

International Social Games Association

BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

VERSION 6.0

October 2024

The International Social Games Association (ISGA) is a global non-profit trade association established to develop and communicate best global practices in social gaming in consultation with public policy makers and regulators around the world.

Since 2013, we have developed Best Practice Principles based upon core values of consumer protection, accountability and transparency, aiming to shape a consistent and complementary global framework for the social games industry.

This sixth version extends the Principles in areas such as in-app purchases, advertising practices, privacy compliance and player safeguards.

We are proud to be taking the lead in promoting responsible standards for the sector - and we are committed to continued review as research and understanding develop.

RESPECT

The ISGA and its members look to implement a culture of respect.

- We engage in honest, transparent practices.
- We are committed to promoting respect and inclusion.
- We do not tolerate harassment or bullying of any kind.
- We aim for in-game communities that are friendly, supportive and well-spirited.
- We are responsive to our players through customer support.

ADHERENCE TO APPLICABLE LAWS AND REGULATIONS

- ISGA members commit to abide by all applicable laws and regulations. Examples include laws and regulations for consumer protection, competition, advertising and privacy.
- We also embrace platform guidance encompassing advertising, age ratings and labels for in-app purchases, including randomised virtual items.
- ISGA is committed to working with app distribution platforms, payment processors, and local government stakeholders to develop and implement technical age assurance requirements.

SOCIAL GAMES DESIGN, FAIRNESS AND FUNCTIONALITY

- Our members' games are designed to be fun and easy to understand for the intended audience. They are never designed to mislead or trick players, for example by intentionally providing false information or being deceptive.
- In general, game companies should consider the average consumer who is reasonably well informed and reasonably observant and circumspect.
 - For example, where a game is designed for a particular group of consumers, it is desirable that the operator assesses the game from the perspective of the average member of that group.
- Terms of service and relevant notices should be accessible to the player before they play the game and easily accessible at all times. They should be easy to understand and avoid information overload.
 - Terms of service should reflect the age-appropriate content of the game. For example, casino-style social games should specify that the games are intended for use by those aged 18 or older and/or provide advice to parents and teens on making smart choices online.
- Game companies are expected to have processes to ensure their terms of service are enforced.

- Social games should not lead players into believing they will be more successful at real-world activities. For example:
 - Car driving simulators should not deliberately lead people to believe they are acquiring real-world driving skills.
 - Action games should not deliberately lead people to believe they have developed real-world physical abilities.
 - Casino-style games should not deliberately lead players to believe they will be successful at real money gambling games.
- Players should have a seamless download and play experience.

PURCHASES, PAYMENTS AND TRANSPARENCY

- Before downloading, games will disclose the presence of in-app purchases, usually via the app store, allowing players the opportunity to make informed choices.
- Where a game offers randomised virtual items for purchase, they will be clearly disclosed in addition to other in-app purchases.
- When players are offered the opportunity to make a purchase within a game, it should be transparent what the purchase is and what it will provide.
- The terms and conditions of purchase for games or items within games (in-app purchases) should be clear – whether for virtual credits, additional lives, boosters, character upgrades or any other bonus features.
- The cost of virtual items and currency bundles offered for sale should be clear, intelligible and unambiguous.
- Where a game offers randomised virtual items for purchase, they should provide players with easily understandable information before purchasing, including terms of sale and the probability of receiving each type of item.
- Where payment mechanisms are under the control of game companies, default settings should allow purchases to be made only with the player's explicit consent. Players can choose to modify these settings.
- Where platforms dictate payment mechanisms, game companies should comply with the platform's payment policies and any applicable consumer laws.



- Like many other industries, social games may have reward programs, but these are not to be linked to the outcome of the game.
- ISGA members commit to providing information such that approved refunds for the purchase are processed according to the member's terms or players are directed to the payment platform's resolution centre that handles refund requests. This includes deliberate purchases and where purchases are made by accident.

| VIRTUAL ITEMS, SECONDARY MARKETS AND SKINS BETTING

- ISGA takes a robust stance against fraudulent use of secondary markets in virtual items.
- A 'virtual item' is any in-game item, virtual credit or virtual good that can be accumulated as a direct result of the outcome of the game or pre-purchased for use exclusively on the game.
- Social games may offer players who have run out of sufficient virtual in-game credits the opportunity to continue to play games within the application they are playing without the requirement to purchase additional virtual in-game credits or waiting for the time they would otherwise receive additional virtual in-game credits in the ordinary course.
- Virtual items must not at any time be exchanged for real money or items of tangible real-world value.
- Social games companies must not facilitate, permit or endorse the trading of virtual items via platforms or third-party websites.
- ISGA members are robustly against the use of in-game virtual items being used to trade on third party sites to facilitate illegal 'skins betting'. By preventing virtual in games items from being exchanged ISGA members' games do not facilitate illegal skins betting.

| RATINGS AND PARENTAL CONTROLS

- ISGA supports and encourages the use of parental controls and other safety features to manage access to age-appropriate content.
- ISGA promotes and provides information on how to use parental controls via our [Smart Mobile Gamers](#) safe play website.
- These controls should empower parents and carers to effectively restrict anyone under the age of 18 from making downloads and purchases.
- Across the platforms through which our members' games are played, our members answer content rating questionnaires honestly and accurately such that apps align properly with age rating expectations.

