/ IGAMING EDITION · 2026

2026 Merchant Payments Outlook

Infrastructure Intelligence for Online Casino, Sports Betting & iGaming Operators

Data distilled from Sumsub, Finix, cside, Chargebacks911, Edgar Dunn & Company,
and iGaming Payment Solutions (2025–2026).

INTRODUCTION

The 2026 Landscape

iGaming sits at the sharpest end of every payment challenge in this series. The highest chargeback exposure. The most heavily issuer-blocked MCC. The most fragmented licensing environment. The most aggressive regulatory trajectory. And from April 2026, the most consequential VAMP threshold change yet — a reduction that has moved the majority of iGaming operators from technically compliant to structurally Excessive overnight.

The global iGaming market is projected to exceed $130 billion in 2026. The platforms winning are not the ones with the lowest processing fees; they are the ones treating payment infrastructure as a licensing asset, a player acquisition tool, and a chargeback management discipline simultaneously.

Key 2026 Trends:

- Visa's April 2026 VAMP threshold reduction — from 2.2% to 1.5% Excessive — has moved most iGaming operators from technically compliant to structurally at-risk. The chargeback ratios the industry runs as standard are now above the line.
- Bonus abuse now accounts for 64% of all iGaming fraud — generating TC40 fraud alerts and TC15 chargebacks simultaneously, compounding VAMP exposure beyond what headline chargeback rates suggest.
- The A2A shift is no longer optional in the two largest growth markets: Open Banking is the primary deposit rail for UK-licensed operators; PIX is the only rail available in Brazil, where credit cards are explicitly banned.
- Regulatory scrutiny is tightening at the payment layer, not just the licensing layer. Brazil's Decree 13,033 freezes PSP accounts for unlicensed operators within 24 hours. Curacao's LOK reform has restructured acquirer appetite for the entire offshore licensing tier.

This playbook is informed by iGaming operator intelligence, PSP data, and validated third-party sources including Sumsub, Finix, cside, Chargebacks911, Edgar Dunn & Company, and iGaming Payment Solutions (2025–2026).

SECTION 01

Deposit Behaviour & Fraud Trigger Patterns

Modern iGaming platforms are contending with:

BONUS ABUSE AT INDUSTRIAL SCALE
Accounts for 64% of all iGaming fraud (Sumsub, 2025). AI-driven multi-accounting creates dozens of accounts per minute — generating both a TC40 fraud alert and a TC15 chargeback simultaneously, compounding VAMP exposure beyond headline figures.

FRIENDLY FRAUD: POST-SESSION DISPUTE
Accounts for 60–70% of iGaming chargebacks. Players dispute losing sessions, claim unauthorised use, or regret the spend — often weeks after the session. A third of operators estimate fraud costs them 10–20% of annual revenue.

SPORTS BETTING: EVENT-DRIVEN BURST DEPOSITS
Legitimate burst deposits during Champions League finals, Grand National, Super Bowl trigger velocity rules designed to catch fraudsters — indistinguishable to legacy fraud logic. Pre-register high-volume event windows with your PSP in advance, not after the spike.

WHITE-LABEL & SWEEPSTAKES: MID CONTAMINATION RISK
Operators sharing pooled MIDs with parent brands carry a rarely discussed risk: a chargeback spike from one brand elevates the MID risk tier for all. The only structural fix is dedicated MIDs per brand — the cost of contamination is acquirer termination.

Operational Response

- Segment fraud typology — bonus abuse, post-session friendly fraud, and stolen card attacks each require different tooling and response timelines; one workstream produces weaker outcomes across all three
- Pre-register high-volume event windows with your PSP and acquirer — submit event calendars quarterly so velocity thresholds are tuned before spikes, not after
- Move to dedicated MIDs per brand — particularly white-label and sweepstakes operators; contamination cost outweighs the management overhead of separation
- Integrate AI-driven bonus abuse detection as infrastructure, not an add-on — rule-based systems are being systematically outpaced by bot networks using generative AI at scale

SECTION 02

The A2A Shift: Open Banking, PIX & the End of Card Dependency

Card processing under MCC 7995 is structurally impaired. What matters is what the leading platforms are doing instead.

In the UK, Open Banking has become the primary deposit rail for licensed casino operators. The approval rate differential makes the case: card end-to-end approval in UK iGaming runs 65–80%; Open Banking approval rates run 92–97%. No chargebacks. No 3DS friction. No issuer-level MCC blocks. The transaction goes bank-to-bank, authenticated by the player directly in their banking app.

The compliance benefit is operationally significant: Open Banking data enables real-time affordability checks at the point of deposit — a capability the UK Gambling Commission actively supports. This converts what was once a regulatory overhead into a payment-layer feature.

