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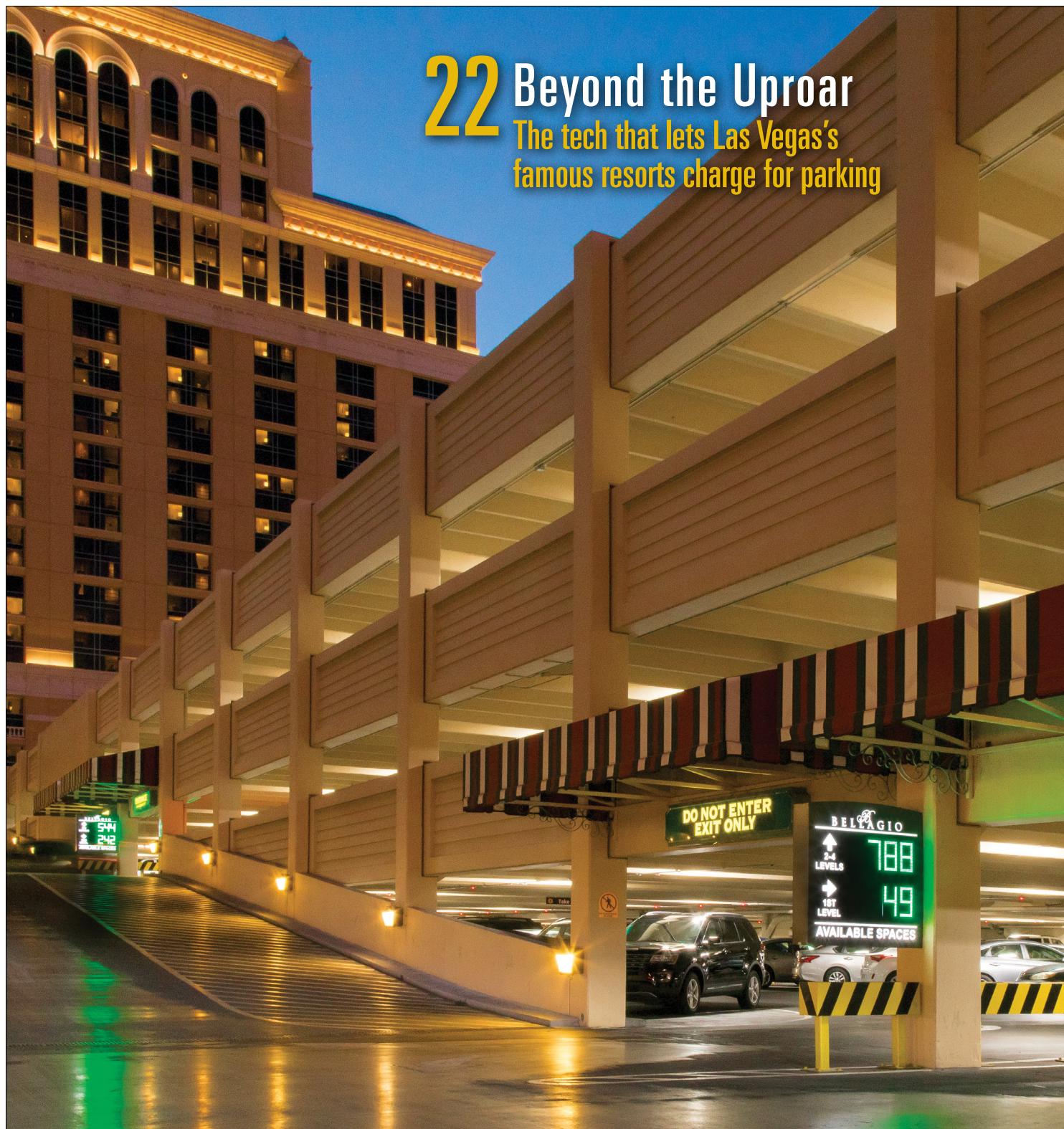
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