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Selecting an Online Offshore Sportsbook

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1. Introduction

The biggest change in sports gambling over the past twenty years has been the advent of legal online wagering through offshore sportsbooks. Most of these operations are located in the Caribbean Islands, with a few situated in England. It has long been our belief that a sports bettor must give their full attention to the selection of a quality sportsbook. To that end, we have put together this easy to use guide that will provide you with the proper framework and tools for selecting a quality sportsbook.

The way these offshore sportsbooks operate is quite simple. You, the bettor, place a deposit with whomever you decide to do business with. In most cases your funds are deposited in an offshore bank. The most desirable arrangement is to have your funds held in a trust account, professionally managed by an independent, insured, government regulated third party trust administrator. After your deposit has been secured, you then wager against your deposit. If you win, your deposit is increased accordingly, and if you lose, your deposit is decreased accordingly. You are able to make withdrawals or additional deposits to your account at any time. Understandably, some people are initially concerned about the safety of their deposit, but as you read on, you will see those fears are unfounded if you choose a safe and reliable sportsbook. Furthermore, we are of the opinion that if you are doing business with an offshore sportsbook, you are probably better off for three important reasons: 1) It is legal. 2) You definitely need to have more than one bookmaker in your arsenal so you are able to shop lines. 3) And probably most important, the fact that you can only lose what is in your account, and therefore avoid getting into debt with a bookmaker.

When evaluating a sportsbook, we suggest using a rating scale of 1-5 for each of the five most important elements of a quality operation that we list below. For your convenience, we provide you with a checklist sheet for the five categories in evaluating a sportsbook on the final page.

Recommended Rating Scale:

5 – Excellent

4 – Good

3 – Average

2 – Below Average

1 – Poor

You are urged to exercise your own diligence and care when selecting an offshore sportsbook that best suits your personal needs. With this guide, you should have no problem in finding a sportsbook that meets your needs. What follows are the five most important elements when choosing a sportsbook.

1. **Experience** – Make sure you are dealing with someone that has been operating as an offshore sportsbook for at least three years.
2. **Customer Service** – Professionalism and politeness, as well as hours of operation are critical factors
3. **Financial Stability** –Accurate balances and expedient delivery of monies are equally important.
4. **Location** – The region where the online offshore sportsbook is in operation.
5. **Software & Technology** –Make sure that your Sports Book of choice is state of the art.

2. Experience

At SGG we believe that before a player should consider using a sportsbook, it needs to have been in business a minimum of 3 years. A new sportsbook can appear to be financially stable in the beginning, but the true financial test is the test of time. This may surprise many, but the majority of sportsbooks in operation today do not meet this three-year criteria. Here are some questions to ask when looking at a sportsbook and evaluating its history and experience.

1. How long have they been in operation?
2. How long have they offered online services?
3. Have they had financial problems in the past?
4. Have there been delays or audits when they are paying out?

The best way to find this information is to call and talk to a supervisor or manager of the sportsbook to get some basic background information. Additionally, it is important to search online forums, review sites, and search engines. Do not be afraid if there are just a few complaints or problems, many operators attempt to discredit competition by posting false reports, and it is never possible to please every person, all the time. If a sportsbook has many/multiple complaints, and that is consistent with your research across the board, then steer clear of that operation. Evaluating the historical information can be very subjective, but keep in mind the top factor in deciding upon a sportsbook is whether or not it is going to pay you when you want your money, and how fast.

When grading the experience of a sportsbook, we recommend this chart:

Excellent Record – No Disputes

Score: 5

<i>Good Record – Few Disputes but resolved</i>	<i>Score: 4</i>
<i>Average Record – Disputes, moderate resolution.</i>	<i>Score: 3</i>
<i>Below Average Record – Disputes, slow resolution</i>	<i>Score: 2</i>
<i>Poor Record – Many Disputes, no resolution.</i>	<i>Score: 1</i>

3. Customer Service

Quality customer service is perhaps the single biggest problem for many offshore sportsbooks. Choosing a sportsbook with good customer service will provide you with the most enjoyable gaming experience.

