

CHECKING OUT THE CASINO-HOTEL'S FUTURE

An industry built on people predicting the future needs to stop gambling with its own future and start harnessing and investing in technology to create the next generation of casino-hotel experiences, says FiveGen's **Sam McMullen**

As a futurist and technologist specializing in imagining the future of Las Vegas, gaming and gambling, I get asked many times what I think the future will look like for casinos. What many people don't realize about futurists is that we're historians first, and the only way to see the future is to have studied the past. It's incredibly important to know where you've been to know where you're going.

Some amazing things have happened in technology, even in just the last 10 years. It was 10 years ago that the iPhone was introduced. Today we couldn't conceive of not having a smart touch-enabled device in our pockets. Ten years ago, League of Legends and many other mainstream esports hadn't yet built the game-changing following they now enjoy. To see where we're going in the next 10 years and beyond, we need to interpret how these and other changes affect how we move forward and that means we have to apply these insights to what we need to do now.

You may have heard people say the future is now. That's not just lip service or an overused trope — it's more true than you could ever imagine.

Imagine for a second that it's 2027, and you're planning a trip to Las Vegas. Maybe you've just competed in an online

tournament for the latest video game and won not only money from the competition pot but also a trip to Las Vegas to compete with other members of your community from all around the world. The money you've won has been deposited into your blockchain wallet, where you also have your digital ID cards and your rewards cards, which are all linked to every travel service and vendor you purchase from. Now you would go to the travel website on your smart device and book your airline ticket and your hotel stay. You've never flown this airline or stayed at your chosen hotel before so you want to sign up for the rewards program. Your AI in your phone asks you to verify your identity and authorize transfer of your digital cash tokens from your wallet to the travel vendors. Your smart device maps the contours of your facial depth pattern as well as your irises against the previous facial and iris pattern stored on your device in your ID card. Your AI assistant passes your information to the

travel AI which in turn applies that to the new rewards program applications that now take up new slots in your digital wallet. On the day of travel you have only to walk through the airport terminal while the security AI scans your biometrics and queries your device AI to make sure your ID matches what it's seen before. You may have to confirm the use of your data for this purpose by placing your finger on your device or by using your voice to acknowledge this use of your data. After going through security, you wait at the gate and board the plane and you're on your way.

The plane lands in Las Vegas, your AI notices you've arrived and are no longer flying and so it turns your external antenna back on. Immediately, the AI from the hotel greets you in your language and warmly asks if you'd like to pre-check into your hotel. You say yes and ask if you can get help with transport. The concierge AI has anticipated this and had an Uber on standby to take you to the property. Your AI gets the details from the concierge AI as well as directions to get you from the gate and through the terminal to your transport. