

VIAGE

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CORPORATE BROCHURE



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In 2010, Brussels saw the launch of the Viage Entertainment Center. Managing director Andrew Webb tells Andrew Pelis how the casino and entertainment venue has quickly established itself as a successful venture and benefactor to the local community

Brussels has long been held up as a doyen for international business. While that remains the case, a recent splash of glamour has seen entertainment become en vogue with the arrival last year of the Viage Entertainment Center.

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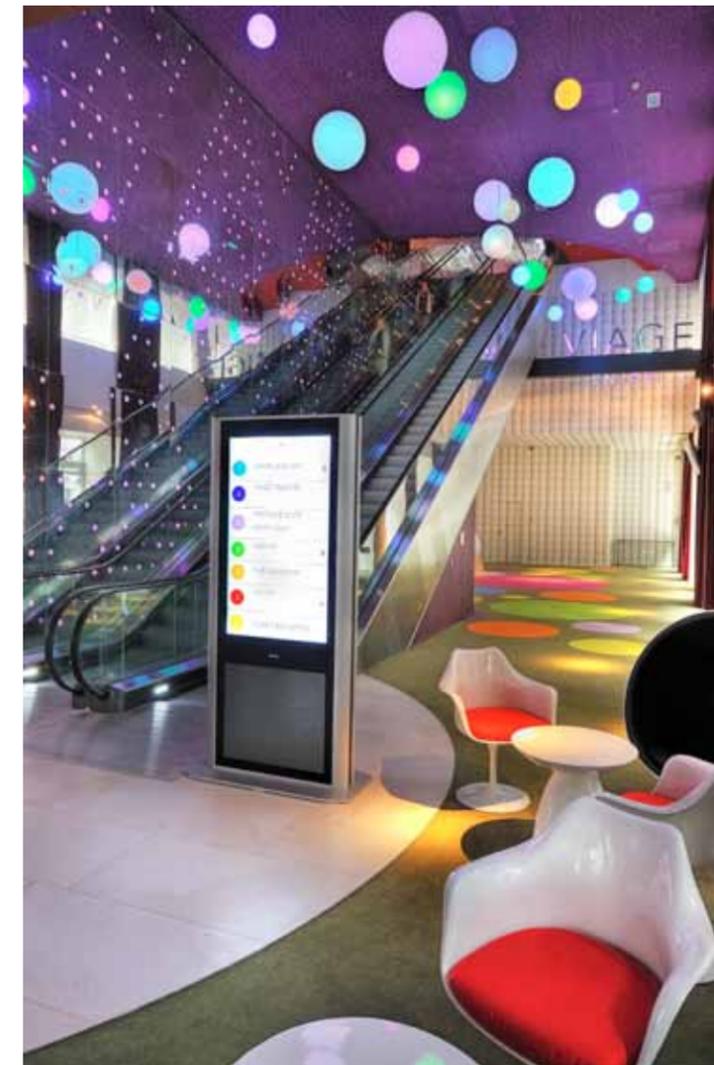
Viage offers the complete one-stop-shop for those seeking a sophisticated choice of entertainment options in Belgium's capital, providing the full casino experience, food, drink and live entertainment. Part of Casinos Austria International (CAI), it launched in Brussels last year amid the despondency of the global economic downturn.

The casino, which has relocated from CAI's Grand Casino Brussels, was the cornerstone of an ongoing urban regeneration programme. It has quickly become established as an integral part of the area's economy, contributing the largest amount of tax for any business in the greater Brussels region and employing 370 full-time staff, with many sub-contractors and local suppliers also involved in operations.

Twelve months on and its managing director Andrew Webb oversees a spectacular empire offering clients a variety of gaming and entertainment options, including Latin music clubs, classic theatre, several casual dining options and bars, a concert venue that plays host to artists such as Prince and Kool & the Gang, and a gastronomic restaurant—all spread across 14,000 square metres on nine levels in the heart of downtown Brussels. Viage also caters for the city's thousands of business visitors by offering state-of-the-art multimedia and conferencing facilities for functions.

"In our first year we played host to roughly 350,000 people, which worked out at about 1,000 people a day," states Webb. "We are now up to 1,100 visitors each day, not including the 300 to 500 customers coming to see a show or to dine."

Webb says that the €43 million development




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is likely to change in appearance over the next few months, as Viage reviews the feedback it has received from visitors. In the meantime, he already has his sights set on new challenges. "We had our 'soft' opening in March 2010 when the gaming zones were operational, ahead of our grand launch in April. Our gaming zones (we have six different zones, including 39 gaming tables, 365 slot machines, live bingo and sports betting) take up about a third of our floorspace and accounted for about 90 per cent of our revenue for our opening year; but we are looking to reduce that as we grow our revenues across the business."

