Nevada casinos partnering with hotel chains

By Hannah Dreier, AP

LAS VEGAS – Time was, gamblers didn't even want credit card companies maintaining a record of their time in Las Vegas.

Now, visitors want loyalty points from mainstream hotel chains for the days they spend holed up in Strip casinos.

Casino corporations MGM Resorts International and Caesars Entertainment Corp. have announced loyalty program partnerships with major hotel chains (Hyatt and Starwood, respectively). The independent Strip casino the Cosmopolitan is also partnering with a hotel chain, striking a deal with Marriott.

The deals enable customers to earn and redeem loyalty points with both the hotel and casino chains, and also hold out the promise of enabling visitors to experience Las Vegas like a high roller, if they have enough points.

The Caesars partnership also applies to Harrah's Reno, Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Harveys Lake Tahoe. It was unclear Tuesday afternoon if the MGM partnership applied to Circus Circus Reno.

The partnerships give the hotel chains a presence in one of the country's biggest tourist destinations, and helps the casinos in their effort to market themselves as more than places to gamble.

MGM owns 12 properties on the Las Vegas Strip, including the MGM Grand and Bellagio. Caesars owns nine on the Las Vegas Strip, including Planet Hollywood and the Flamingo.

MGM announced the partnership over the summer, followed by

Caesars in December, and the Cosmopolitan in January.

Caesars celebrated the announcement with a junket for national hotel reporters, including a stay at Caesars Palace, VIP seats at Britney Spears' Las Vegas show, and free spa service. Rewards programs participants can experience similarly luxurious moments, though it might take a while.

Jeff Zidell, senior vice president of Hyatt Gold Passport said the partnership with MGM has allowed the hotel chain to expand the benefits of joining its loyalty program, and is proving a hit with customers.

"Over time, members had shared their desires for a wider selection of locations for earning and burning Hyatt Gold Passport points –with a particular interest in The Las Vegas Strip. MGM Resorts has nearly half of the hotel rooms on The Las Vegas Strip, and these 12 participating MGM Resorts destinations are iconic," he said in a statement to the Associated Press.

Casinos were hit hard by the recession, and have been slower to come back than other businesses. Some in Las Vegas are hailing the new partnerships as a sign that the Strip no longer looks as dubious to major hotel chains.

Two major Strip players remain un-partnered: Wynn Las Vegas, which owns the high-end Wynn and Encore casinos, and Sands Las Vegas, which owns the Italian-themed Venetian and Palazzo casinos.