

Operator of the year: 888.com

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It will not come as any surprise that the contest for this top award was closely fought among some of the biggest names in egaming. Close competition, however, is what all the operators in the field have to live with day-to-day and in terms of proving itself up to the task on a consistently excellent basis, 888.com stands out.

But the company is getting used to having superlatives attached to its name. Founded on a bedrock of reliably robust internet, IT and software infrastructure, 888 says it aims to deliver a unique egaming experience to its registered members. And with 20 million sign-ups since launching in 1997, it makes 888 the world's largest on-line casino and poker site, viewed in 11 languages in more than 150 countries.

The list of firsts comes thick and fast: among the first to recognise the potential growth markets in Europe; the first global operator to invest outside the US; the first global brand to have offices in the UK; and the first egaming operator to sponsor an English Premier League football club.

From the off, 888 concentrated on having a global presence and its present geographical split in revenues reflects the success of the strategy to date with 56% of its income

coming from the US, 37% from Europe and 7% from the rest of the world.

London listing

888's listing on the London Stock Exchange stands as a signpost on the road to maturity for the egaming sector as a whole. Notwithstanding the recent travails of many listed entities, by entering the public-listed sphere 888 is showing the way in more ways than one.

So 888 has won the Operator of the Year award with what the judges deemed was full control of all aspects of its operation. Far from shying away from the heat of battle, the judges felt 888 had held its position in the face of intense competition.

As for the name; as well as being unique in a market where x-poker vies with y-casino for name recognition, 888 is a symbol of wealth, luck and prosperity in Asia, while the number eight in Cantonese reads as 'Fa' which, when translated, means 'a great fortune in the near future'.

888 is the deserving winner of the Operator of the Year 2005 award and undoubtedly will be seeking to continue its record of planned good fortune long into the future.

Shortlist

- 888.com
- Bodog
- Ladbrokes
- PartyGaming
- William Hill

Judges' decision

- With 20 million registered users, 888 leads the field.
- Pioneer status has been built upon to give the company truly global coverage in an extremely competitive landscape.
- Judges felt that in an intensely fought race, 888 has the edge in terms of its complete product offering.

Highly commended: Sportingbet

In the words of the judges, for showing continued strong growth and revolutionising the industry with its acquisition of Paradise Poker, Sportingbet is more than worthy of mention.