

ALL ABOUT COBALT™ 23:

An Interview with Darnell Johnson

Sr. Director Product Management, Poker

By Christine McCrory



Darnell Johnson

IGT's name is nearly synonymous with video poker, and it has remained a cornerstone of the company since it was first founded back in the 1970s. Throughout the years, IGT's cabinets have demonstrated a commitment to thoughtful design and an enhanced experience for players. **“ Built to maximize player ergonomics and offer a durable, easily serviceable package to operators, the Cobalt™ 23 is no exception. ”**

I sat down with Darnell Johnson, Senior Director of Product Management for Video Poker, to talk about what makes the Cobalt™ 23 stand out in the market.



Can you tell us about the development of the Cobalt™23 Video Poker Machine?

The Cobalt™23 cabinet was already in the works for the Class II and VLT verticals, and at the same time, we had a need in Poker for a cabinet to replace our existing G20 upright machines. When we got the opportunity to look at this cabinet, we saw that it would be an excellent form factor for our poker games. The 23-inch screen itself is a unique thing for the poker market; while other markets are going for larger screens, poker players tend to favor a closer environment, so to speak. With an upright form factor, the 23-inch screen works well. The design of the cabinet itself leans toward things poker players really like. When we saw the Cobalt™23, we thought it would be a good fit for our poker players and for what we want to do in the market itself.



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What differentiators does an upright cabinet have for operators when compared to a bar top?

The first differentiator is the second screen. Bar tops only have a single screen, so you can provide a different type of presentation experience to players on the upright cabinet by taking advantage of those dual screens. Uprights are also utilized on the casino floor, rather than only at the bar, so operators have a lot of flexibility to place that unit and showcase product better with a sign package or other similar items. From a functionality perspective, every single one of our themes that we create are available on not only the bar top, but also on the upright cabinets as well.

What type of game content does the Cobalt™23 offer for players?

It's important for us to provide a lot of variety to our players. They're used to having all their favorite games available. Many of our most popular games are our bundles or multi-game packs that provide the best of our video poker offering. We plan to continue to develop and make these games available for the Cobalt™23 cabinet as well, so that all their player-favorite games will be available. And as we continue to create more unique and compelling content, we'll make that new content available on this cabinet as well. Every single one of our key games that are available on the market today are available on this cabinet.

“...it provides a lot of improved ergonomics...”



How does the Cobalt™ 23 meet the needs of operators?

I'll start off with ergonomics. The design on this cabinet is a bit unique, and it provides a lot of improved ergonomics for players. The area where your hands are resting and where the button panel sits is much larger, so the comfort level from a player perspective is extremely high. The positioning of the monitor has been well thought out and researched to help prevent eye fatigue when playing the games over a long period of time. From an operator perspective, it's attractively priced, which helps address some of the financial challenges at this time. Serviceability was a key element we wanted to maintain and improve where needed. We've also added a lot of innovation. In today's world, it's all about making things more comfortable, making it easier for players to enjoy themselves. The charging port station is there, the footrest is available for them to take advantage of, and the lighting package that we provide is much different than what we offer on our core video titles. It's a much more subdued experience for the player.

Tell us about some of the more compelling features of the Cobalt™ 23, and how these can benefit players and operators.

There's a lot with this cabinet. Some things are associated with video poker itself, and some with IGT. **Offering a cashless solution is a hot trend that will continue to grow. When it comes to IGT, our Cardless Connect solution is an offering that we fully embrace.** One of the things we want to ensure is that all of our newer cabinets going out the door support this offering. It is a feature that our legacy cabinets did not have that I'm really happy to introduce to our newer cabinets. I think that's going to be very beneficial to players and operators as we move forward. From a serviceability perspective, the design is very unique. Everything is right there in front of you to allow for ease of access to service and address any issues with the cabinets. We sat down with not only internal field service team members, but our customers' field service team members as well, and had them offer insight and feedback regarding what could be done to make their lives easier and reduce machine downtime. We incorporated that feedback into this product. So far, the response has been incredibly positive.

What is your personal favorite feature or component of this video poker machine?

As someone who used to have to deal with machines at one time in my life, serviceability is a big one for me. Accessing the cabinet itself is very simple and easy. Getting to all the key things from a serviceability perspective, it's all right there in front of you. I also just like the feel of the cabinet. The ergonomics are excellent. Our legacy cabinets are great, but I have to say the feel of this particular cabinet and the experience of playing poker on this cabinet is much more comfortable for sure.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

We believe the Cobalt™ 23 fits a need in multiple areas, as an evolution to the upright existing cabinet found in the field today at an attractive price point, which we know is often first and foremost in a customer's mind. And in addition, it offers improved ergonomics that will make the player experience more comfortable than what it is today.

