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## In Las Vegas, Sports Books in a Pocket

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LAS VEGAS — For decades, sports bettors in this city have queued up at sports book windows and handed over cash in exchange for paper tickets formalizing their bets.



Laura Rauch for The New York Times

At the Palazzo, using a device called the PocketCasino for sports bets.

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Laura Rauch for The New York Times

Tracy Vale, right, placed a wager last week during a Monday Night Football game, with David Ehrlich at the Palazzo Las Vegas.

But on a recent Sunday in the sports book at the M Resort in nearby Henderson, gamblers seeking action on professional and college football games were engaging in a much different ritual: betting through hand-held devices no larger than a smartphone.

The technology, part of a new system from [Cantor Gaming](#), a subsidiary of the financial services firm Cantor Fitzgerald, lets gamblers place bets on certain sporting events like football or baseball, tennis matches and horse races from anywhere in the casino and play other games like blackjack and baccarat.

Gamblers can also for the first time wager on the outcomes of events as the events transpire. When a football team lines up for a field goal, for example, bettors can bet on whether the kicker will make it or miss.

Not surprisingly, casino operators like it. They are always trying to make their books more profitable. While annual casino revenue in Nevada hovers around \$10 billion, last year revenue from sports bets was only \$125 million, or 1.25 percent of that amount.

“All of a sudden, these same people who were betting once or twice a game at the beginning of a sporting event can place wagers every minute if they want,” says Anthony A. Marnell III, chief executive of the M Resort. “Having this technology changes the entire equation for everyone involved.”

To wager, bettors still fork over cash to human ticket writers in the sports book, but those workers simply convert the money into electronic credits, which are stored in a triple-encrypted database hosted on backroom servers.

At the M Resort, gamblers have two options to use these credits: they can sit in front of touch-screen monitors in the sports book that resemble airline check-in kiosks, or they can check out location-aware wireless hand-helds, called eDecks. These devices then connect to the casino servers over a secured wireless Internet connection.

The eDecks resemble chubby iPhones, and can be taken almost anywhere in the casino — into the lounges and restaurants, for example. Bettors, however, cannot use them (or any other devices) while playing table games.

At the sports books at the Venetian and the Palazzo on the Strip, eDecks are the only option, and have been rebranded as PocketCasino.

In both introductions, the portable devices offer standard sports bets and are already loaded with software that allows supplemental wagering in the form of blackjack and baccarat games. The games include basic wagers, as well as propositional bets that dynamically calculate odds based on the cards dealt.

The betting during events option is called in-running betting, and Lee Amaitis, chief executive of Cantor Gaming, says oddsmakers have dreamed of this for decades but have lacked the number-crunching resources to hang lines at game speed.

To solve this problem, Cantor Gaming sets its in-game lines based upon algorithms from the financial services world. Mr. Amaitis says these algorithms are variations of those created by a sister company, [Cantor Index](#), a financial [spread-betting](#) company in London that offers bets on various markets including equities, indices, bonds and commodities.

“We’ve created an environment in which we’re trading sports,” Mr. Amaitis said. “With markets, realities and probabilities of future events are changing constantly. It’s no different in sports; each game has millions of permutations and potential outcomes we can offer as odds.”

Despite its pedigree, Cantor Gaming's eDeck technology had to overcome a number of challenges before it was approved by the Nevada Gaming Commission in 2008. First was the issue of security. The company requires all eDeck users to obtain a plastic card embedded with a Radio Frequency Identification chip. When bettors check out a device, ticket writers program it to work only within a few feet of that chip, so no other people can pick up the device and wager on the original user's account.

Sunny Tara, Cantor Gaming's chief technology officer, says that as soon as the device can no longer read the RFID chip, it prohibits any further betting before being reset.

Mr. Tara said another security precaution was to protect all monetary transactions by relegating them to back-end servers. "The portable devices are sophisticated, but they really are just tools to access the real technology, which sits on the servers," Mr. Tara said.

He added that the devices transmitted data over channels "not normally used" for mainstream Wi-Fi.

A second challenge for Cantor Gaming has been persuading old-school sports bettors to embrace the new approach.

Mark Goldman, director of race and sports for the Venetian and Palazzo Las Vegas, said his sports books were licensing 200 eDecks. Older gamblers have been slow to adopt them, he said, but younger bettors have shown interest. The overall betting has increased since October.

"Once most people know this is available, they seem pretty interested to try it out," Mr. Goldman said. "This is something we'll probably have in our sports books for a long, long time."

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