

Globetrotting Intercard still top

When access really is 'all areas'

ALBERTO Borrero was just back from a trip to Lima, in Peru, where he was a guest at the opening of a huge new family entertainment centre, when *InterGame* caught up with him to discuss this special issue.

The senior vice-president international for debit card specialist Intercard had been joined for the trip by president Scott Sherrod and global marketing director Lynda Brotherton.

The high-powered delegation for a long-distance opening was by no means unusual for the American company. Sherrod and his colleagues have a policy of close relationships with all of its customers, working with them from initial concept right through to maximising all of the benefits and management data made possible by using the Intercard system.

Borrero, however, must rank with the most travelled people in the amusement industry, with the entire globe as his territory, but there is a special place in his affection for the Middle East. The Spaniard has been frequenting the region for as long as Intercard has been supplying it - and that is now over 20 years. It has also made Intercard the most-used debit card system in the Middle East.

Borrero takes much of the credit for that. The Intercard policy of building bridges with the industry and fostering close ties with its customers has been very much the objective for him. "When Majid Al Hokair wanted to go to see Real Madrid (Borrero's passion), it took a lot of doing, but I managed to get some tickets and we spent a lot of time in each other's company that weekend."

That kind of attention to detail becomes not just a matter of commercial expedience as much as personal preference. "Many of the operators in the Middle East have become personal friends," he said.

It is understandable, therefore, that when asked to describe the value of the Middle East market to Intercard, his response was brief and to the point. "The Middle East is a key market for us. We have been supplying our transaction technology to the region for more than 20 years."

An understatement perhaps but in real terms it means that at one time or another, Intercard

has worked with every big name in the region. That means Al Hokair, Al Othaim, Landmark, MAF, Al Mogren, Future Kid, Galaxy Park... right down to the one-venue operation.

The company's products do considerably more than simply validate games and rides and act as POS payment processing. The back-office processes and the opportunities to recognise loyal customers are vital parts of the Intercard offer and the company is constantly updating, upgrading and introducing new ideas into its products. That goes beyond taking some of those original installations and bringing them up to date with technologies that have been introduced in the interim; often it means showing the industry something completely new. This year is no exception.

When Sherrod, Borrero and their team hit Dubai for the DEAL show next month, they will bring with them *Shindigger*, the latest development to come out of Intercard's R&D department. *Shindigger* is an online party booking and reservation software. "Increasing numbers of customers want to book parties on their mobile devices," said Borrero. "*Shindigger* helps them to capture this business and it will also be the most affordable party software on the international market."

Of the general trends within the Middle East, Borrero is a keen observer and few people understand the market as well as he does. "Eighty per cent of our business is in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," he said. "This may surprise many of your readers, who often assume that all of the action is in Dubai, but that is because Dubai is the great tourist hub and has all of the glamour. In fact, the biggest market of all is in Saudi. And if you are talking about tourists, then technically Saudi still comes out on top because it is the destination for Mecca and millions of Muslims go to Mecca each year, far outstripping Dubai as a tourist destination in terms of numbers."

Two of the industry's biggest players in the region, Al Hokair and Al Othaim, he points out, are actually Saudi companies and are now expanding very rapidly, both in their domestic markets and in the countries that surround Saudi. "What is likely to come out of Saudi is and will continue to be, bigger than the rest of the Middle East market put together."

That is not to denigrate the big operators in other countries, he points out, as some of them are these days displaying a degree of professionalism equal to anything to be found in the FEC business anywhere in the world.

Current trends in the region, he said, have seen the opening of major amusement parks in the UAE, a factor that Borrero does not feel will impact the FEC business. "These new theme parks won't affect the FECs - it is a different type of market attracting a different type of guest. The two profiles don't overlap."

And the other big talking point has been the



The entrance to the new Future Kid FEC in the Salmiya Mall, Kuwait, a location with the latest Intercard system



The interior of the Future Kid FEC in Salmiya, Kuwait, an Intercard-equipped destination

introduction of VAT in Saudi and the UAE and will subsequently be visited upon the industry in other GCC countries within the next year. "It is too early to judge what the impact will be on the FECs. From the point of view of our system, it has in-built processes that will handle the new tax."

The run-in to DEAL is a time of considerable activity for Sherrod, Borrero and their colleagues as they prepare for what is for them one of the biggest dates in the calendar. "IAAPA outstrips everything, of course," said Borrero, "but, because of the importance of the Middle East market to companies such as ours, I would say DEAL is second to none. It is a well-organised and well-managed show. It is also an opportunity for us to spend time with some of our best customers all under one roof - and there are always new faces."



Intercard CEO Scott Sherrod (centre) with two of his best customers, Georges (left) and Richard Elias of Robert's Group, Lebanon

