

Do you know the Wizard of Odds?

Das Glücksspielmecca Las Vegas zieht viele interessante Menschen an, die mit außergewöhnlichen Jobs ihren Weg in der Glücksspielindustrie machen. [key:IG] hat einen Mann getroffen, der als Versicherungsmathematiker seinen Traumberuf in Las Vegas gefunden hat. Er berät Automatenhersteller und betreibt eine Internetseite, auf der er Spielern die beste Strategie bei Casinospielen erklärt.

Michael Shackelford, the Wizard of Odds, berichtet im Interview mit [key:IG] über seine Arbeit in Las Vegas. Das Interview haben wir in Englisch geführt.

Michael Shackelford, the Wizard of Odds, is an American gambling expert. Born in Pasadena, California, he graduated from University of California at Santa Barbara in 1988 with a BA in Mathematics and Economics and started to work in the office of the Chief Actuary at the Social Security Administration Headquarters in Baltimore, Maryland.

In 1997 Michael Shackelford launched his gambling website www.wizardofodds.com as a fun project in website design. On his site he provided mathematically correct strategies and information on almost every casino game possible. Soon not only gamblers but also slot machine manufacturers discovered the professional and highly interesting content of his site. Consequently several requests for consulting followed and in 2000 he dedicated himself full time to the website and the consulting business.

In 2001 he moved with his wife and three children to Las Vegas to be at the heart of the gambling business.

His business is professional math analysis for casino games and software evaluation for online-gaming. He also works on

new slot machine designs for his clients. At the same time he keeps all gamblers updated on his website on the latest news on casino games and the best strategies to play them. His personal goal was to become the most known and trusted name in gambling advice for the whole range of casino games. Today he has achieved his goal: As one of the most recognized experts on gambling strategy he will be key-note speaker at the Australasian Gaming Expo in Sydney this coming August.

[key:IG] is proud to be the first German-speaking media to interview Michael Shackelford.

[key:IG]: We welcome you on [key:IG] – the biggest online German-speaking community for gamblers and those who are affiliated with the gaming business. Michael, what made a solid family man give up his secure job at the Social Security Administration and move to Las Vegas and start in gambling consulting?

Michael S.: That was indeed going from one extreme to the other. After several years I grew restless with government work. Number crunching grew unfulfilling. I wanted to have an impact on policy decisions. However, that was way above my pay grade. Meanwhile, another door opened in the gambling world, which seemed more interesting and exciting. It was not a hard decision for me to make, but it took several months of lobbying my wife to go along with it.

[key:IG]: You have two different business lines: One is consulting gaming enterprises and the other is providing gaming strategies for gamblers. Let's start with the gamblers. You operate a gaming website called www.wizardofodds.com. What kind of benefit do you offer for passionate gamblers and how do you make money with this site?

Michael S.: I teach gamblers how to gamble better. Name your game, and I'll show you how to play it. I make money through advertising.

[key:IG]: Just a few weeks ago you launched a new website www.sweatthemoney.com. You call it a consumer advocacy web site for the Nevada casino player. What exactly is the idea of this site?

Michael S.: The idea is to warn players about rouge casinos that don't pay winners. Unfortunately, even in Nevada, the player can't take for granted that if he wins a bet, he will be paid. Most casinos here are honourable, in my opinion, and will give the player the benefit of the doubt over a disputed bet. However, some will "sweat the money," looking for any excuse to not pay a winner.

[key:IG]: How do the Nevada casinos react to the website? Do they see you as their foeman or do they appreciate what you do?

Michael S.: That web site is very new, so I doubt if many know about it yet. I do know of one casino manager, who shall remain nameless, who supports it.

[key:IG]: A consumer advocacy web site like yours would probably have no chance to exist in Europe. The attitude towards gambling in the US is quite different from Europe. From a European point of view gambling in the US is considered part of the entertainment industry and has hardly any bad connotations. Whereas Americans go on a weekend trip to Las Vegas like a duck takes to water, people in Europe hardly talk about their excursions to casinos. How would you describe the situation from an American perspective?

Michael S.: We Americans like to be busy. Whether you are into gambling, dining, shows, or clubbing, there is a lot to choose from here in Vegas. I would also add that the best consumer advocacy site, in my humble opinion, for Internet gambling is casinomeister.com, which is run out of Germany.

[key:IG]: Let's turn to your second line of business. You do consulting for gambling enterprises. What is your main focus

of consulting?

Michael S.: I do a combination of slot machine and card game design. Right now the poker-based games are hot, and I always seem to be doing lots of those.

[key:IG]: It seems that your lines of business are a little conflicting. How do you succeed in combining the interests of f.ex. slot manufacturers and gamblers on the other side?

Michael S.: I'm not against the gambling industry. I am all about honest and fair gambling. If I can help make a good slot machine, I have no problem with that.

[key:IG]: In a few weeks summer vacation season will start all over Europe and many tourists will come to Las Vegas. Most of them are inexperienced gamblers who will try their luck at the casinos for the first time. We kindly ask you as an expert for a short advice: What are the three main basic rules newcomers should follow while playing?

Michael S.: Study a game before you play it. My web site is a good source, but there is no shortage of books on gambling advice. Play the games with the best odds, namely blackjack, craps, and video poker. Stop playing if you're not having fun.

[key:IG]: In June Las Vegas will host again the annual World Series of Poker 2008. How crazy does Las Vegas get during this event and will you also participate in the tournament?

Michael S.: No, I won't be participating. Poker is one of my weaker areas when it comes to gambling. June is normally a slow month in Vegas, because it is so hot, so that is a good time to have it. The Rio should be very busy with it, but otherwise things in Vegas should be fairly normal.

[key:IG]: Michael, we thank you very much for this interesting interview and wish you good luck for the future.

Michael S.: Thank you, the pleasure was all mine.