Powerball: From Lottery Game to World-Class Global Entertainment Brand



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PGRI Introduction: Powerball® is one of the most recognizable consumer brands in America and increasingly around the world. Yet the larger strategic opportunity extends far beyond producing record jackpots. The question facing lotteries today is whether Powerball can translate that extraordinary awareness into deeper, more continuous relationships with consumers while remaining true to lottery's unique public-service mission.

Stephen Durrell, Executive Director of the Kansas Lottery and newly elected Powerball Game Group Chair, believes the answer begins by recognizing that lottery no longer operates within a neatly defined gaming category. It competes for consumers' time and attention within an entertainment marketplace where the traditional boundaries separating sports, media, gaming, technology, and consumer brands are rapidly disappearing.

That evolution is already taking shape. Powerball is expanding internationally. Partnerships with organizations like the NFL demonstrate the potential for collaboration between iconic consumer brands. A national digital platform could strengthen engagement with players while complementing state loyalty programs. Coordinated marketing could amplify the marketing efforts of individual lotteries while keeping Powerball culturally relevant regardless of where the jackpot happens to stand.

Durrell readily acknowledges the challenges. Powerball is owned and governed by lotteries operating under different laws, political structures, technologies, and appetites for change. Protecting the integrity of the game and respecting the sovereignty of every member jurisdiction remain fundamental principles. Yet he also believes caution cannot become an excuse for inertia. At a time when sports wagering, prediction markets, lottery couriers, digital commerce, AI-driven marketing, and increasingly sophisticated CRM strategies are reshaping consumer expectations, simply perpetuating the status quo may represent the greatest risk of all.

Underlying his strategic vision is a remarkably simple leadership philosophy: **give more than you take and leave Powerball better than you found it.**

Lottery Competes in the Entertainment Economy

Paul Jason: You've encouraged us to think of lottery as part of the broader entertainment business rather than simply the gaming industry. Why is that distinction important?

Stephen Durrell: My perspective is influenced partly by my legal background working in entertainment. It caused me to recognize that industries we once viewed as separate are increasingly converging into a much larger entertainment ecosystem.

Sports illustrate that evolution. Years ago, television, movies, and sports largely occupied separate worlds. Today, sports has become year-round entertainment. The NFL is no longer simply a season that begins in September and ends with the Super Bowl. Fans follow free agency, the draft, training camp, preseason, regular season, playoffs, documentaries, podcasts, social media, and now even NFL-themed Christmas movies. It has evolved into an ongoing entertainment experience that also happens to include one of the world's largest gaming categories.

LEGO offers another fascinating example. Twenty years ago, it was primarily a toy company. Today it encompasses movies, television, video games, theme parks, publishing, and countless other consumer experiences. The company didn't abandon

its identity. It expanded it by discovering new ways to engage consumers while remaining unmistakably LEGO.

That example resonates with me because I think Powerball already possesses many of those same ingredients. It is one of the most recognized consumer brands in the world. It has extraordinary public awareness, an unmatched retail network, tremendous consumer trust, and millions of loyal players. The opportunity is not to change what Powerball is, but to discover additional ways for consumers to experience the brand.

People will always seek entertainment, even during difficult economic periods. History demonstrates that remarkably well. During the Great Depression many entertainment businesses not only survived but prospered because they continued giving people reasons to engage. At the same time, successful companies maintained visibility through advertising and consumer engagement rather than disappearing until conditions improved.

Today's entertainment landscape continues changing rapidly through YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, streaming platforms, gaming communities, and technologies and media companies we haven't yet imagined. As custodians of one of the world's great consumer brands, we have to understand those changes and evolve with them.

Sports wagering has transformed professional sports by deepening fan engagement. Is there an opportunity for lottery gaming to further fan engagement?

S. Durrell: Many people who enjoy sports wagering were already participating before legalization. Bringing it into regulated markets made participation easier, more visible, and more socially accepted. But, as your question points to, the most significant change wasn't simply increased wagering—it was increased engagement.

People who wager on sports tend to watch more games, watch them longer, discuss them more frequently, and remain invested throughout an entire season, even after their favorite team is no longer contending. They follow players, statistics, and outcomes they might otherwise have ignored. The leagues recognized that value because live sports remains one of the few forms of entertainment people consistently watch in real time, making advertising extraordinarily valuable.

That does have important implications for lotteries.

I think of gaming as a large onion. Historically, much of that onion belonged to state lotteries operating for public benefit. In Kansas, because of our constitutional structure, we oversee casinos and sports wagering in addition to traditional lottery products. But in any capitalist economy, private enterprise continually looks for opportunities to peel away portions of that onion. That's how markets function.

The challenge for lotteries is recognizing both the opportunities and the risks. If we fail to adapt, the onion gradually becomes smaller until less value remains for the citizens and public programs lotteries exist to support. Commercial operators quite appropriately focus on shareholder returns. Their mission is fundamentally different from ours.

