

# CASINO BUSINESS: Blink and you'll miss him

## Casino cheat shows how subtle moves squeezed out cash

**By ARNOLD M. KNIGHTLY**  
**REVIEW-JOURNAL**

**Richard Marcus claims to have made more than a healthy living cheating casinos all over the world. It is a claim that has to be taken on faith because he was never caught.**

"I looked at what I did as an art," said Marcus, who said his teams took casinos around the world for \$20 million. "Let's face it, who's going to feel sorry for a casino?"  
Not Marcus.

Judging by the packed ballroom at the recent World Game Protection Conference, a lot of casino insiders believe his claims. The two-day industry gathering, held at Bellagio in early February, featured seminars and exhibitions of the latest casino surveillance technologies.

Organizers said approximately 300 casino executives and security personnel from around the country -- the people charged with catching casino cheats -- attended the conference.

As Marcus demonstrated his signature moves at roulette and blackjack tables set up in a ballroom, members of the crowd could only shake their heads.

Casino surveillance technology continues to evolve. Now cameras watch every move in the pits and radio frequency identification track casino chips. Nevertheless, Marcus told the audience that their best protection against professional cheaters is still educating dealers and floor supervisors about what to spot.

"Even as technology progresses, my thing was still to beat the people on the floor so they didn't bring the cameras into play," Marcus said.

Marcus, a former dealer, said he knows how boring floor jobs can be and how he could psychologically manipulate the people his teams dealt with.

Hour after hour, shift after shift, year after year, he said, dealers become robotic and pit bosses become complacent. Any little disruption can throw casino personnel off their game.

"Touching a dealer is like hitting him over the head with a bat," Marcus said.

In one of Marcus' blackjack past posting moves -- past posting is when a player switches a bet after the outcome has been determined -- the player reaches out and taps the dealer with one hand while replacing a bet chip with the other right after being paid.

Marcus said that early in his career, casinos didn't run cameras on all the tables at all times, so the casino staff could not always go to the tapes for replays.

It wasn't until The Mirage opened in 1989 that casinos ran cameras at all times.

By gathering inside information, Marcus said he came to learn how different casinos operated security. Ironically, with the arrival of the "eye in the sky" he found an unlikely alibi.

He developed a signature move, "The Savannah," named for a stripper in Reno where he first executed it. The move was built around hiding a legitimate bet in plain sight on the roulette table. The move required patience because it could take anywhere from a half-hour to two hours to set up, he said.

The pit boss must see the cheat playing for a while and the dealer must become relaxed by the person's presence at the table.

Here's how it works. Standing farthest from the dealer, the cheating bettor places what appears to be three \$5 chips. But a higher-valued chip is placed at the bottom of the stack, which the dealer fails to see more than 95 percent of the time, Marcus said.

If the bet loses, the player rakes off the chips and replaces the high chip with a \$5 chip. If caught raking, which is illegal, he bumbles out an explanation, apologizing profusely.

If the bet wins, the bettor acts surprised, as if the wager had been placed by accident.

If the casino wants to look at the tape, which it rarely did, it would only verify the bet.

If the bet hits, the bettor keeps playing, giving some of the money back through losses. He then tips the dealer and slips away.

Marcus said he made \$7 million during a 25-year run that ended in 2000 when he felt he had enough money and wanted to write books about his experiences.

He pitches himself as the ultimate riches-to-rags-to-greater-riches story, albeit not legitimately. According to Marcus' memoir "American Roulette," a not-quite-yet 21-year-old Marcus blew into Las Vegas from the East Coast in 1975 with \$20,000. He promptly lost it all and found himself living under an overpass.

After a few failed attempts at employment, Marcus landed a job dealing at the Four Queens. Legitimacy only lasted until he was approached by a professional cheat who had seen him at work and convinced him to run an inside cheat.

After running the cheat, which netted him \$2,500, Marcus switched sides of the table and was soon past posting craps with a four-man team all over the city.

For the next two decades Marcus traveled the world ripping off casinos. He was never caught, although he did end up in the casino back room five or six times being sweated by casino security.

Nothing ever stuck.

Marcus has written two more books about the underbelly of casino gambling. His fourth, "World's Greatest Gambling Scams," is scheduled for release later this year. An independent movie producer bought Marcus' memoir and plans to release it as a film in 2009.

Marcus said he receives e-mails from people who want him to teach his techniques. He refuses, saying his story is for entertainment.

He also points out that if someone is caught cheating in a casino they could face serious legal charges.

Marcus, who lives in France, said he has no moral qualms about how he obtained his money or the lifestyle it still brings him.

"I've never stolen a penny from anyone in my life," he said. "If I went to a restaurant and didn't have enough money to leave a tip I would feel guilty."