



Online gaming, Ciavarella (CEO Empire Global): "Acquisition of Multigioco first step; 50 million to invest in Italy"

ROME - It was the first major hit of the year in the online gaming industry, with signs of a series of mergers and acquisitions in the coming months. Empire Global Corporation - a company based in Toronto and quoted on the OTC Market in New York - in a one million euro transaction, has discreetly acquired Multigioco Srl. a licenced online gaming operator in Italy, with five physical gaming centres in Italy made up of corners and agencies and more than 700 online web shops that produced over 71 million euro in turnover through 2013. Agipronews met the CEO of Empire Global, Michele "Mike" Ciavarella; an Italian-American entrepreneur in Rome outlining goals for Italy.

Mr. Ciavarella, why has Empire Global decided to enter the Italian market?

The Italian gaming market is a large, maturing and well-regulated market. We believe it is the right framework for a company like Empire Global, listed on an international stock exchange, seeking a safe and regulated gaming environment. The acquisition of a company such as Multigioco - with an excellent reputation and a young and capable management - is in our opinion the best way to enter the Italian gaming space. In addition to Italy, we have plans to expand into other countries in Europe and beyond.

What are Empire's first objectives in Italy?

We want to be a forerunner in this market, for this - after Multigioco - we have ongoing negotiations with another major operator rich in human capital and experience, which is enthusiastic about the idea of having a foreign shareholder and capital sources. We plan to become one of the top five players in the Italian gaming space, always keeping in mind the need to offer a responsible gaming product to the consumer. We know that the most difficult part is yet to come; after the acquisitions, we will need to continue to invest resourcefully to reap the large rewards this market has to offer.

Which brand will you use to manage your business in Italy?

We will have three main areas of action: online web-based gaming; corners and agencies. We believe that we will maintain a specific brand for each sector, but we have not yet made a decision to that end. In any case, it will be clear to the consumer that the location is a part of the Empire Global group of companies. Our stores will be well organized and recognizable even from an aesthetic point of view. We plan to invest aggressively on this part of our business.

Speaking of money, how much is the investment of Empire in the Italian market?

Our forecast is to invest 50 million by the end of 2015, with a target of 100 - 120 physical betting locations as well as the development of our online web based business.

Do you plan to participate in the tender for betting licences in 2016?

Certainly yes, it will be mandatory for us, we will choose the areas in which to implement our existing network carefully.

Are you worried about the presence of thousands of unauthorized operator centers in the market?

Very much. We want to enter the market by following the rules, but we ask that those rules apply equally to all participants. To reassure investors, both the courts and the Italian authorities must ensure that laws are respected, otherwise, it will be increasingly difficult to attract international investors to Italy.

Do you believe that the proposed amnesty for foreign operators will help the market in this sense?

It is not just a matter of paying or not paying taxes, the key is to have an equal playing field for all. There should be no parallel network; all operators - even those that operate in the Italian market thanks to the amnesty proposal - must be transparent.