

Slot machines hold a special place in casino lore and gaming history. From the iconic mechanical "one-armed bandits" to the dazzling modern video slots, their evolution reflects shifts in technology, design, and player preferences. But one question often comes up among gamers, designers, and casino floor planners alike: *Did video slots make slot machines bigger or smaller?*



In this deep dive, we'll unpack the **mechanical vs video slots** debate, look at how early physical constraints shaped cabinet sizes, explore the impact of multi-monitor setups, and clarify why diagonal screen measurements and aspect ratios might mislead when sizing up a slot machine. Along the way, we'll reference companies and organizations like **MrQ Casino** and the **California Office of Historic Preservation**, and compare slot cabinet dimensions to everyday tech like your smartphone and desktop monitor for relatable scale.

How Mechanical Constraints Shaped Early Slot Machine Cabinets

Before video slots, slot machines were fully mechanical marvels. These "one-armed bandits" featured physical reels spun by a lever, intricate gears, springs, and coin mechanisms. The cabinet sizes had to accommodate not just the reels but complex mechanical parts and coin handling.

The **California Office of Historic Preservation** archives several early slot machine designs dating back to the 1920s and 30s, many of which share similar cabinet footprints:

- A heavy wooden or metal box base housing the coin reel and payout mechanisms
- A front glass display window showing three reels side-by-side
- A lever arm prominently positioned for player interaction
- Space for payout trays and coin collection

This physical complexity meant the cabinet's *footprint* far exceeded just the visible reel window. The typical mechanical slot cabinet could range anywhere from **24 to 30 inches wide**, with depths of 20 inches or more, and stood over 40 inches tall. The reel window itself often measured about 12 to 15 diagonal inches, but that was only a fraction of the total cabinet volume.

In this sense, early the cabinet sizes were dictated by mechanical needs rather than player display area or digital interface design. The constraints of physical reels and coin handling defined the form factor.

Video Slots: Big Screens and Bigger Cabinets?

With the arrival of video display technology in the 1970s and 80s, slot machines transitioned from physical reels to screens showing digital reels. This paradigm shift changed mechanical design constraints drastically:

- **No moving reels:** No more bulky spinning parts, coin drop levers, or mechanical gears.
- **Digital flexibility:** Games could now use multiple paylines, animations, sound, and bonus rounds.
- **Screen size and layout:** Cabinets needed to accommodate CRT or later LCD screens, often larger than the old reel windows to enhance visual appeal.

Initially, video slots often got *bigger*. The first generation of video slots incorporated CRT monitors that could be around **19-21 inches diagonal**, much larger than the 12-15 inch reels they replaced. Manufacturers used the opportunity to make flashy cabinets with vivid graphics, lights, and immersive audio—sometimes incorporating multiple screens in what's called a **multi-monitor slot machine**.

Those multiple displays added to cabinet depth and complexity. For example:

- A primary monitor displaying reels and gameplay information
- Secondary smaller screens or VGA panels showing pay tables, bonus game info, or unrelated animations
- Control panels with touch buttons and ticket dispensers

These innovations made slots larger and more attention-grabbing on the casino floor. They were designed to be immersive focal points, competing for players' attention amid hundreds of machines in casinos like those operated by **MrQ Casino**.

Smaller, Slimmer, and Portable: The Impact of Mobile and Modern Design

Fast forward a few decades, and the growth of mobile gaming and online slots has put pressure on physical slot cabinet design:

- Many players began gaming on devices like smartphones with screens around **5 to 7 inches diagonal**, demanding clarity and simple interfaces.
- Online-only casinos (including platforms like MrQ Casino) focus on tidy, readable screens optimized for thumb interactions rather than sprawling multi-monitor setups.
- Physical casinos started gravitating toward slimmer, more minimalistic cabinets that prioritize ease of use, smaller footprints, and improved sight lines on busy floors.

Rather than sprawling multi-monitor arrays, modern cabinets reuse newer, high-resolution LCD panels with widescreen 16:9 or 16:10 **aspect ratios**, sometimes even portrait-oriented. The diagonal inch measurement may seem large at a glance—say a 27" screen—but the actual playable area, touch targets, and ergonomic layout reflect minimal sizes designed for optimal player interaction.