When wagering online, there is little opportunity for you to visit the physical premises, demand proper service, or lodge a complaint in person. Additionally, if you do encounter a dispute with an online sportsbook, it is the customer service department that you will be dealing with. Keep in mind that customer service is an excellent indicator of the overall general business.

If you are able to communicate with the sportsbook in timely fashion, and receive a clear and professional response, this is indicative of a first class operation. If you are contacting the sportsbook by phone, the language skills of the employees are of primary importance. High quality customer service is difficult to fake; weak operations will not be able to give you answers quickly, or concisely. Don't be fooled into believing a service offers good customer service simply because it lists a variety of contact methods. One of the very best customer service departments for an online sportsbook only offers email support, but they respond to questions within minutes, and their average time for resolution is drastically better than the industry average. On that same theme, if you like to place your bets via telephone, or find yourself needing to call the customer service department, a sportsbook with poor English speaking employees should be avoided. When choosing your online sportsbook, the speed of response time and the language capabilities are the two major criteria to be considered. The best customer service departments should have a response to you within 30 minutes to an hour (not auto-responses). They may not be able to resolve the situation at that time, but they should give you details regarding your inquiry, and a timeline for resolution.

Here are some customer service attributes that you should look out for when choosing your sportsbook:

- Fast response times. Anywhere from a few minutes, to under an hour is acceptable, depending on the type of query (30 minutes is excellent).
- For immediate answers, if offered, try online chat.

- Look for a toll-free customer service phone number to be well publicized in the “Contact Us” section of the services website. Call that number to make sure the employees have a strong grasp of the English language.
- Does the customer service representative treat you in a professional manner, and do they answer all your questions?
- If your question is fairly straight forward, does the representative provide you with basic information on the spot, or do they get evasive or transfer you multiple times?
- Did you receive helpful service, or a resolution? If not, what options have you been provided to follow up? Are they reasonable and understandable?

One good way to test the customer service without investing cash is to join their free account (if offered), and send an email with a question. Follow that up with a phone call to their customer service department. When grading the experience of a sportsbook, we recommend this chart:

Excellent Service - Score: 5
Good Service - Score: 4
Average Service - Score: 3
Limited Service - Score: 2
Poor Service - Score: 1

4. Financial Stability

Selecting a sportsbook is similar to investing in a business or bank; the security of your investment / account is dependent on the stability of the business / sportsbook.

Unfortunately, many players are unaware of this and it can cause major problems down the road. You have to be concerned about the financial stability of your sportsbook if you are to enjoy your experience, and most importantly, have faith that your money is safe.

There are a number of methods to determine if a sportsbook is financially stable. As we mentioned earlier, find out how long the sportsbook has been in operation. This is easily done with a phone call, or by using an internet search engine for the information.

Ideally, you are looking for an operation that has been in business over 3 years. New startup operations come and go, but sportsbooks that have a few years under their belt typically have had to maintain a good financial reputation in order to survive. When grading the years of operation of a sportsbook, we recommend this chart:

<i>4 plus years in operation:</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>3 or more years in operation:</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>2-3 years (recommended min.)</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>1-2 years in operation:</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>1 or less years in operation:</i>	<i>1</i>

Second, does this sportsbook have a history of financial problems? This can also be found on the internet. There are a number of sites that review sportsbooks and have in depth blacklist information and slow pay history, as well as forums and discussion groups with feedback from past or present customers. It is very unlikely that any sportsbook is going to reveal any problems they may have with this via telephone or email correspondence, so it is imperative that you spend some time reviewing the internet profiles of the sportsbook you are evaluating.