That includes changing the perception of casinos held by some sceptics used to reading negative headlines. Webb says that a concerted advertising and public relations effort, strategically targeting the Flemish- and French-speaking audiences with different messages, is beginning to pay off. "We eventually want to see gaming having a reduced impact on total revenues as people's perceptions change and they realise they can visit us in the centre



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J.C. Jacobsen



The Carlsberg brewery was founded in 1847 by J.C. Jacobsen, a man with a vision. In order to be able to produce quality beer, he created his own laboratory, which later developed into a centre for experimental brewing techniques, and would ultimately create a revolution in the brewing process. He was the first to make use of **steam-brewing techniques, cooling, and brewing with one specifically-selected yeast strain.**

Striving for the best quality was the top priority. These innovations in the art of brewing formed **the cornerstone of the modern brewing industry.** It was under his influence, the brewing sector became industrialized and specialized. This laboratory was also behind the discovery of the **Saccharomyces Carlsbergensis** yeast strain, which is still used today. The composition of this yeast strain was generously shared with the entire brewing world. In addition to that, the laboratory laid the basis for the discovery of the acidity value (pH).

As J.C. Jacobsen wanted to secure the future of his creation, he established the Carlsberg Foundation in 1876. Even today, this institution is still the majority shareholder in Carlsberg.

Carlsberg, meaning literally 'Carl's hill' in Danish, refers to the hill where the brewery was built, and is a tribute to his son Carl. In the same way that J.C. Jacobsen had a passion for science, Carl developed a passion for arts and design.



As Carl was highly committed to the cultural development of his country, he donated the famous 'Little Mermaid' to the city of Copenhagen, and, in 1897, he founded the 'Glyptotek', an impressive museum harbouring his personal collections.

Even today, the objective of the Carlsberg Foundation, which was established to promote J.C. Jacobsen's vision, is to support sciences and arts through its total annual profit.

Drinking a Carlsberg is therefore not only a moment of pleasure, but is also a tribute to the person who wanted to elevate the art of brewing to perfection as an example for the entire beer industry.

Probably the best beer in the world.



of Brussels just to eat or attend a show," he explains.

"We are always looking to target 'Middle Belgium'—the recreational gambler who will arrive at our venue, eat, take in a show and perhaps gamble. We think there is an untapped market here and we are striving to overcome the traditional taboos and negative impressions. We want to break down those psychological barriers with a high-quality offering that gives people a choice. We like the fact that people can spend money across the various facilities and that they

are aware that they are under no obligation to play in the casino environment."

Webb says that Viage's efforts to change perception are beginning to bear fruit. "We were given permission to drop the Casinos Austria International badge and use Viage; and we have appeared in over 454 press cuttings in Belgium alone in the last 12 months," he states. "Right now we are going through a total impact assessment and should have the results by March; but I can say that in 2010 there was national brand awareness reaching 27 per cent of the population.

"We are now developing refreshed communication messages and need to go back and see what the market understands about us and what it thinks of us. After nine months of operations, we understand that some of our components have worked well while others haven't; and these will be reconfigured this year, resulting in some physical changes to the property."

Of equal importance will be the new Belgian Gaming Act laws, which will determine the parameters for



online gaming. It is an arena that Webb is keen to tap into and a major marketing campaign is currently on hold pending the announcement of what online gaming hosts will be expected to provide.

“We are already a significant player in Brussels,” Webb indicates, “but it is widely acknowledged that casinos across Europe have been in decline in recent years as customers have never had so much choice with their income—in addition, laws in Belgium were made to protect vulnerable players. This, for example, has an impact on how many slot machines we are allowed and limits turnover, so the introduction of online gaming will provide exciting new opportunities.

“We eventually want to see gaming having a reduced impact on total revenues as people’s perceptions change and they realise they can visit us in the centre of Brussels just to eat or attend a show”



“Once the operating protocols [for online gaming] are in place we will be ready to launch; we are more or less there but we need to see the legislation before we make any major investments in hardware or software programs,” Webb continues. “For the time being we are looking with the Gaming Commission at how that market will shape up, before we start our major advertising campaign.”

Viage, derived from the Italian word *viaggio*, meaning journey, has certainly been a rollercoaster ride for the past 12 months. The facilities have already played host to international pop star Prince on two occasions and Webb is currently in the process of lining up other major acts for 2011. “In Belgium, there is a significant leisure market, but it can be quite splintered and boutique-focused,” he says. “With a wide range of international quality entertainment choices under one roof, we are a unique destination in the heart of Europe.” www.casinosaustraiinternational.com



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