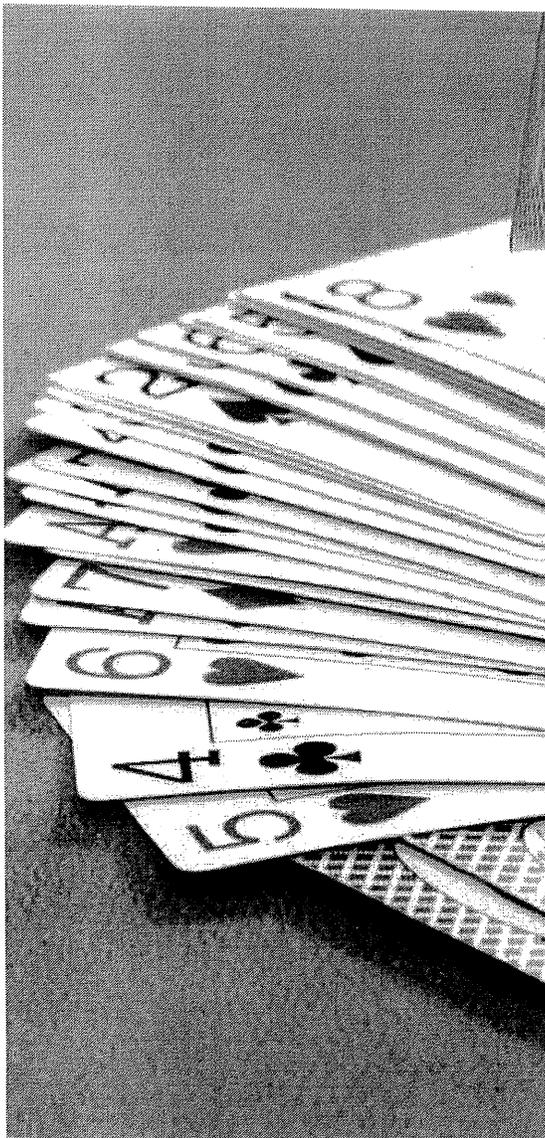


USING PRE-SHUFFLED PLAYING CARDS IN BLACKJACK AND BACCARAT

By Bill Zender



Several months ago I received an e-mail inquiry from a director of surveillance for a casino that caters to larger baccarat play. His casino has decided to offer baccarat in the "midi" form, which allows the highest wagering customer, on the player hand or the banker hand, to look at the dealt cards. In many instances, especially with Asian customers, the cards are bent and destroyed during the peeking process. This procedure requires that new playing cards be used with the dealing of each new shoe.

As every casino executive knows, the introduction of the new cards is quite time consuming. First, each deck is opened and inspected by the floor supervisor. Next, the cards are spread and inspected, both front and back, by the dealer in full view of the players. Once all the decks have been inspected, the dealer will shuffle them together. This usually entails the use of a lengthy card scramble, or "wash," followed by a series of riffles shuffles, including deck strips and boxes. This entire process could take as much as 20 minutes or longer.

In an effort to reduce time wasted placing new cards into action, some casino managers have opted to use pre-shuffled decks of cards. This process has become so popular that many playing card manufacturers, if not all, offer this pre-shuffled service. The director of surveillance's concern: Is this process safe? Are the decks shuffled randomly?

Pre-Shuffled Playing Card Concerns

The director of surveillance writes:

My casino is looking at introducing midi baccarat. I have heard the casino manager is looking at purchasing pre-shuffled cards. I am not too familiar with the concept and was wondering if you could explain the advantages and disadvantages (if any) from a casino point of view. Does the manufacturer shuffle them with a machine or by hand? Are the cards randomly shuffled (each deck is shuffled differently)? Do we need to shuffle them again at the table? Any info on this would be much appreciated.

Many casinos that utilize squeeze baccarat games are going to some fashion of pre-shuffled playing cards. In most cases, it is well worth the extra cost per deck to have them shuffled at the plant. Some casinos have opted to pre-shuffle the cards themselves, but find the process labor intensive, costly and open to security problems. In any event, the

need for pre-shuffled cards is growing, and the advantages from this process are numerous, not only from normal time and motion gains, but from other possible gains as well. For example: The State of Indiana requires the new decks open at the table to be inspected first by the floor supervisor and then one card at a time by the dealers. The entire process to put a change of decks on an alternative game like Pai Gow Poker is quite lengthy. However, the state has approved the use of multi-deck manufacturer pre-shuffled cards without the need for an inspection process. Can pre-shuffled cards be approved for use on the single deck alternative games, too?