In Brazil — estimated at €5.96 billion GGR in its first full regulated year — the picture is starker still. The government banned credit cards and crypto-anonymity entirely under Law 14.790/2023. Every deposit must originate from a PIX-registered account linked to the player's verified CPF. Operators without native PIX infrastructure cannot legally take a deposit.

UK IGAMING DEPOSIT APPROVAL RATES

Card (MCC 7995)	65–80%
Open Banking	92–97%

No chargebacks. No 3DS. No issuer-level MCC blocks.

BRAZIL: PIX-FIRST BY LAW
Credit cards banned. Crypto-anonymity banned. Every deposit must originate from a PIX account registered to the player's verified CPF. Third-party deposits prohibited by law.
78 licensed operators / 138 brands as of June 2026.

A2A rails outperform cards on every iGaming metric that matters — approval rates, chargeback exposure, regulatory alignment, and cost.

Action Plan

- Prioritise Open Banking as your primary UK deposit rail — card-first checkout with Open Banking as secondary is leaving 12–27% of deposit attempts on the table
- For Brazil: ensure PIX infrastructure performs a real-time CPF cross-reference at point of deposit — the SPA fines operators accepting deposits where the account name does not match the player's CPF
- In MCC 7995-blocked corridors (Germany, Belgium, Australia), route via e-wallets (Skrill, Neteller) or local APMs as primary — card cascade routing should be a fallback, not a primary path
- Treat A2A rails as a dispute prevention tool — as A2A adoption grows as a proportion of total volume, the pool of dispute-eligible transactions shrinks permanently

VAMP — APRIL 2026

Most iGaming Operators Are Already Above the Excessive Line

MCC 7995 structural chargeback ratios run at 2–4% as a baseline — and under VAMP's combined TC40 and TC15 formula, the effective ratio is higher still. The April 2026 threshold reduction means most operators are already above the Excessive line before they open their acquirer portal in the morning.

Classification	Merchant Threshold	Acquirer Threshold / Notes
Excessive (US/CA/EU/APAC — from April 2026)	≥ 1.5% (reduced from 2.2%)	≥ 0.7% at acquirer level
Acquirer Above Standard (from Jan 2026)	—	≥ 0.5%
Effective iGaming operator VAMP ratio	2–4% structural range + TC40 bonus abuse double-count = typically 2.5–5%+	Most MCC 7995 operators are above Excessive before TC40 inclusion
Acquirer internal iGaming threshold	Undisclosed — typically 0.5–0.7% for MCC 7995 portfolios	The operative threshold: acquirers act before Visa's formal programme triggers
Penalty — Acquirer Excessive	—	$8 per TC40 + TC15 dispute. Uncapped at scale.
Remediation window	15-day plan; 1× 3-month grace per 12 months	Exit requires 3 consecutive compliant months — extremely difficult at structural 2–4% ratios without A2A migration

Note: The iGaming Excessive threshold (1.5%) differs from the 0.9% threshold applicable to Crypto, FX, and Travel merchants. The April 2026 reduction from 2.2% to 1.5% is specific to the US, Canada, EU, and APAC merchant-level calculation.

SECTION 03

What Your Licence Tier Means for Your Payments

The practical payment consequence of your licensing jurisdiction determines which acquirers will underwrite you, what rolling reserve they will hold, and whether your banking relationships have any structural stability at all. Operators who treat licensing and payment infrastructure as separate decisions routinely discover the connection at the worst possible moment — when an acquirer terminates without warning.

Jurisdiction	PSP & Acquirer Access	Key Payment Consequence
UKGC / MGA (Malta)	Tier-1 acquirers (Nuvei, Worldpay, Adyen). Lowest reserve requirements. Broadest PSP choice.	UK Gambling Duty increase in 2025 has tightened acquirer appetite even for UKGC operators — expect increased due diligence on marketing model and responsible gambling spend
Curacao (post-LOK)	Mid-tier acquirers. Higher reserves (5–10%). LOK-reformed CGA more credible than old sub-licence model — but institutional turbulence is creating processing uncertainty in the transition backlog.	Operators awaiting final CGA licence decisions are in processing limbo — many PSPs will not underwrite without a confirmed active licence. Confirm status before signing PSP contracts
Anjouan / Nevis / Tobique	Specialist offshore PSPs only. Higher reserves (10–15%). Limited conventional banking access. Anjouan explicitly acknowledged as having "lower recognition with banks and payment providers".	Anjouan's ~€17K annual fee vs MGA's ~€25K+ looks attractive until rolling reserves, higher processing rates, and restricted PSP choice are modelled against volume
Brazil (SPA)	PIX-only for deposits. Brazilian-registered payment partners required. 78 licensed operators as of June 2026. Enforcement at the payment layer from Decree 13,033.	Unlicensed operators face account freezing within 24 hours — enforcement has moved entirely to the payment layer. No licence = no banking access, not just domain blocking

BRAZIL: ENFORCEMENT AT THE PAYMENT LAYER
Decree 13,033 (June 2026) mandates account freezing within 24 hours for unlicensed operators. The SPA has moved from guidance to strict enforcement — for operators, 2026 is not about obtaining a licence; it is about keeping it.

