

PEAK EFFECT



PLAYER DRIVEN DESIGN, SHOWSTOPPING AESTHETICS, REMARKABLE PERFORMANCE.

By Christine McCrory

A leader in the global gaming industry for decades, IGT has earned a reputation for innovation. The recently released Peak family of cabinets is in line with IGT's history as a pioneer in the hardware space. With this new hardware solution set, IGT was looking for a way to fill the gaps within current industry offerings, while continuing to support operators' floor refresh needs. When approaching the development of the series, IGT was committed to supporting floor efficiency and looking for ways to support diversity of product on the floor.

With the Peak Effect, IGT harnesses showstopping aesthetics, player-driven design, and remarkable performance. Made up of the PeakBarTop™, PeakSlant32™, PeakSlant49™, and Dynasty Peak Terminal, this series was thoughtfully created with the player experience in mind. By leveraging a rigorous internal development process alongside comprehensive stakeholder research, IGT has produced a series of cabinets that deliver optimum performance and comfort.

Five leaders at IGT, all of whom were closely involved in the product development process for this new hardware solution set, gave their insights on the development journey and how the Peak Effect can positively impact performance.





Anthony Baerlocher
VP Product Management,
Innovation and Mechanical Reels

Journey to the Peak

Arriving to market with new hardware is never easy. The road to launch is purposefully layered and often long, incorporating multiple designs, research phases, and iterations before project goals are realized. But it is exactly that type of commitment to a long and rigorous journey that delivers a truly superior product in the end. Anthony Baerlocher, Vice President, Innovation and Mechanical Reels for IGT, took us through the upfront phases and research process that went into developing the Peak family. His years in the gaming industry and experience make him an expert in what considerations are most important when approaching the design of new hardware:

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“...What we saw in market and heard from players and customers around floor diversity requirements drove our thinking. From there, we looked critically at macro trends and how we could improve the player experience for future needs. This drove our vision. With the whole Peak family, we vetted several design options and went through multiple rounds of internal and customer reviews. **All four of the Peak cabinets we’ve launched are really fabulous products for lots of different reasons, but specifically because of this process. It’s not the most efficient as far as time and cost and getting to market are concerned, but I think it really ended up giving us some of the best hardware products in the industry.**”

The initial development journey began with the PeakBarTop™. As the first to market, its research phase included a 360-degree requirement: every individual who would have contact with the product must be tapped for their opinion and feedback, from players and operators to bartenders and field service technicians. IGT’s Senior Director of Product Management for Video Poker, Darnell Johnson, talked about how these multifaceted focus groups heavily influenced the development and ultimate design of the PeakBarTop™:



Darnell Johnson
Sr. Director Product Management, Poker

“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.**”

“ With the PeakSlant49™, the quest for the most comfortable machine began with a desire to create a 49-inch curved portrait display...” ”

Around 10% of existing customers now have at least one PeakBarTop™ since its initial launch in May and June of 2020, but the success story is only beginning. The popularity and results of the PeakBarTop™ also influenced the development of the Dynasty Peak Terminal as part of IGT's Electronic Table Games (ETG) suite. While there were complexities to overcome, the team quickly recognized the brilliance of the PeakBarTop™ design and implemented a new housing unit that could be used with the Dynasty ETG product. The Director of Product Management for ETG, Paul Baskerville, spoke about the research and insights that led to the Peak Terminal:

“One of the greatest things about IGT is its scale and ability to share insights internally. Because we are in so many segments, we get to leverage truly exceptional resources. That scale really paid off for ETG. IGT Video Poker is the industry leader and through our product touch-base sessions, we saw that poker was developing the 23-inch Peak hardware. Our ETG objective was to reduce the footprint to provide increased visibility to the roulette wheel. When we saw the 23-inch that poker was doing and the focus group results, we did some viability testing internally and discovered quickly that this would work to reduce the footprint for the overall size of our configuration solutions. With this, the visibility of the wheel from the player's perspective significantly increased, creating a better player experience.”

Still, the PeakBarTop™ and Dynasty Peak Terminals are only half the story. The final members of the family are the PeakSlant32™ and the PeakSlant49™. Baerlocher told us that though these products target “a little different player, a different position in the casino,” the development process was similar to the PeakBarTop™. For these and their predecessors, the key was to identify top priorities to help guide the team. Baerlocher noted:

“Typically, our priorities are content, player ergonomics, cost, and serviceability. We started asking ourselves, which one is really the most important? And we said, it's really about player ergonomics. So, at every point of contact, design, and value discussion, we asked, how can we go through and make this machine comfortable to play?”



With the PeakSlant49™, the quest for the most comfortable machine began with a desire to create a 49-inch curved portrait display, creating the largest and most visually ergonomic screen possible to showcase the content. Brainstorms for the PeakSlant49™ soon turned into discussions about improving the dual screen experience and how the tenants of ergonomics could be applied to both form factors. It became apparent there was an opportunity to offer something new in the slant top machine segment, which has not seen much innovation recently. From there, the PeakSlant32™ was born. With its stunningly beautiful triple 32” screens, the PeakSlant32™ remains the first and only triple 32” screen offering in the North American market, and it has turned out to be not only a top performer, but also a truly striking addition to any casino floor. “When you physically see it, stand next to it, it’s breathtaking. It’s different. And man, does it play well,” said Baerlocher. “We know we’ve got everybody’s attention, and the best thing is, we see the performance of games on this cabinet, and it really drives higher performance, sometimes fairly substantially.”