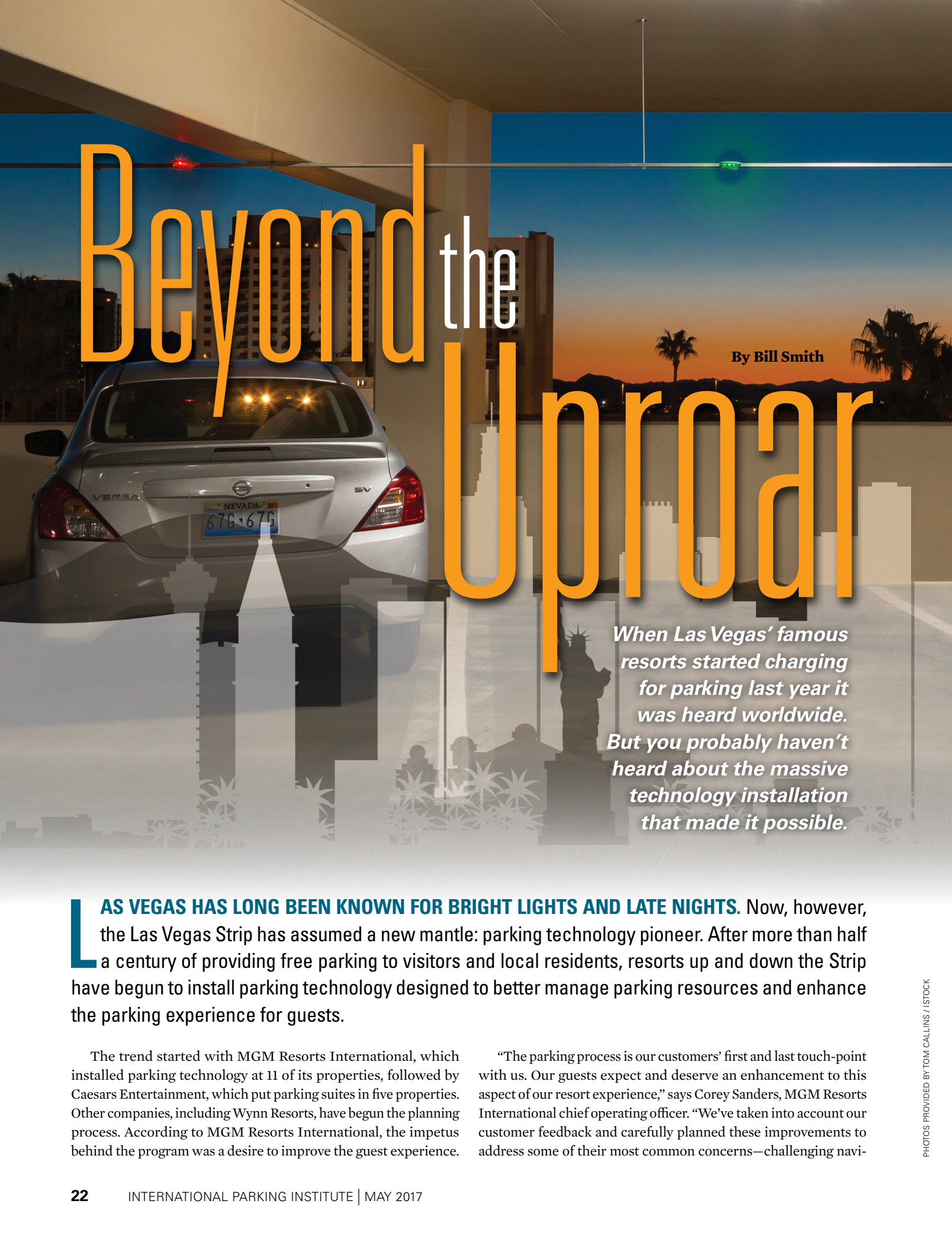
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The tech that lets Las Vegas's famous resorts charge for parking