And finally, be on the lookout for oddly timed promotions, such as a revamped incentive program, or a significantly reduced juice offering. As an example, at the end of football and basketball season, sportsbooks see an increase in withdrawals. If suddenly they have created a generous new promotion to increase deposits at that same time, it might be a scam to generate funds so that the withdrawals can be covered. Sportsbooks with a poor business model who are struggling often can ill afford a “run on the bank”, and in the past many operations have accepted deposits and encouraged them right up until their doors were closed for good. The financially stable, experienced sportsbooks typically do not need these types of promotions and tend to keep the same ones in place all year. Again, use the internet search engines, review sites, and forum and discussion groups to see if these types of things have happened with the sportsbook in question. When grading the financial history of a sportsbook, we recommend this chart:

<i>No history of financial problems:</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Small history of financial problems:</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Moderate history of financial problems:</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>More than average history of financial problems:</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Large history of financial problems:</i>	<i>1</i>

5. Location

Location is a very important aspect in choosing an offshore sportsbook. Each individual country has different gaming commissions, licensing rules, regulations, and enforcement practices. To make this simple, we have divided the countries into three categories: “Favored”, “Acceptable”, and “Stay Away”.

The “favored” countries we list below have strictly regulated licensing jurisdictions that ensure that new operations can meet the financial, technical, and professional standards they demand.

The “acceptable” countries we list below have less aggressive rules and regulations, and tend to be more lax with both their standards and enforcement. This does not mean these are unsafe regions. Many of the best online sportsbooks are located in these countries. We do suggest you use caution when looking at sportsbooks in this region, particularly if they have been in business for only a short time.

The “stay away” countries are those that have almost no standards or regulations, have tried to have gambling operations banned or outlawed from the region, and have corrupt gaming commissions. With so many other countries with stellar sportsbooks out there, we see no reason to consider a sportsbook in these countries, and you should avoid these at all cost.

When grading the location of a sportsbook, using the list below, we recommend this chart:

<i>Favored region:</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Acceptable region, strong history:</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Acceptable region</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Acceptable region, weak history</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Stay Away region</i>	<i>1</i>

The Favored Countries List for gaming:

Antigua/Barbuda
Australia
Austria
Belize
Costa Rica
Dutch Antilles – Curacao
Gibraltar
Isle of Man
Mauritius
United Kingdom

Acceptable:

Bahamas
Dominica
Dominican Republic
Honduras
Jamaica
Margarita Island (Venezuela)
Nicaragua
Panama

Stay Away:

Aruba
Grenada
Haiti
Madagascar
St. Kitts
St. Marten
St. Vincent

6. Software and Technology

Software and technology are a crucial aspect to online gaming. The player needs the online experience to be convenient, fast, simple, and of course, fun! If the software and technology is cumbersome, slow, and confusing, it can drive an online player to use the phone to place their wagers.

The software platform that the sportsbook is using is the first thing you should look at. This can be easily obtained by simply calling the sportsbook and asking what software they run. You are looking for software that is easy to navigate, easily understood, provides fast load times, stability (does not freeze or boot you out), and last, but not least, entertaining and fun to use. Below we list 8 of the most popular software companies for your convenience, and our evaluation of its overall performance.

Action Sportsbook Int. (ASI) -	Excellent
Digital Gaming -	Excellent
BLR Software -	Excellent
Interactive Gaming & Wagering -	Very Good
IQ Ludorem (IQ) -	Very Good

World Gaming -	Very Good
Futurebet -	Average
INet Software -	Average
Unified Gaming -	Average

One of the strongest software types is proprietary software. This is software that is exclusive to the sportsbook that created it, and usually is amongst the best software available for online sports wagering. Built, owned, and operated by the sportsbook, proprietary software typically has a few more bells and whistles overall, with the strongest possible tech support and in-house maintenance.

When calling the sportsbook to find out what software they run, you should also ask if they have 24/7 monitoring of their software, and if they have an in house tech department. If they do not, then it could take several hours to several days for a major software problem to be corrected. If a sportsbook has no technology department and no monitoring, you should probably avoid that operation.