Roger Pettersson
Sr. Director Core, PMM,
Market Research

Roger Pettersson, Senior Director of Marketing Research for Core Video, and Phil O’Toole, Director of Core Video & PMM, also spoke with us about the PeakSlant32™ and the PeakSlant49™ and what inspired their development. Speaking about the PeakSlant32™, O’Toole said, “We saw a market gap that we wanted to fill, and we wanted to make an impression with a large, eye-catching cabinet, and we did that with the PeakSlant32™.” Pettersson added to that, noting the compelling aspects of both PeakSlant cabinets and how they meet the needs of operators looking for something new to add to their floor:

“I think the PeakSlant32™ and the PeakSlant49™ are state of the art in every aspect. They’re both full HD screens, they’re large format, which means they visually stand out on the casino floors. They catch a lot of attention. But what I like best is how I feel when I sit and play. This hardware really does make the game superior, and I can really engage in the play experience. That’s what appealed to me, and that’s what I believe an operator ultimately wants – does the hardware contribute to something memorable and offer the player an experience that they want to repeat? Operators always look for games that look different, are more modern, bigger, or whatever’s going to stand out and look new and

fresh and exciting on the casino floor. And I think both of these cabinets, the PeakSlant32™ and the PeakSlant49™, do that very well.”

Content is King

This hardware solution set obviously has great visual appeal, and each offering has its own key differentiators. But beyond that, the entire series has critical commonalities that contribute to their success. More than anything, the focus is on the player and on making the playing experience as comfortable and optimal as possible, but it doesn’t stop there.



“The second part of that is really our philosophy that content is king,” Baerlocher said. “So, it’s really trying to design a piece of hardware that, while it’s comfortable and optimal for the player to play, it showcases the game. You can have this beautiful, perfect cabinet, but if the game gets hidden or doesn’t present properly, or the player has to do something like reach awkwardly or look in a place that isn’t comfortable to look consistently, you’re not doing your game content any justice. It’s really about making sure our games are presented the best they possibly can be.”

Others also referenced content as a key differentiator for the Peak family. “One of the things that I learned several years ago is that hardware is what draws people in, but it’s the content that keeps their attention,” said Johnson. “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 same goes for ETG. “We have the Peak Terminal on the 23-inch, which for our players is phenomenal; it has lots of appeal, and it’s different,” Baskerville said. “But where we really shine is the combination with content. Our unique side bets, our RNG offerings, our overall game library, it’s all in harmony with the hardware.”



Paul Baskerville
Director, ETG Product Management

The Key to Standing Out

Baerlocher also mentions the curved screen, and though these have been seen in the industry before, the PeakSlant49™ goes even further, offering something different. It introduces a particularly unique curve that is the first of its kind: a progressive curve. Baerlocher comments on the uniqueness of the design:

“We did a double curve. So, it starts out at a wider-angle curve and then sharpens upward and then almost goes flat. This progressive curve is beneficial for a couple of reasons. One, the player viewing angle is the most comfortable for the neck, and it puts the game interface right in the player’s face. As it goes up and becomes more vertical, it’s attractive for people walking by and grabs their attention better.”

And it’s not just the PeakSlant49™ that offers an innovative new feature. The PeakSlant32™ has filled a unique gap and met an almost unanticipated need. “We’re really proud to be innovators in this space. Just by making some small changes, we became the first in the market with the triple 32. It’s hard to believe how many weeks we spent trying to get the right angle on each of those displays,” Baerlocher said. “Lots of debate, lots of discussion, lots of sitting in front of it for hours to see, O.K., am I getting tired? Does this hurt? What about the glare from the lights?” The culmination of that rigorous, meticulous work is four incredible products focused on player comfort and ergonomics.



Performance at the Top

United by a modern, sleek style, player comfort and ergonomics, but above all, performance, games simply perform better on Peak cabinets. Baerlocher notes that the streamlined, innovative look of the PeakBarTop™ inspired some casino operators. **“From the bartender and casino standpoint, we actually have had some casinos build bars with this new product in mind,”** he said. **“And that’s about as big a compliment as you can get, when others actually change their landscape because of the product you built.”**

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One of the first installations for the PeakBarTop™ occurred at the San Manuel Casino in California. Within the first several weeks after launching the PeakBarTop™, they reported a significant increase with number of hands played and an additional increase with coin in, particularly when compared to older models like the G20 Bar Top. That trend continued as the PeakBarTop™ began to roll out to other states, with many other properties also reporting a significant increase in number of hands played, as well as noting player satisfaction with the overall playing experience. Steve Ringkob, Corporate Director of Slot Operations at Monarch Casino & Resort, Inc. specifically called out the improvements to the new design: **“Guest response has been positive with players appreciating the increased display clarity and reduced glare of the screen.”**

The PeakSlant49™ and PeakSlant32™ have also shown significant positive performance. When the same game is compared between two cabinets, recent performance statistics show an average of a 35–40% lift on the new hardware. The Peak cabinets have shown improved performance, sometimes by as much as 70% or more, when the same game title is released on multiple cabinets. In the case of Wolf Peak, the PeakSlant32™ showed up to a 90% increase in performance when compared with other cabinets.

Ismael Barrera, Corporate Director of Slots for Gila River Hotels and Casinos calls out the PeakSlant49™ saying, **“The aesthetics of the PeakSlant49™ paired with a first-class modern sign makes it very inviting to our guests, with high occupancy levels and continuous performance. I am sure the gaming experience must be an excellent one!!”** The story told by the data and feedback is clear; the Peak family has real performance power! ■