Pre-shuffled cards have a lot of upside with very little downside. The process is safe and allows for the casino to bring new cards into play much more quickly than when they come sealed in the box. The manufacturer pre-shuffled card concept is used primarily in baccarat, where the cards are handled by the customers. Because the customers are allowed to handle or "squeeze" the cards, the used cards are removed from play at the completion of every shoe. Changing the cards each time using the traditional method of opening new decks at the table, inspecting them and going through a "new deck" shuffling process can consume up to 15 to 20 minutes, depending on the house procedure. Wasted time is wasted money since lost dealing time greatly reduces hand decisions. Considering the frequency for new deck introduction, the amount of time lost using a standard new deck shuffling procedure could be huge. In general, pre-shuffled cards are brought onto the table, removed from their case and shuffled once through. The entire process should take less than 2 minutes for the introduction of eight new decks.

Manufacturer pre-shuffled cards are very safe. Most executives' original concerns are that the decks could be incomplete, or the cards could be arranged or set up like a "cooler" deck. Several years ago I viewed the pre-shuffling process at GEMACO Card Co.'s plant in Blue Springs, Mo. The area used to pre-shuffle the cards is inside a secure fenced portion of their plant. The casino's cards are brought into the area, the decks opened and inspected and the cards placed into a batch shuffling machine. Once the cards are shuffled they are put through a "deck checker" that counts the cards and prints a slip with the card count for verification. The shuffled cards are then placed into a plastic container along with the printed verification slip and sealed. This individual container is packaged with a number of other containers (usually 24 containers to a case), and shipped to the customer. Once the cases arrive at the casino, they are stored in a secure place, and brought out to the gaming floor as needed.

An option to manufacturers' pre-shuffled cards is pre-shuffling the cards yourself. I know of several casinos that pre-shuffle their own cards, either manually or by putting them through a batch shuffler similar to the card companies. The shuffled cards are then either placed into the plastic carriers similar to the ones used by the card manufacturers or placed into plastic bags. The containers are sealed, dated and stored for future use. If the cards are manually shuffled, the dealer shuffling the cards will sign off on the bag or container as added protection. In most cases, the shuffling process is also video recorded so management has evidence that the cards were shuffled in a fair and random manner.

Casino executives considering the use of pre-shuffled playing cards might wish to contact the card manufacturer and ask them to describe their pre-shuffling process. In many cases, the manufacturer will be more than happy to give executives from the casino a tour of their facility. That way the potential users can check out the procedure and the manufacturing safety features for themselves.

Final Comments

Manufacturer pre-shuffled cards have been used for a number of years without problems. Not one case of marked cards or arranged sequences has been noted. In addition, the process has trimmed hours off the new card introduction and shuffling procedure. Any time there is a decrease

An In-Depth Look at an In-House Pre-Shuffle Process

If the process is done off the casino floor and with batch shuffling machines, the following steps are recommended:

1. Dedicate at least two employees to the process. They can pre-shuffle a number of setups all in one day or can shuffle a number of setups per day as needed. Pre-shuffle deck storage must include the ability to lock up the decks and must also have an inventory log for pre-shuffle introduction and removal.
2. The card control room where the machine pre-shuffle occurs must be video recorded and a back log of recordings kept for a period of time equal to the longest storage period. It goes without saying that room access needs to be limited, with access treated in the same manner as the security requirements of the soft count room.
3. Have one employee open the boxes and examine the playing card faces for content and backs for pattern and logo consistency. Then have the employee place the required decks into a batch shuffling machine.
4. Once the batch shuffling machine has completed the process, have the second employee place the cards in a deck checking machine. This machine will check the machine shuffle cards for number and composition, guaranteeing that all play cards remain in the shuffled group.
5. The deck checker will count all the cards, and upon completion, issue a paper receipt verifying the total number, individual ranks and suits. This process needs to be signed off for by the employee verifying the deck checker findings.
6. The cards are then placed into a sealable container along with the signed verification receipt. These containers are maintained in a locked and video covered draw or cabinet similar to the card storage area.

In addition, many casinos with limited off-floor space and manpower have elected to conduct the pre-shuffle procedure in the casino pit. During slow periods like the grave shift, management utilizes the idle dealers to conduct the inspection, shuffling and packaging on dead tables. This process can be safely administered through the use of a floor supervisor who oversees the pre-shuffle and signs off (along with the dealer) on the sealed containers. The process is also accomplished with the present video coverage that is dedicated to the unopened table games.

in time spent on the table inspecting and shuffling, there will be an increase in the game's revenue potential. These factors, safety and speed, make the decision to switch to pre-shuffled cards, whether manufacturer shuffle or in-house shuffled, one of the easiest decisions the casino executive will make.



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