Director of Product Management for Video Poker, to get his perspective on what sets the PeakBarTop™ apart.

Can you tell us about the research that went into developing the new PeakBarTop™?

Probably around 2017 or 2018, we started having conversations around developing a new form factor for our bar tops. The G20 Bar Top has been on the market for quite a long time, and we thought, as you start seeing evolution happening with technology in gaming, there were some things we could take advantage of in the bar top space. [From a poker perspective, our cabinets have a much longer life cycle than traditional floor units, and we were starting to see a lot of interest and demand for newer boxes. We thought it was the right time to introduce something new and leverage some of the latest technology for players and operators to take advantage of.](#)

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How have focus groups helped to influence the PeakBarTop™ design?

Hearing from all stakeholders was so important for us throughout this process. We did internal focus groups, we did external focus groups, we leveraged players, we leveraged operators. We went out to operators' establishments and talked to bartenders to solicit advice and feedback. These different perspectives uncovered so many ways to improve our design. [Feedback from bartenders and field technicians in particular forced us to investigate different ways of looking at utility around cabinet design. Of course, it's about the player experience and serviceability – but we started asking ourselves, what can we improve upon in the design that compliments broader business processes and what happens in a bar environment?](#) This level of commitment to feedback made all the difference, and we reaped insights that drove the final design.

What new design elements do you feel will appeal the most to players?

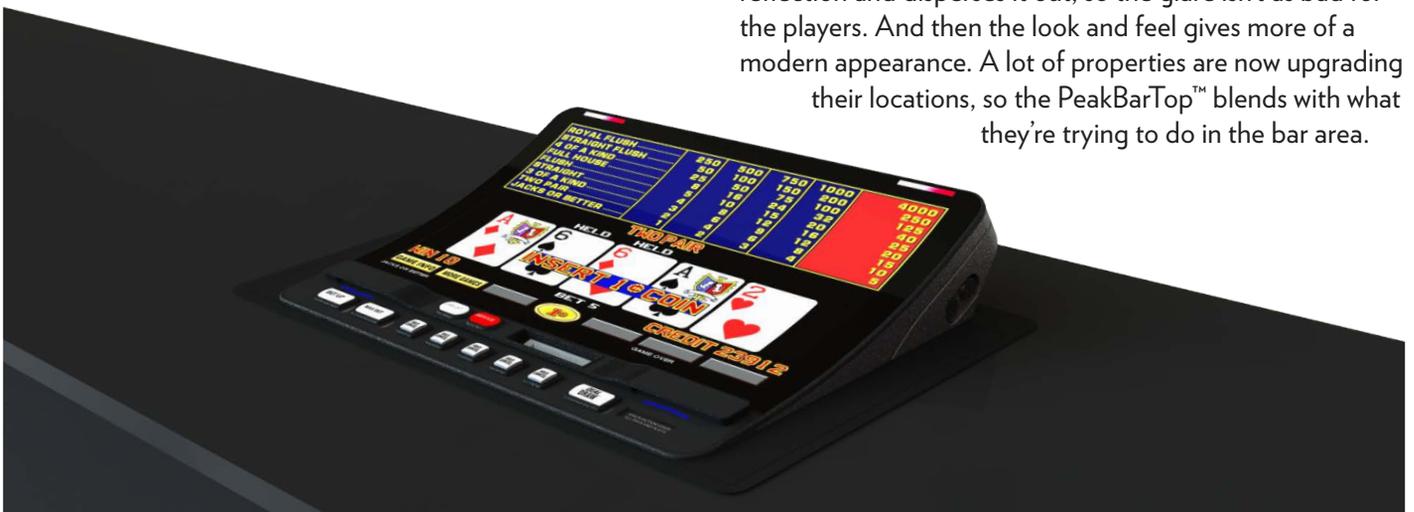
The number one thing that I believe will be impactful, and so far has generated the most positive feedback, is the display. Traditionally, our displays have been a smaller size, and over time, 13-inch displays jumped up to 20 inches. The PeakBarTop™ is a 23-inch display, and it's also curved. We took advantage of the latest trends in gaming today, with so much popularity and interest around curved displays. So far, that has been a big success for us, because [the curved display helps address a number of different challenges that we have seen with bar tops in the industry. One of the number one issues is glare.](#) When you have lighting coming down onto a bar, that can reflect a lot of glare back to the player. But the curved screen takes that reflection and disperses it out, so the glare isn't as bad for the players. And then the look and feel gives more of a modern appearance. A lot of properties are now upgrading their locations, so the PeakBarTop™ blends with what they're trying to do in the bar area.