- ISGA and its members support the development of ratings guidance for players at the platform level.
 - For example, via the introduction by PEGI¹ of an 18+ rating for casino-style games on Google Play in Europe.

| ADVERTISING OF GAMES

- Advertisements should comply with all applicable laws and regulations.
- Games that are designed for children should not contain direct exhortations to children to buy items in a game or to persuade an adult to buy items for them.
- ISGA and its members are committed to clear, transparent and accurate advertising of games and in-app purchases:
 - Games should not be advertised as ‘free’ where purchases are mandatory.
 - Game companies take care to create visualisations of gameplay shown in advertisements that are generally representative of the game itself.
 - Advertisements should give a realistic impression of how easy or difficult it is to obtain virtual items through standard play.
- When assessing marketing for different audiences, game companies should take due account of the way messages are presented and the context of those messages.
- Game companies should develop advertisements that are appropriate for the intended audience and filter content accordingly:
 - Advertisements for casino-style games should not be directed at those aged below 18 years. ISGA members commit to adhering to local jurisdictions’ advertising standards and practices and incorporating appropriate age ratings and labelling on marketing materials.
 - Advertisements should consider local jurisdictions’ state age classification and labelling requirements when developing and distributing advertisements and marketing materials.
 - In maintaining this longstanding ISGA Principle, we support the development of guidance at the platform level, including that advertisements for casino-style games should only be targeted at players aged 18 or older.
- Players should be able to access clear and comprehensible information about how their personal information is being processed within the advertising ecosystem.



¹Pan European Game Information

PRIVACY

- ISGA members take appropriate steps to comply with privacy and data protection laws that are applicable to their games.
- ISGA members seek to provide players with information about the processing of their personal data and how to exercise their data protection rights.
- ISGA members empower players so they can make informed decisions about how their data is used. For example:
 - Players can easily access a game's privacy policies.
 - Game companies provide players with choices about the sharing of personal data, for example by allowing a player to choose whether they share their game activity publicly when playing on a social network.
 - Players are able to request the deletion of their public profile.
 - Game companies provide data-protection friendly interfaces on a range of applications, platforms and devices that feature simple, uniform and easily accessible features to exercise key choices.
 - ISGA and its members support data transparency efforts at the platform-level.

COMPLAINTS

- ISGA members make customer support available to players.
- Customer support and complaints procedures should be easy to access and use.
 - For example, customer support or help centres provide the player with easily understandable information to troubleshoot common issues themselves whilst also offering the option to contact the company directly either through an online form, email, chat or other communication method.
- ISGA members have an internal process and trained personnel to respond to player complaints in a timely manner.

SAFEGUARDING PLAYERS

- ISGA members believe in giving players the tools and information they need to have a positive experience.
- The goal is always to create a fun, safe, positive, and supportive community in and around social games.
- ISGA and its members commit to providing support and education via the [Smart Mobile Gamers](#) website on the use of technological controls to:

- Manage and approve purchases
 - Manage and approve downloads
 - Understand screen time and mobile device usage
- ISGA's [Smart Mobile Gamers](#) safe play website works in concert with these Principles, offering guidance, tips and information on topics such as parental controls and managing in-app spending from leading experts in the online safety field.
 - ISGA members support approaches that encourage balance and control in gameplay, such as the '[5 tips to Prevent Problematic Gaming Patterns From Forming](#)' outlined on the Smart Mobile Gamers website:
 1. Set time limits for play and stick to them
 2. Install an app or apply a device level control to help limit play time
 3. Recognise triggers
 4. Find an accountability (or 'success') partner
 5. Reach out to a culturally competent psychologist
 - ISGA members recognise that education efforts must be iterative, and support making players aware of self-help tools and associated materials through multiple channels.
 - For example, through emails to registered players or links, pop-ups, and tabs within the game itself.
 - Game companies have an internal process to suspend and/or close a player's account in a timely manner when requested to do so by the player.
 - If a game company discovers a player whose account was previously closed opened a new account, the game company should investigate the circumstances with that player and determine whether the new account should also be closed.
 - ISGA members support the introduction of temporary and permanent self-exclusion policies when players communicate and/or we are able to deduce from their communications, that they are unable to control their gameplay and/or expenditure.
 - Through our research program, safe play website and these Principles, ISGA is responsive to the development of evidence-based understanding of concerns surrounding excessive gameplay.

AND FINALLY, CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- ISGA and its members regularly review these Principles and are always looking to improve our practices. If you have constructive suggestions, please get in touch: contact@i-sga.org