Beyond the Up roar

By Bill Smith

When Las Vegas' famous resorts started charging for parking last year it was heard worldwide. But you probably haven't heard about the massive technology installation that made it possible.

LAS VEGAS HAS LONG BEEN KNOWN FOR BRIGHT LIGHTS AND LATE NIGHTS. Now, however, the Las Vegas Strip has assumed a new mantle: parking technology pioneer. After more than half a century of providing free parking to visitors and local residents, resorts up and down the Strip have begun to install parking technology designed to better manage parking resources and enhance the parking experience for guests.

The trend started with MGM Resorts International, which installed parking technology at 11 of its properties, followed by Caesars Entertainment, which put parking suites in five properties. Other companies, including Wynn Resorts, have begun the planning process. According to MGM Resorts International, the impetus behind the program was a desire to improve the guest experience.

"The parking process is our customers' first and last touch-point with us. Our guests expect and deserve an enhancement to this aspect of our resort experience," says Corey Sanders, MGM Resorts International chief operating officer. "We've taken into account our customer feedback and carefully planned these improvements to address some of their most common concerns—challenging navi-



gation and difficulty finding available spaces. We acknowledge that this aspect of our resort experience can be improved, and we're taking an aggressive approach."

The Starting Line

MGM began the process in the summer of 2015 by establishing an internal parking task force. The task force evaluated the parking challenges presented by the parking facilities in their various properties and outlined a preliminary strategy for meeting those challenges. Through an RFP process, the company sought out parking partners and selected a team comprised of SP+, Sentry Control Systems, and INDECT USA. Sentry was chosen to create a technology suite that would provide a frictionless parking experience for guests and staff; INDECT was selected to create a parking guidance program to help

parkers quickly and conveniently find available parking spaces; and SP+ serves as MGM's parking operator. Each was added to MGM's parking task force.

Ultimately, the task force settled on a plan that would lead to the creation and installation of a comprehensive parking technology program serving all of the company's Las Vegas resorts, including MGM Grand Las Vegas, Bellagio, Mirage, Aria, Mandalay Bay, Delano Las Vegas, Monte Carlo, Luxor, Excalibur, Vdara, and New York New York. The \$90 million program was the largest parking technology installation ever undertaken by a private company, permitting the management of 60,000 parking spaces throughout Las Vegas.

The centerpiece of the MGM parking program is a SKIDATA access and revenue system that features state-of-the-art bar code readers, RFID technology, and mag strip readers. The equipment can



of our guests are first-time users who are unfamiliar with these types of technology. The flexibility of the technology really meets everyone's needs because it can read room key cards, loyalty cards, and credit cards. We didn't want our guests to have to carry around another badge to get in and out of parking, and the technology package keeps the parking process extremely simple."

According to Lunn, the parking guidance technology is particularly popular with guests.

"We are receiving a lot of positive comments about the program, particularly the ... sensors," Lunn says. "Before we implemented this program it was often challenging to find a space. Now, the parking guidance technology directs drivers right to an open space, and guests are communicating to us about how much they love the system."

Dana Wade, director of business development for Sentry in Las Vegas, says ensuring sensors are reliable is key in a system this big. "Sensors aren't any good if they aren't accurate or if they lead parkers to a space that's already occupied," he says. "If you're in a rush, the last thing you need is to be directed to a space that's already full."



Implementation

As easy as the parking technology is for guests to navigate, implementing the program was no simple matter. MGM's aggressive timeline gave SP+, Sentry, and INDECT just six months to design the program, work out all of the kinks, install the equipment, and have it tested and up and running. That timeline would have been challenging under any circumstances, but considering the massive size of the installation, putting everything together in just six months required extraordinary effort on the part of both MGM Resorts staff and their partners.

"I can't overstate how important our partners were in getting this done so quickly," Lunn says. "Sentry built a demonstration room in one of our conference rooms to show us how the technology was going to work. All of the equipment was in there—LPR, pay-on-foot, an exit column. That's how they problem-solved. They ran our people through the payment process to make sure everything worked properly, showed us how it worked, and trained the people who would be running the program."

"When we added components, such as offering several months of free parking to locals through their driver's licenses, we worked out the kinks in that room," Lunn continues. "There were no lay-ups; everything was a three-point shot. These guys had to make sure it would work, and they did."

