

36 years, 106 countries and the miles in between



Stephen A Crystal,
Founder & CEO, SCCG Management

Thirty-six years in this business, and 106 countries and counting. I keep the count the way a Captain keeps a log, not to boast about stamps in a passport but to remember what each one taught me. Read end-to-end, the log says something simpler than I expected when I started out: there is no such thing as a national gambling industry. There is one industry, and it happens to be spread across borders. The number I am prouder of is the one that is harder to count. Hundreds of thousands of miles by air, and after that by train, bus, car and on foot. The flight gets you to the country, everything after the flight gets you to the market. I have learned more in a taxi line outside a regional airport, on a bus between two provincial capitals and on a long walk to a licensing office than any deck about the same jurisdiction has ever taught me.

The ties that bind

And here is what all those miles underscore - we are tied together far more closely than the maps suggest. Sit down with a Lottery Director in LatAm, a central European supplier, a Tribal Chairman in the American Southwest or an operator in Asia, and you will hear four accents asking three of the same questions: How do I reach the player I have not reached yet? How do I stay on the right side of my regulator? And how do I fund the next stage of growth? The regulatory answers differ enormously; the human questions barely differ at all.

Convergence built on trust

This is why SCCG has never tried to run this business from one time zone. Our people sit in North America, Latin America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Brazil, and the more than 130 client-partners we serve are spread wider still. Convergence is the word the industry now uses for gambling, media, sports intellectual property and technology folding into one stack, and it is the right word. But convergence between two companies still begins as trust between two people, and trust is still built in a room.

The best part of the work

I am also at the point in a career where the arithmetic changes. There are decades behind me and fewer than two ahead, and I have stopped pretending otherwise. What surprises me is what this arithmetic has actually done. It has not made me cautious, and it has not made me tired. The curiosity is as strong as it has ever been, and so is the desire. What the arithmetic has done is make me a better guest. I pay closer attention on the ground now. I take the dinner instead of the early flight. I cherish each trip more than the one before it. The airport at 5:00am, the city I have never seen, the client-partner who becomes a friend somewhere between the meeting and the meal. None of this is the cost of the work. It is the work, and after 36 years it is still the best part of it. Country No.107 is already somewhere on the calendar. I do not know yet which room I will be sitting in or which market will surprise me, and that is most of the appeal. If you are building something in a country I have not reached, tell me about it. There are miles left in me, and I would like to spend them well.

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