Another challenge is ensuring lotteries maintain an effective voice during policy discussions. We generate dependable revenue for states year after year, yet that contribution can sometimes be taken for granted. Commercial interests have opportunities to advocate for their businesses in ways government lotteries often cannot. That isn't a criticism. It's simply the environment in which we operate, and it makes it even more important that lotteries communicate their value clearly and proactively.

From Lottery Game to Global Entertainment Brand

How might Powerball create the kind of mutually reinforcing relationship with entertainment that sports wagering created with professional sports?

S. Durrell: We may not know the exact pathway in advance, but partnerships with the NFL, international lotteries, and other entertainment brands may put Powerball in a position for fresh new opportunities to emerge. We can be sure the future will be different because of these collaborations and that the upside potential is promising indeed.

I credit my predecessors, including Matt Strawn, Drew Svitko, Dave Barden, and Rebecca Paul, and many others, especially at MUSL Headquarters, for recognizing the need to broaden Powerball's reach, and collaborate with mega-consumer-brands and international lotteries.

The United Kingdom initiative represents an excellent example. Now that Powerball is offered through the UK National Lottery, we've already received inquiries from several other countries interested in participating. We don't know how quickly those opportunities may develop, and we need to follow through on the UK launch before expanding further. But the level of international interest demonstrates that Powerball's appeal extends well beyond the United States.

In entertainment—and really in almost any industry—you are either expanding or contracting. If we don't actively ensure that Powerball remains part of the broader entertainment conversation, we eventually risk managing decline rather than growth. Lottery has proven remarkably durable over generations, but durability alone doesn't guarantee future relevance. We have to continue refreshing the way we present our products while preserving what makes them unique.

One challenge is that we can't control jackpot cycles. Consecutive billion-dollar jackpots generate publicity that no marketing campaign could ever purchase. Other times, jackpots remain comparatively modest for extended periods. The question becomes how we maintain cultural relevance when the jackpot itself isn't generating headlines.

Powerball and Mega Millions will always serve as the flagship games that introduce consumers to lottery. They drive traffic throughout the entire product portfolio. But relying exclusively on sky-high jackpots leaves too much of the brand's relevance to chance. International participation, entertainment partnerships, digital engagement, and a stronger national presence all create additional ways to keep Powerball visible and valuable throughout the entire jackpot cycle.

Winning Beyond the Jackpot

Record jackpots have made Powerball one of the world's most recognizable lottery brands. At the same time, those extraordinary prizes may have conditioned some consumers to wait until jackpots reach $750 million or more before buying a ticket. How do you

broaden the game's value proposition beyond the jackpot itself?

Stephen Durrell: That's one of the most important questions facing Powerball.

When I entered the lottery industry, players became excited when jackpots reached $100 million or $150 million. Sales would begin climbing much earlier because people understood that even those amounts represented extraordinary, life-changing opportunities. As jackpots eventually approached and even exceeded $1 billion, consumer expectations naturally changed. Today, the sales curve often doesn't accelerate until jackpots reach $300 million or $400 million.

Somewhere along the way, we've unintentionally diminished the significance of prizes that would fundamentally change almost anyone's life. If you win $100 million, your life changes forever. For most of us, $10 million or even $1 million would be transformational. Even much smaller prizes can make an enormous difference.

I remember a gentleman in Wichita who won approximately $10,000 after taxes. He was absolutely thrilled because it allowed him to pay off credit card debt, repair his car, and eliminate financial pressures that affected his everyday life. That may never make national headlines, but it completely changed his circumstances. Those stories should be part of our brand and how we talk about Powerball.

Another priority is creating more reasons for people to engage with the brand between drawings. A national Powerball app can become much more than a place to check winning numbers. Players should be able to scan tickets, participate in second-chance promotions, accumulate loyalty points, receive merchandise or gift cards, and engage with promotional partners. Those experiences create continuing value that doesn't depend entirely on winning the jackpot.

Powerball has needed a stronger national presence for many years, whether through a digital platform, coordinated advertising, national promotions, or ideally all of those working together. The app begins creating that national identity while still allowing every member lottery to maintain its own relationship with players and continue serving local markets in ways that are unique to each jurisdiction.

Forging a National Brand that Augments the In-State Business

Years ago, many lotteries resisted the idea of a national Powerball identity because they believed their business existed primarily within state borders. Why has that thinking changed?

S. Durrell: I often compare MUSL's governance model to Major League Baseball.

Each lottery resembles an individual franchise. The Kansas Lottery is like the Kansas City Royals. Other lotteries resemble the Dodgers, Orioles, Rangers, or Yankees. Each organization manages its own market, but collectively they own and govern Major League Baseball. That's very similar to how member lotteries collectively own and govern Powerball.