CURACAO LOK: THE ACQUIRER CREDIBILITY GAP
LOK-reformed operators with confirmed active licences are attracting mid-tier acquirers. Those still in the application queue face the same processing uncertainty as offshore-offshore operators — confirm licence status before signing any PSP contract.

> *"The grey market era of Brazilian iGaming is officially dead. As of January 1, 2026, the transition period has expired and the SPA has moved from guidance to strict enforcement. For operators, 2026 is not about obtaining a licence — it is about keeping it."*
> **BRAZIL BETTING COMPLIANCE GUIDE 2026**

SECTION 04

CE 3.0 Representment & Acquirer Relationship Management

What CE 3.0 requires at the transaction level:

- Device fingerprint and real client IP captured at the point of deposit — not the session IP, which may differ if the player has used a VPN post-login
- Session timestamp linked to the specific transaction reference — the evidence must be transaction-level, not account-level
- Proof of 3DS authentication including the authentication reference number, not just confirmation that 3DS was applied
- Wagering activity post-deposit — demonstrating funds were used undermines the "unauthorised transaction" claim at its foundation
- Player communication record — deposit confirmation, terms acceptance, and responsible gambling interactions establishing player identity at point of deposit

DESCRIPTOR CLARITY
A recognisable billing descriptor is the single cheapest chargeback prevention tool available. It should include the brand name, a contact number, and a URL — not a parent company legal entity name that appears nowhere in the player's experience.

DEPOSIT CONFIRMATION
Instant deposit confirmation by SMS or email — sent at point of transaction — creates a contemporaneous record of player acknowledgment directly usable in CE 3.0 representment. Most operators send confirmation on session end or not at all.

CRITICAL GAP
KYC-stage and login-stage data are not the same as transaction-layer data. Most iGaming platforms have the former but lack the latter — and CE 3.0 requires transaction-level precision.

Pre-Dispute Resolution: The VAMP Lever

Verifi RDR and Ethoca Alerts resolve disputes before TC15 escalation — and pre-dispute resolutions are excluded from the VAMP ratio entirely. For an MCC 7995 operator at structural 2–4% chargeback ratios, moving even 20–30% of disputes into pre-dispute resolution has a disproportionate impact on VAMP compliance.

Acquirer Relationship Actions

- Request TC40 data from your acquirer before your next renewal — most operators have no visibility into their fraud-alert component and are unknowingly close to internal MCC 7995 thresholds
- Set internal VAMP monitoring at 0.65% as a hard limit, tracked per MID and per bonus event cohort — not against your acquirer's threshold, which you will breach before discovering you are close to it
- Build a secondary acquirer relationship at 20–30% of volume before you need it — the time to establish a redundancy relationship is not during a VAMP remediation window

SECTION 05

PSP Selection & Acquirer Appetite

Acquirer selection in iGaming is not primarily a commercial decision — it is a compliance infrastructure decision. The acquirer determines your VAMP monitoring framework, your rolling reserve exposure, and whether you have an operational relationship that can absorb a chargeback spike without immediate account action.

What acquirers with iGaming appetite actually require:

- A credible licence — UKGC, MGA, or a confirmed LOK-reformed Curacao CGA. Sub-licence and applicant-stage operators are systematically declined by mid-tier and above
- Demonstrated chargeback management — not a target ratio commitment, but evidence of typology segmentation, pre-dispute tooling, and a historical trajectory that is flat or improving
- Business model clarity — bonus structure, withdrawal policy, and responsible gambling controls reviewed at underwriting
- Volume data with corridor breakdown — acquirers price and reserve against specific corridor mix; Brazil or Germany volume is underwritten differently from a UK-only operator at identical GGR

Redundancy by Design
A single-acquirer iGaming setup is a single point of failure. Acquirers terminate MCC 7995 portfolios with less notice and less recourse than almost any other vertical. A secondary acquirer relationship provides operational continuity during a VAMP remediation window or a bonus event chargeback spike.