A Quick Clarification on Diagonal Measurements and Aspect Ratios

A final note worth stressing: **Diagonal screen size alone can mislead** your perception of how big a slot machine screen is. Much like with smartphones and desktop monitors, two 27-inch diagonal screens might differ significantly in usable space depending on their width-to-height *aspect ratio*. For instance, a 27" 16:9 widescreen is wider and less tall compared to a 27" 4:3 screen that might be more square-shaped.

This distinction matters when judging how readable slot games are and how comfortably UI elements [screen size vs diagonal measurement](#) fit a player's thumb or finger. My experience transitioning from casino floor assistant to tech blogger always leads me to examine whether buttons and pay tables remain easily tappable—even on big diagonal screens, proper UI scale matters more than just raw screen size.

The Casino Cabinet Evolution: From Mechanical to Modern Multi-Screen Designs

Era	Typical Cabinet Footprint	Screen Type & Size	Mechanical/Digital Constraints	Player Interaction
1920s-1960s	Mechanical Slots ~24-30" wide, 20-25" deep, 40"+ tall	Reels 12-15" diagonal window	Physical reels, coin payout, levers	Lever-pull, coin insertion
1970s-1990s	Early Video Slots Similar or larger than mechanical; often deeper	CRT monitors, ~19-21" diagonal	CRT bulk, multiple monitors added	Buttons and coin inputs
2000s-2010s	Multi-Monitor Cabinets 24-36" wide, 30"+ deep	sometimes Multiple LCD/LED screens, 19"-27"+ diagonal each	Digital video flexibility; complex payout systems	Touch buttons, ticket printers
2010s-Present	Slimline & Mobile-Aware Slots Smaller footprints, optimized depth	16:9+ LCD panels, 21"-27" diagonal typical	Digital only, UI optimized for touch	Touchscreen controls, digital ticketing

Putting It All in Perspective: Slot Machine Sizes Compared to Everyday Tech

To wrap up, let's relate casino cabinet screen sizes to familiar objects:

- **Mechanical reel window of 12-15 inches diagonal:** About the length of a standard pencil (7.5 inches) doubled or a small sheet of letter paper turned wide.
- **Early video slot CRT displays (19-21"):** Roughly the width of a standard school ruler and a half side-by-side (a typical ruler is 12 inches long).
- **Modern multi-monitor cabinets (24"-27" or larger):** Comparably sized to desktop computer monitors found in many offices and homes—though arranged vertically or horizontally depending on the slot floor design.

- **Smartphone screens (5-7"):** About the size of an adult thumb to index finger spread, dramatically smaller than physical slot displays but critical for online and mobile slot access.

This illustrates how the shift from mechanical reels to video slots initially caused cabinet sizes to grow, as technology demanded bigger and more engaging displays. However, the mobile revolution and informed design have since driven a trend toward smarter, more compact, and ergonomically considered slot machine sizes.

Final Thoughts

Did video slots make slot machines bigger or smaller? The honest answer is: **both**, at different times in history. Mechanical slots were physically constrained — resulting in bulky yet deceptively compact cabinets focused on reels and coins. Video slots unleashed new possibilities, often making machines larger with big CRT screens and multi-monitor setups to attract players. Then, the rise of mobile gaming, touchscreen interfaces, and digital convenience pressed manufacturers toward slimmer, smaller, and more user-friendly cabinets.

Game operators like **MrQ Casino** continue this evolution in digital spaces, optimizing UI for thumb-friendly interfaces on smartphones and desktops alike. Meanwhile, preservationists at the **California Office of Historic Preservation** safeguard the legacy of those original mechanical giants that set the slots' course.

Remember, when sizing slot machines in the casino or comparing them to everyday tech, diagonal screen sizes and aspect ratios are just part of the story. Always consider cabinet footprint, control ergonomics, and UI layouts to fully understand how slot machines fit players' hands, eyes, and casino floors alike.