Major League Baseball promotes baseball nationally, while individual franchises continue marketing locally. Those two efforts reinforce each other rather than compete. National promotion elevates the sport, which ultimately benefits every franchise.

The same principle applies to Powerball.

When national marketing introduces new consumers to the Powerball brand, every participating lottery benefits. Individual lotteries still advertise within their own jurisdictions, promote their complete portfolios, and maintain relationships with their own in-state players. A stronger national brand simply creates additional momentum that supports those local efforts.

Some directors understandably worried that legislators might think that a national advertising campaign should replace state marketing budgets. I appreciate that concern. But in reality, lotteries will always need to communicate with players locally because they offer much more than Powerball alone. A coordinated national campaign complements those efforts while reducing production costs and creating marketing opportunities no single lottery could accomplish on its own.

The NFL doesn't diminish the Kansas City Chiefs by promoting professional football nationally. It elevates the entire sport. I believe Powerball can produce the same kind of mutually reinforcing relationship for participating lotteries.

Perhaps even more importantly, creating a national platform allows opportunities to emerge that we simply cannot identify today. Some of the greatest opportunities only become visible after you've built the platform capable of supporting them.

Lead change without losing consensus

Many of the opportunities we've discussed require change, but Powerball is governed by member lotteries with different laws, political environments, technologies, and appetites for innovation. How do you create urgency while respecting those differences?

S. Durrell: That's one of the unique characteristics of leading a member organization.

I think there may have been a time when some directors were more hesitant about change. Today, however, I believe everyone recognizes how rapidly our environment is evolving and how dangerous it would be simply to assume that yesterday's success strategies will continue to work indefinitely. The evidence increasingly suggests otherwise.

That doesn't mean every jurisdiction can move at the same speed. Some directors operate within governmental structures that limit how quickly they can pursue new initiatives. We have to respect that because the strength of Powerball depends on respecting the sovereignty and circumstances of every member lottery.

At the same time, I sense tremendous energy throughout the organization. Bret Toyne has done an outstanding job preparing MUSL for this next chapter, supported by an engaged Executive Board and membership that recognizes both the opportunities before us and the urgency surrounding them.

The NFL partnership provides a good example. Jay Finks from Oklahoma deserves enormous credit for helping bring Powerball Xs and Os to fruition, forging a partnership with one of the world's strongest consumer brands. A few jurisdictions decided not to participate initially because of their own governmental considerations or operational circumstances. That's entirely their decision. We demonstrate the value where we can, respect those choices, and leave the door open for others to participate later.

What encourages me most is the collegiality among today's directors. There isn't a single director I don't respect or enjoy working with. When talented people share a commitment to constructive change and genuinely enjoy collaborating, remarkable things become possible.

Leaving Powerball Better Than You Found It

What do you most hope to accomplish during your tenure as Chair of the Powerball Product Group?

S. Durrell: I want Powerball to be recognized and managed as one of the world's premier consumer entertainment brands.

That means continuing international expansion, strengthening national marketing, creating a meaningful digital presence, building more sophisticated CRM capabilities, expanding strategic partnerships, and broadening the consumer value proposition so the brand remains relevant throughout the entire jackpot cycle. Those initiatives aren't separate objectives. They're all part of building a stronger, more resilient relationship between Powerball and its players.

Just as importantly, I want to preserve the culture of communication established by those who preceded me. Matt Strawn was exceptional about simply calling fellow directors and asking how things were going, even when there wasn't an immediate issue to discuss. Leadership in a member organization isn't only about advancing your own ideas. It begins with listening, understanding the pressures other members face, and ensuring everyone remains part of the conversation.

I believe we're experiencing an unusual moment of opportunity. Directors are energized. MUSL is building the capacity to support a larger vision. International lotteries and globally recognized brands increasingly understand the value of partnering with Powerball. Technology provides entirely new ways to engage players, while competitive pressures remind us that standing still is not a strategy.

None of that guarantees every initiative will succeed. We'll encounter political resistance, legal constraints, technical challenges, and ideas that ultimately don't work. But uncertainty cannot become an excuse for inertia. If we continue exploring responsibly, protect the integrity of the game, respect every member jurisdiction, and keep players at the center of every decision, we'll discover opportunities that simply aren't visible today.

Lottery has created extraordinary public value for generations. But past success doesn't exempt us from change. We have to remain part of the broader entertainment conversation, protect the relationship we have with our players, and demonstrate to potential partners that lotteries bring something uniquely valuable: trust, legitimacy, unmatched retail reach, and a mission dedicated to public benefit.

My goal is straightforward: give more than I take and leave Powerball better than I found it. If we can expand the possibilities for the brand while strengthening the member lotteries and the public purposes they serve, that will be a legacy worth having. ■

