



INTERVIEWS

Interview with SUZOHAPP's Sim Bielak, Global President, Gaming & Amusement

# "When this is all over, the gaming industry will come back stronger than ever"



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In an exclusive interview with Yogonet, SUZOHAPP's Global President of Gaming & Amusement provided a full analysis of the impact the global pandemic has had on the company and the sector. He revealed SUZOHAPP's top priority is to get cash in and minimize costs while keeping everyone safe and said there is some good to be found in all the chaos: "we've seen a lot of companies helping each other out," Bielak stated.

## *In which ways has the coronavirus pandemic affected SUZOHAPP and the gaming industry as a whole?*

On every level, I think it's been a shock to the system. We're a global company with offices spread all over the world so we've always had to be prepared for whatever was changing in the global climate, whether that be shifts in governments, natural disasters, changing regulations, etc. But **I don't think anyone ever really anticipated a situation that would be so universally traumatic.** Usually, when something goes wrong, we look to where there is stability to try to learn and emulate to improve our situation but as everyone is being hard hit, it is difficult to find that inspiration.

For us and for the entire industry, I can't imagine there's a single person who hasn't been affected. We're working remotely, if we're working at all. Children are at home instead of at school and the support structures we have of the people that we're usually surrounded by is now limited to only our immediate households. There's a lot that we've lost in a short amount of time and we're all just figuring out how to cope with it.

But **we're also seeing the strength of our industry.** I'm seeing the community make great strides to help each other. Calls from customers and vendors alike have been flooding in. Some, just to check in and see how we're holding up. Others, looking for partnerships so we can all make it through to the end of this. We've seen how adaptive this community is and I know, without a doubt, that **when this is all over, we'll come back stronger than ever.**



## *Which measures did your company implement voluntarily or have to adopt in accordance with local and/or regional policies when the pandemic first began? What can you tell us about the outcome of your current approach so far?*

**We've had a pandemic contingency plan ready for a while, which has put us ahead of the curve.** We got hit with the effects of the virus early as we have a manufacturing warehouse in China. We took aggressive measures to ensure the safety of our staff including requiring temperature checks for every shift, additional protective gear such as masks and gloves for all employees and our office staff was instructed to work remotely immediately. By having most of our staff work remotely, we were able to create more space for our essential on-site staff to appropriately social distance. The hardest part for us, given the global nature of our company was that we had to cancel all travel. The majority of our sales are done face to face so this restriction took a toll on us but was necessary. These measures were very successful in China so we implemented them across the globe at our Poland production and US production centers as well as with every office that we have internationally and the results have been great— **we have not had a single employee contract the virus.**

Given that we are a global company, we were fortunate to already have most of the infrastructure in place to allow for remote working and teleconferencing so we were well prepared and already had the majority of our staff working from home when the shelter-in-place orders expanded to the US. We are also fortunate that our business is diversified across multiple markets. While our gaming and amusement customers have had to reduce or completely shutter all operations, we also support banks, retail and grocery stores with our solutions products which are essential businesses. This has allowed us to keep our business running, albeit with limited staff and very strict precautions, but it is keeping us afloat.

## *Has this situation changed your company's short- and long-term strategies and business plans?*

Both long term and short strategies have changed because of the virus. Right now, the world is still very much in a reaction phase. The rules are still changing on a daily basis. We don't know what the future and our long-term strategies look like because the situation hasn't really stabilized yet. We don't know when the peak is going to happen, if it will recur and when businesses will be allowed to operate again and what measures will be in place to resume operations. Given that lack of foresight, our longterm strategies are mostly just on hold. Our longterm goals and ideas still exist but we know that our tactics will have to change once we know what the new normal looks like.

In terms of short term strategies, it's very clear. There is one main goal and I think every business in our situation has the same goal and that's to stay afloat. So everything we do right now has that goal at the center. **We are hyper-focused on how we can get cash in and minimize costs while keeping everyone safe.**

## *Do you think the tendencies and customer behavior expected for this year and beyond will change in light of the pandemic?*

It's really hard to say at this point what tendencies and customer behavior will look like as we have yet to determine how to effectively combat and eventually stop the virus. I think the natural reaction coming out of this will be to keep cautious. People need to feel safe going outside their homes again to gather with people and given how much we don't know about how the virus behaves, I think that could take a while. Additionally, we have to look at the economic change that has happened. With so many unemployed, consumers may be less inclined to risk their resources so we'll need to see buyer confidence resume as well before we can see the industry recover. As we determine what works and what doesn't in this new reality, I think we'll see some facets of the industry return faster than others. If sporting events resume, even without live audiences, I think we'll see the sports betting sector rise in full force as it was just starting to emerge before the virus. Any sort of digital gambling will likely also have a quick comeback as it doesn't require anything done in person. **I think our industry will have to shift a lot of how we operate.** It will be painful of course, but I think it will also result in a lot of innovation and new ideas.

## *Are there any bright sides to this situation?*

For the COVID-19 situation, I think there is some good to be found in all the chaos. To start, we've found the strength in our community and industry. Everyone is in the situation equally which means that everyone is willing to work with each other to keep moving forward. Companies that are unable to pay are being given leniency to pay later or use reduced services so that we can all keep our businesses running. It's in everyone's best interest for more companies to succeed so **we've seen a lot of companies helping each other out.**

Additionally, the situation has made us evaluate the efficiency of our processes. Working remotely has been effective and has made us look at how much real estate and physical space we might want to maintain in the future and look at our carbon footprint and how many resources we generally use as opposed to how we're running now. We've also had to take a fine-toothed comb to our expenses to see what we're spending and where. It's been a good opportunity to see how we value our investments and investigate why we're spending the money in the first place.

Lastly, our team has also shown us that they are very adaptable. They've changed almost everything they do and are doing jobs of multiple people and reacting to where the business need is. Seeing how they've really hit the ground running furthers my belief that when you invest in the right people and give them the tools and opportunities to step up and do their best, you won't be disappointed.