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 NeoGames Studio   
 eInstant gaming

# Pushing the boundaries in eInstant gaming

Hili Shakked talks to *EGR* about how market-leading NeoGames Studio is introducing revolutionary ideas to the world of eInstant gaming

## Bio



**Hili Shakked** is the VP of games at NeoGames. With extensive experience in online gaming, marketing and investments, Shakked joined the company in 2019 and oversees the NeoGames Studio. Before that he worked at 888, managing a \$130m business unit, directing the roadmap, tech, marketing and business analytics. Shakked holds a BSc in Electronic Engineering from the Technion (Israel) and an MBA in Finance from Tel Aviv University.

**W**ith continued sales growth in eInstant markets, NeoGames Studio has seen significant enhancements over the past two years that has boosted its evolution and created new business opportunities. Leading this effort is Hili Shakked, NeoGames' VP of games. Shakked joined NeoGames after 12 years leading 888poker, a brand which he helped build up to become the world's second largest online poker operator.

Shakked and the NeoGames Studio team faced an increasing demand for eInstant games and responded by meeting requests to diversify NeoGames' game portfolio and address new segments of players, as well as taking on the challenge of new markets with different regulatory requirements.

"Since I joined NeoGames in 2019, our Studio has evolved in many ways," explains Shakked. "We needed to retain ourselves as market leaders in creating best-performing and entertaining eInstant games for ilotteries around the world, while being agile, flexible and innovative enough to meet growing and diversified demands. We continue to see demand in existing and new markets, with specific requests to answer the ever-changing needs of players.

"Consequently, we've added talent to our production teams so we can rigorously craft every detail of our games, to our delivery teams, who work vis-à-vis with our customers on a daily basis to make sure they achieve their goals, improve existing processes, and introduce new ideas and game features," he added.

**EGR Intel (EGR):** *What can you tell us about the transition from poker to the eInstant business?*

**Hili Shakked (HS):** The transition was very challenging because the products are completely different in nearly every aspect. While in both cases the profitability is derived from having as many customers as possible, in poker it's

about reducing the skill gap between the players, and in eInstant it's about maximising the personal experience. In eInstants, we must ensure the player is excited every time they play the game – the accumulation of the vision, the sounds, the ups and downs within the game and the variety of options. In contrast to poker, where most players enjoy the routine of the game, eInstant players seek variety, while at any given time they prefer a given atmosphere (game).

**EGR:** *Is there a 'secret recipe' for producing a successful eInstant?*

**HS:** While in other online games there are many playing options within the game, the challenge in eInstant is building engagement in a game where players have a single option – to hit the PLAY button knowing that they have no effect on the outcome of the game. However, from that moment of clicking PLAY through to the end of the round is where we see the difference between the average games and the great games.

Designing a winning game is the meticulous combination of art and data – creating an overall harmony between the atmosphere (visual, sound) and the events occurring in the game – ensuring they are all in harmony with each other. On top of the complex artistic challenges of the in-play experience, NeoGames Studio adds a complex mathematical model that fits each game.

**EGR:** *Can you tell us more about your mathematical model?*

**HS:** While art is at the heart of the game and is essentially the key driver that leads a player to try a game, there is also the parallel journey consisting of how the player feels while playing the game. This is where the mathematics kicks in, creating the experience of winning and ramping up the excitement that comes with it. There is a huge difference between the experience of playing a game



with a coin toss result versus a game in which the outcomes vary along the way.

This is where the math experts take the lead. At NeoGames Studio, we realised there is a whole world to explore, so we added maths experts to our team and spent a lot of time analysing the maths of the great games (as well as the lesser great games). Doing so led us to gradually build a very strong tool that generates the mathematical models of our new games, to the benefit of our lottery customers and ultimately the players.

As well as the importance of in-game data, NeoGames Studio is part of NeoGames, which leads the market with full lottery turnkey solutions. Drawing from the data collected by our business intelligence (BI) department enables us to have a better understanding of the specific landscape each of our customers operates in, helping us come up with new ideas that address their specific needs.

Just as importantly, we work very closely with our partners – lotteries around the world – and listen carefully to what they learn from their customers. The combination of using the data from our lottery partners and the aggregated information in our systems means we can build better games with a better player experience. This knowledge about the end users (both their actual activity and future preferences) contributes to the joint development of targeted customer game roadmaps.

**EGR:** *Recently, the NeoGames Studio launched Magic Winnings, a new game that continues to be a big success. What makes this game so successful?*

**HS:** We are indeed very proud of our Magic Winnings game. We invested a lot of time and effort into optimising the static art and animations and have them perfectly embedded in the game flow. This game is a great example of our ingredients for success – the features of the game are rather common, but ‘packing’ everything correctly with a unique maths model keeps players engaged in each game session.

In the first 25 days after launching the game in two major US lotteries, it generated more revenue than any other game launched since the beginning of 2021. This measured revenue is net of all seasonality effects and the lottery’s portfolio size, and revenue is significantly higher



NeoGames Studio has optimised the static art and animations for Magic Winnings

than the best performing non-seasonal games launched in the last six months. Building on the success of Magic Winnings, our lottery partners have already requested a sequel.

**EGR:** *What else can we expect from NeoGames Studio in 2022?*

**HS:** While Magic Winnings is off to a great start, we’re anticipating a growth in revenue with a host of other new games, some with game styles new to the eInstant market, including an eInstant ‘poker style’ game that will be launched in the coming months. The challenge in designing this game was encapsulating a multi-player poker game into an eInstant, single-click game experience. I am excited to see how it will be received.

Though many people in the Studio are already working on our 2023 content, we have more exciting new game launches lined up for 2022, including additional features to our Progressive Jackpot, reviving the industry’s iconic Queen of Diamond game with an exciting Joker game version, as well as other games with dual and dynamic themes.

At NeoGames, we believe in exploring multiple approaches to develop and launch unique and innovative games. As market leaders, we understand that, to build on the success of our existing games, we need to keep pushing the boundaries to introduce new and revolutionary ideas to the world of eInstant and pave the way for new trends. 