Rolling Reserve Strategy
Rolling reserves in iGaming typically run 5–10% for mid-tier operators and 10–15% for offshore-licensed operators. Reserves held for 180 days represent material working capital impact at scale. Negotiate the release schedule at onboarding — not when you need the capital.

Proactive Remediation
Submitting a VAMP management framework to your acquirer before being formally flagged changes the relationship dynamic entirely. Acquirers are more likely to offer extended remediation windows and maintain commercial terms when an operator demonstrates awareness and a credible plan in advance.

THE AFRICA CORRIDOR
Operators in or targeting Africa should additionally assess: local acquiring relationships in Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa; e-wallet and mobile money rails (M-Pesa, Airtel Money) as primary deposit methods; and the payment consequence of an Anjouan or Curacao licence when approaching African banking partners.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

iGaming Payments Checklist for 2026

Audit your infrastructure against these eight criteria. Items 7 and 8 are critical 2026 additions — VAMP awareness and licence-tier alignment are no longer optional for iGaming operators at any scale.

1. **Do you have dedicated MIDs per brand — particularly for white-label and sweepstakes operators sharing infrastructure? Have you modelled the MID contamination risk if a co-tenant brand has a chargeback spike?**
   Shared MID contamination is the most common cause of unexplained acquirer risk tier escalation in iGaming

2. **Have you segmented your fraud workstream by typology — bonus abuse, post-session friendly fraud, and stolen card attacks — with separate tooling and response timelines for each?**
   Running three distinct fraud typologies as a single workstream produces weaker outcomes across all three

3. **Is your primary UK deposit rail Open Banking, not card? Are you tracking approval rates separately for Open Banking vs. card deposits — and presenting Open Banking as the primary checkout option?**
   Card-first checkout with Open Banking as secondary is leaving 12–27% of UK deposit attempts on the table

4. **For Brazil: is your PIX infrastructure performing a real-time CPF cross-reference at point of deposit? Is your AML software flagging third-party deposit mismatches for immediate freeze?**
   The SPA fines operators accepting deposits where the registered account name does not match the player's CPF

5. **Is your billing descriptor recognisable to players — including those who deposited through a white-label or parent-brand payment flow? Are you sending instant deposit confirmation by SMS or email?**
   Unrecognisable descriptors and delayed confirmations are the two most preventable chargeback causes in iGaming

6. **Are you capturing browser-layer session data (device ID, real client IP, session timestamp) on every deposit for CE 3.0 representment? Is this data linked to the disputed transaction record — not just the KYC file?**
   CE 3.0 requires transaction-level precision — session-level or account-level data is insufficient for successful representment

7. **Do you know your effective VAMP ratio — TC40 fraud alerts plus TC15 chargebacks, combined? Have you requested TC40 data from your acquirer? Is your internal chargeback target set at 0.65% as a hard limit?**
   New for 2026 — most MCC 7995 operators are already above the 1.5% Excessive threshold before TC40 inclusion

8. **Is your licence tier reflected in your PSP relationship tier? Have you modelled the true cost of your current licence — rolling reserves, processing rates, restricted PSP choice — against the cost of a higher-tier licence at your current volume?**
   New for 2026 — the payment cost of a low-tier licence often exceeds the cost of the licence upgrade at modest volume

Operators in or targeting the African corridor should additionally assess: local acquiring relationships in Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa; e-wallet and mobile money rails (M-Pesa, Airtel Money) as primary deposit methods; and the payment consequence of operating under an Anjouan or Curacao licence when approaching African banking partners.

FINAL THOUGHT

Infrastructure is the Licence

In iGaming, the conversation about payment infrastructure has historically been secondary to the conversation about licensing. In 2026, that order has reversed. Your licence determines which acquirers will consider you. Your chargeback ratio determines whether they keep you. Your VAMP ratio — not your headline dispute rate, but your effective TC40 plus TC15 combined figure — determines whether your acquirer relationship survives the next marketing campaign or bonus event.

The operators who understand this are building payment infrastructure as a compliance asset: A2A rails that remove entire categories of chargeback exposure, dedicated MIDs that isolate brand risk, CE 3.0 evidence chains that make representment deterministic, and proactive VAMP management frameworks that give acquirers a reason to stay. That is the competitive advantage available in 2026 — and it does not require a higher-tier licence or a larger team. It requires treating payments as the same calibre of strategic decision as the licence itself.

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This playbook is informed by operator intelligence, PSP data, and validated third-party sources including Sumsub, Finix, cside, iGaming Payment Solutions, Chargebacks911, Verifi, Fast Offshore, Legarithm, and the Brazilian Secretaria de Prêmios e Apostas.