According to Dale Fowler, director of INDECT USA, one of the most important and unusual elements of the MGM program is that all of the parking spaces for the 11

Some of the new additions to Las Vegas resort garages include sensors with green and red lights to help drivers quickly find available parking, and wayfinding signs to help them navigate after parking their cars.

read hotel room keys, employee badges, Nevada driver's licenses, military IDs, and tickets to special events to admit vehicles and direct drivers to appropriate parking areas. The readers can also recognize the company's proprietary M Life Loyalty program cards to provide complimentary parking to members. Parking privileges extend to other MGM resorts as well, permitting guests to visit other casinos without having to worry about paying for parking.

Upon entering a garage at one of the MGM properties, license plate recognition (LPR) equipment records the driver's vehicle information, associating that vehicle with the driver's credentials. When the driver is ready to leave the garage the LPR system recognizes the vehicle license plate, and if the parking fee is satisfied the gate will open for the customer to exit. The entire transaction is completed without drivers having to stop at an exit gate.

Putting Guests First

It was essential to MGM that the parking program provide guests a more pleasant and convenient parking experience. To that end, MGM initially installed INDECT single-space parking guidance systems at several properties, including the MGM Grand, Mandalay Bay, Monte Carlo, Aria Employee, and New York, New York parking structures. Sensors were later added at Bellagio and Aria. The sensors use a highly visible, LED lighting system to help drivers identify where parking can be found and guide them directly to open spaces. The parking management software associated with the sensors allows visitors to access additional customer service amenities, including loyalty program benefits and special validation offers.

"Our customers have been pleasantly surprised by how much the technology has improved the parking experience," says Travis Lunn, senior vice president for hotel operations at MGM Grand Las Vegas. "Many

The Bellagio and other resorts added space-available signs outside and inside garages to help drivers quickly park and be on their way.



properties are managed from a single centralized command center. All the garages are tied together through fiber optics. MGM's centralized command center provides the company

greater control over all of its parking facilities and permits parking management staff to immediately respond to any issues that may arise.

MGM's Lunn says that as beneficial as the parking program has been for guests, it has also provided significant benefits to the company.

"The parking program has really refocused the company's attention on our parking areas and our guests' experiences in those areas," Lunn says. "We've been able to take our new parking revenues and invest them in our parking facilities, freshening and cleaning them and replacing lighting with more sustainable motion-controlled technologies. We've also added ambassadors within facilities to assist guests. All of these strategies provide a much better parking experience for our guests."

Like MGM, Caesars Entertainment recently overhauled the parking programs at its resorts in Las Vegas. Caesars' program, which includes new paid valet and self-parking, was designed with an eye to improving the parking experience for guests, local residents, and members of the company's loyalty program, Total Rewards.

"Guests who stay, game, and shop at our resorts have said that parking spaces and valet services had become increasingly scarce," says Richard Broome, executive vice president of public affairs and communications for Caesars Entertainment. "We believe that implementing a paid parking program while also investing in LED parking guidance systems will help address these issues."

The centerpiece of the Caesars program is a parking guidance system designed to help guests easily identify occupied and unoccupied self-parking spaces. Caesars installed the LED sensors in five of the company's properties: Caesars Palace, Harrah's Las Vegas, Flamingo Las Vegas, Bally's Las Vegas, and Paris Las Vegas.

"The new parking system allows our guests to easily navigate our large parking garages at five of our Las Vegas properties," Broome says. "The LED lights allow guests to see which parking spots are currently empty or occupied by another guest. There are also parking signs at the entrance to each parking level, alerting guests to the number of available spots on that particular level. This will cut down on the amount of time guests spend looking for parking within our garages, creating a better experience and allowing them to spend more time on property enjoying our hospitality offerings."

The Effects

"Our Las Vegas properties are most concerned about creating an unforgettable experience for all of our guests," Broome continues. "When we received feedback about the scarce parking and valet services, we immediately knew that something needed to change. Adopting this new program allows for a better experience for our guests, local residents, and our Total Rewards loyalty program members."

While parking programs like those at MGM Resorts and Caesars clearly represent a growing trend in Las Vegas, Wade says that their effects will be felt well beyond the Strip.

"These programs were unparalleled in terms of both their size and the extent to which different technologies were integrated to work together," Wade says. "The MGM and Caesars programs demonstrate how any organization can successfully implement a variety of parking technologies to provide a better customer experience, while at the same time managing their parking assets more effectively."



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