

INSIGHTS

It's Just the Beginning of Innovation at SG Studios

By [Scientific Games](#)

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Digital lottery is evolving at the speed of light, and nowhere is this truer than at [Scientific Games](#). The company's SG Studios is led by Steve Hickson, VP of Digital Games and a digital game industry veteran with more than two decades of experience providing content to government-regulated lotteries worldwide.

Hickson shared his thoughts on the continuous evolution of eInstants and gave us a look behind the scenes into how SG Studios creates content that keeps players eager for more.

What are some of the biggest trends in eInstants right now?

Hickson: From a gameplay point of view, progressive jackpots have become a staple in digital lottery programs for U.S. lotteries. We're also seeing the emergence of multi-state progressive jackpots, which give lotteries the opportunity for exponential revenue growth.

There's a drive toward more omnichannel play, where digital games support and enhance physical game sales. Our SG Studios team is highly adept at collaborating with the Scientific Games retail teams to build game content that complements and extends the retail game experience. From a lottery's perspective, omnichannel games allow for more cost-effective marketing, creating higher overall levels of brand awareness and player trust as they move from physical to digital products and back again. Our *GAME OF THRONES* branded content is an excellent example of how to create a high-impact omnichannel campaign.



What's SG Studio's approach to creating games?

Hickson: Our studio mantra is to deliver high-quality, exciting play experiences so the player receives value, whether they win or lose. In other words, they get a dollar's worth of entertainment for their dollar spent. We call that our value exchange.

Our lottery customers each have unique needs, expectations, regulatory frameworks and cultural attitudes toward iLottery games. Understanding the differences in player motivations is also critical in the production of game content.

Scientific Games stays true to our name by analyzing the game performance data available to us. Our Analytics & Insights team also gets input directly from players through our *ONE Segmentation Study* to help us break down what types of games suit particular player types by segmenting them into specific groups, each with different motivations for play. In this way, we can produce diverse content to satisfy all players in a particular lottery market. Our scientific method means we are maximizing the performance of each game, and in turn, the potential for returns to good causes.



Are there any eInstants from SG Studios that make you particularly proud?

Hickson: That's a hard question. It's a bit like asking who is your favorite child? But recently there have been some standouts. At the end of 2023, we released a *MONOPOLY* game called [MONOPOLY PROPERTY PAYOUT](#). It incorporates an isometric layout that emulates a 3D game board, and players can choose their pieces, just like they would in the

traditional *MONOPOLY* board game (I always choose the dog, by the way!). It's just like playing a real game of *MONOPOLY*, with the player moving around the board collecting houses and Chance cards and finds multiple ways to collect prizes and bonuses. This is a particularly good example of how a game that offers engaging content can remain true to an iconic brand. And players absolutely love it!



Another fantastic new game is *Merge Mania*. It's a totally new concept for the North American market. I'm really excited to see how this game performs in market because the studio team has pulled out all the stops. It's just so full of energy! Instead of a traditional tumbler style, players must build clusters of two or more matching game assets. The bigger the cluster they can build, the bigger their prize. The game has an expanding play area which increases the opportunity to win bigger and bigger prizes. The anticipation

and excitement continue to grow in every round of play.



What makes SG Studios' game mechanics different from competitors?

Hickson: We spend a lot of time generating unique play styles that players haven't experienced before and adding unique twists to familiar play styles. Recently, we've seen great success with a game called *3asy Money*, which is based on a simple, familiar match-three game mechanic. Our version adds a new layer of jeopardy by allowing players to win

different prizes when they match different attributes, like color or shape. For example, if a player matches three yellow items, they win one prize. But if they match three yellow diamonds, they can triple their prize.



We also experiment by turning certain game mechanics on their heads. For example, connect-style game mechanics are extremely popular in the U.S. In these games, players connect like items, which then move from the play area and are replaced with new assets. In our *Maximum Cash* game, we have reversed this mechanic by leaving the matching assets in place and removing everything else from the play area. Then, we introduce a new set of assets, so the player can increase

their winnings by making even more matches. You'll have to try it for yourself, but it adds a new and very dynamic level of excitement to the experience.

Scientific Games' SG Content Hub is changing the way lotteries access digital content. Can you tell us more?

Hickson: The [SG Content Hub](#) is essentially a game aggregator, but it's completely focused on iLottery content alone, which makes it unique in the industry. The *SG Content Hub* makes it easy for our lottery customers to access some of the best game content in the world for their players. We've already done the work of handpicking best-in-class game studio partners, handling the contract arrangements and integrating the studios' iLottery content into the *SG Content Hub*. This means that lotteries only have to carry out one integration to access games from multiple studios in a completely frictionless way.

The *SG Content Hub* itself is a feature-packed platform that lets us implement some great functionality across our own game content, along with content from our studio partners. For example, you might have five different games from five different studios, all sharing the same progressive jackpot. It's an evolving program that will change the way lottery operators and game creators view the digital lottery space.

From a game studio perspective, it's a phenomenal way to gain exposure and access to potential lottery customers all over the world – with Scientific Games' trusted reputation supporting them. We call this our *Content Hub Partner Program* which presents many advantages to studio partners. They'll even have access to select licensed properties in Scientific Games' portfolio of 100+ pop culture and iconic brands, the largest collection in the industry.

Through the *Partner Program*, we are creating a truly collaborative environment for content providers with the result being better and better game content for lotteries and their players.



What are some future trends in consumer demand for instant games?

Hickson: These are exciting times in the digital lottery space right now and really, it's just the beginning. We are going to see more and more North American lotteries becoming digitally enabled, so the demand for digital game content will continue to grow at pace. With that growth, we fully expect players will have increasingly diverse expectations of their digital content. Lotteries and their content suppliers will need to dive deep into player data to understand and meet the needs of their different player types and motivations.

Acquiring 25-to-40-year-old players will be a key growth area. Undoubtedly, these players will demand high-quality, sophisticated, immersive content and frictionless access to digital lottery in the same way

they already access all digital entertainment. It will continue to be a battle for player screen time, so if the lottery's digital offering isn't top-notch, they'll struggle against the competition.

In terms of SG Studios, we'll continue to respect what our data and player insights tell us and innovate game content and playstyles to meet the needs of every kind of player for every one of our customers, so they can curate high-performing iLottery portfolios that help fund their good causes.

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