What is the classic video poker player looking for?

Comfort is number one. When you're sitting over a bar, you can be hunched over. There's not a lot of space, your hands are cramped. So, the number one thing we wanted to provide was comfort. The second thing is familiarity. From both a hardware and ergonomics perspective, as well as from a content perspective, we wanted to make sure there was a level of consistency. Poker players are different than video slot or mechanical reel players. They can be very loyal to a particular unit, so we want to stay away from too much deviation.

Would you say those are the things you consider when developing new hardware for video poker in particular?

Absolutely. We deal with a bit more of a balancing act. We have that legacy player base that doesn't like a lot of change, so we have a very delicate balancing act when it comes to developing new hardware.



Hardware Is What Draws People In

Were there any initial improvements made to the PeakBarTop™ that were in direct response to feedback?

This is the first time we've introduced a new cabinet in quite some time in the poker space, and we'd like to say we do things perfectly right off the bat, but there have definitely been improvements that we've been making along the way. When it comes to some aesthetic things, thankfully nothing from a design perspective has been majorly done, other than making things a bit more intuitive regarding opening and closing doors. But everything else has been well supported and liked by operators overall.

How do you think the PeakBarTop™ will change the video poker game?

I think it will definitely help! I've been in the industry for quite some time, and one of the things that I learned several years ago is that hardware is what draws people in, but it's the content that actually keeps their attention. And I think the design changes we've made are appealing enough that it's going to draw people in, make people more comfortable, but at the end of the day, the content is what's going to keep their attention. The combination of things that we've done on the hardware side and the software side is definitely going to make this product a game changer moving forward.

What sets the PeakBarTop™ apart from other similar offerings on the market?

The number one thing is the curved display and the size of the curved display. It's been well received by players and operators. The other thing is its serviceability. We did a really good job in reaching out with customers and talking to internal people to understand how we can make this product easier on the service side, and so far, that's been well received by industry experts and operators. The third thing I would say is the unique design. A lot of the

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competitors that we have today modeled their bar tops to our existing G20 Bar Top footprint in look and feel. This PeakBarTop™ is a completely unique looking design, not only from a display perspective, but also from an ergonomics perspective. A lot of the controls and inputs to the peripherals are now pushed below the main monitor, so the player has easy access to everything.

What is your personal favorite feature of the new PeakBarTop™?

My personal favorite feature is probably the feature that's just starting to get out the door now, which is referred to as the play level indicator. One of the things that I like to do is understand problems and create solutions for those problems. I know one challenge that operators have had with their bartenders is to properly understand the best ways to compensate their players based on play. We introduced the functionality to inform bartenders of the level of play that's going on at the machine at any given time. Bartenders can utilize this feature to determine how frequently they want to provide a complementary drink or promotional item to the player. I think it's a really good tool that I hope addresses some of the challenges that our operators are dealing with today.

What's next in the bar top world?

For the PeakBarTop™, we're going to continue to evolve. I think the one thing we want to enhance is the player light indicator. It's at a very basic level of functionality right now, and we want to make sure that works for our operators, but we do have a long-term vision regarding how we want to evolve that over time. We're not looking to make any physical changes to the hardware itself, since we believe it's pretty much proven itself from a design perspective. Now we're looking at firmware updates and modifications on the software side of things with this particular product. ■