And finally, go to the website and visit as much of the site as you can! This is the best way to find out if the software is easy for you to use and navigate. Make sure that the load time is acceptable to you, and most importantly, make sure that it is fun and entertaining to use. If the graphics are poor, or the procedures for placing the wager are cumbersome or confusing, then it is probably not the right software for you. When grading the software and technology of a sportsbook, we recommend this chart:

Excellent (5)

- Very fast and responsive website
- Tech department, 24/7 onsite monitoring
- Easy to understand and navigate
- Software is entertaining
- Software is stable

Good (4)

- Fast and adequately responsive website
- Tech department, 24/7 monitoring
- Moderately easy to understand and navigate
- Software is moderately entertaining
- Software is stable

Average (3)

- Stable website
- Occasional delay when server is busy
- Acceptable ease of use and navigation
- Software is stable

Poor (2)

- Unstable website

- Website load time is slow
- Difficult to navigate and use
- Poor stability of software

Terrible (1)

- Website stability very unstable
- Website load time is very slow
- Difficult to navigate and poor features
- Little or no software stability

7. Summary

We certainly hope that this guide will prove useful when choosing a sportsbook. There are now over five hundred of these offshore online sportsbooks in operation, so taking some time and effort to make the correct choice will benefit you greatly in both the short and long run. Not everyone can be in Vegas to place their sports wagers, so the online sportsbooks are catering to a huge amount of customers. This large customer base has led to plenty of bad sportsbooks trying to get a piece of the action. While they are convenient, they are located away from our eyes and our laws. Until regulations and certification processes are uniform for all sportsbooks to protect the player, it is incumbent on you to “weed out” the bad apples.

Once again, this guide and its content is offered ‘as is’, and is solely the opinion of the SportsGamblingGuide.com staff. If you have any questions regarding this guide, or of the authors, please contact us at <http://www.sportsgamblingguide.com>. Best of luck to you all, and thanks for reading.

If you feel that you may have a problem with gambling, please visit one of the following links and seek help.

<http://www.gamblersanonymous.org>

<http://www.ncpgambling.org>

<http://www.ncrg.org>

Best Regards,

Sports Gambling Guide Staff

8. Checklist – Appendix A

A. Experience

<i>Excellent Record – No Disputes -</i>	<i>Score: 5</i>
<i>Good Record – Few Disputes but resolved -</i>	<i>Score: 4</i>
<i>Average Record – Disputes, moderate resolution -</i>	<i>Score: 3</i>
<i>Below Average Record – Disputes, slow resolution -</i>	<i>Score: 2</i>
<i>Poor Record – Many Disputes, no resolution -</i>	<i>Score: 1</i>

B. Customer Service

<i>Excellent Service -</i>	<i>Score: 5</i>
<i>Good Service -</i>	<i>Score: 4</i>
<i>Average Service -</i>	<i>Score: 3</i>
<i>Limited Service -</i>	<i>Score: 2</i>
<i>Poor Service -</i>	<i>Score: 1</i>

C. Financial Stability

<i>4 plus years in operation -</i>	<i>Score: 5</i>
<i>3 or more years in operation -</i>	<i>Score: 4</i>
<i>2-3 years (recommended min -</i>	<i>Score: 3</i>
<i>1-2 years in operation -</i>	<i>Score: 2</i>
<i>1 or less years in operation -</i>	<i>Score: 1</i>
<i>No history of financial problems -</i>	<i>Score: 5</i>
<i>Small history of financial problems -</i>	<i>Score: 4</i>
<i>Moderate history of financial problems -</i>	<i>Score: 3</i>
<i>More than average history of financial problems -</i>	<i>Score: 2</i>
<i>Large history of financial problems -</i>	<i>Score: 1</i>

D. Location

<i>Preferred region -</i>	<i>Score: 5</i>
<i>Adequate region, strong history -</i>	<i>Score: 4</i>
<i>Adequate region, decent history -</i>	<i>Score: 3</i>
<i>Adequate region, weak history -</i>	<i>Score: 2</i>

Avoid region:

Score: 1

E. Software and Technology

Excellent Software and Tech -

Score: 5

Good Software and Tech -

Score: 4

Average Software and Tech -

Score: 3

Poor Software and Tech -

Score: 2

Terrible Software and Tech -

Score: 1

To calculate the score, add the six scores above, then divide by 6. $A+B+C+C+D+E / 6 = (x)$

Excellent - 30 points

Good - 24 points

Average - 18 points

Below Ave. - 12 points

Poor - 06 points