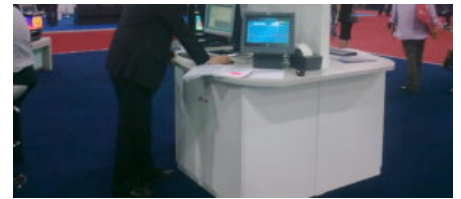


## Program Management – Key Success Factors



Being a program manager is not easy. It can be pretty challenging at times. However, there are certain things that you can do to increase your chances of success. Applying Key Success Factors is a vital skill illustrated by the successful Server Based Gaming (SBG) Program at Aristocrat. As a Program Manager at Aristocrat in 2009, I led and coordinated the SBG Program. This was the world's first server-based technology for the gaming industry at Aristocrat. The role included developing the overarching Program for SBG at Aristocrat, the product developed ready for market introduction, and the first installation in a casino – MGM Macau. I worked closely with Aristocrat management, our development team in Sweden, and our customer. Aristocrat is one of the world

that can be played on desktop and mobile devices. They have a market capitalization of \$14.34 Billion (Oct 2022). Server Based Gaming (SBG) is a platform that enables casinos to offer a range of Aristocrat games on demand from any terminal (slot machine). SBG allows casino operators to choose which games to offer and when they want to provide them. This means that players can enjoy a wide selection of Aristocrat games on a machine of their choice and opens the possibility of new game forms. This keeps casinos fresh and exciting for both operators and players alike. In 2008 and 2009, the “hot” new technology showed signs of being the next “big thing” in gaming. In 2008 Aristocrat invested \$75m\* to purchase the Server Based Gaming platform from Swedish company ACE Interactive AB. Therefore, our Program’s challenge is to offer Aristocrat a return on this investment. The basis of our charter, handed out by the CEO in 2008, was “make SBG work.” We got to work! The question, therefore, is, what quantifies success?



Given the very loose definition provided by the CEO, the first question was. What constitutes success? This is where KEY SUCCESS FACTORS (KSFs) come in. We needed to understand the business. How does Aristocrat make money from SBG and make a return on the investment? These are the steps we followed: We worked with subject matter experts in Aristocrat to define the assumptions. Assumptions include how many casinos are operating with Aristocrat products (850), how many would take SBG (137), and what the competition is. IGT was one of the main competitors to Aristocrat, and it was determined that they would not be able to launch SBG earlier than Aristocrat. How many units can each Casino install? Maybe 100 each. Over ten years, the SBG Program could offer a top-level revenue of (\$275m). But this displaces some Aristocrat products already installed in casinos. But these products are already bought and paid for by the Casino and only offer service and support revenues, much less than the SBG revenues. Aristocrat had a Program Management Office (PMO), which I was a part of. This provided leadership on Program methodologies, practices, and leadership. This was significant in helping the team “win the ear” of key staff at Aristocrat. From the above and through our analysis, including interviews with Aristocrat leadership (stakeholders), a few top levels KSFs were determined:

- Demonstrate a positive business case for one Casino as quickly as possible. This will require a positive user experience from casino punters.
- Demonstrate that the product is leading in its capabilities and get ahead of the competition. See this a from 2008

With these defined, the project plans were created covering:

- Negotiating a trial with the Casino
- The porting of the select games onto the SBG platform
- Local Trial & Staging before shipping
- Installation at the Casino
- Stakeholder management within Aristocrat

One key factor (KSF) was having a willing and cooperative customer. In this case, we found MGM in Macau. They had a helpful floor manager and IT team ready to support the integration. It is always essential to realize the human component. The floor manager was keen to move his family from Macau back to Sydney, Australia, and one possibility for him was to work with Aristocrat and even be part of SBG. So he was motivated to help us get this up a running too. I remember, on one occasion, he showed us his office and the list of VIPs, “high rollers.” They can spend hundreds of thousands of dollars at the Casino. He would keep tabs on them if they came into the Casino and personally attend to their needs, even if that meant getting a specific chair design. This happened in one case; the chair was just like the competing Casino down the road. This particular high-roller wanted the chair, and he got it! Another KSF was that the SBG system performed well on the floor. To put this in context, imagine a large area the size of a department store with hundreds of gaming machines and thousands of players. The SBG system needs a compelling offering to attract and keep players playing. One of the features of SBG was that the player could select the games they wanted from a range, which would mean staying at a particular machine longer and spending more money overall; this was the hypothesis and needed to be tested in the field. The trial was not without its issues. Pre-configuring, testing, shipping, staging, back-end customer system integration, floor placement, and installation. This project required some fundamental project management, and I remember being in a hot, smelly, dirty warehouse staging the system for days to ensure it would be stable on the floor. One serious issue arose when we arrived on the floor to find all eight SBG machines down and offline. This doesn't look good for a casino, and the MGM team was unhappy and considered removing it. We eventually solved the issues, the system worked fine, and we coached the technical team on making repairs if needed. The results were good but not great. The installation was successful, but the SBG product was not performing as a business venture. The uptake of players was lower than we had hoped. For MGM or any customer to be interested, we needed to demonstrate an increase in revenues for the SBG product versus a stand-alone machine. After I left Aristocrat, the MGM trial was concluded. Aristocrat went to work developing the new game forms and other compelling features that would make SBG a success later on. Some more subtle keys to success or KSFs were; developing relationships with key people and enrolling support both within the team and when needed outside. One example was the need to resolve technical issues with the Swedish developers and have them onsite in Macau. Also, ultimately people make decisions daily to support or not support the Program, and you always want them to be supportive, even if only emotionally. Building bridges and positive experiences with people and offering real value to people are all keys. Such was the success that I was awarded Excellence in Program Execution for my part. (\*) The numbers in the Case Study are illustrative only and not intended to be accurate. Copyright 2023



Pete Cooper is a CEO and Program Manager with 20+ years of diverse experience as a Program Manager and eight years as a CEO. His career started as a design engineer and grew to the executive level. He has worked in various fields, including Software Development, AI/ML, Product Design Aviation, App development, RF design, Electronics Design, Mechanical Design, Telehealth, Semiconductors, IoT, and more. Pete is a thought leader in applying Program Management methodology as a CEO. He has received recognition for overseeing complicated projects in various sectors. He holds an  Airline Pilot's Licence, and multiple Program Management Certifications, including FAIPM. At Skillion, where Pete is the CEO, we pride ourselves on our ability to implement and educate Program Management woven into our customer projects. If you need more than just a technical solution managed end to end, don't hesitate to get in touch with us today to learn more.

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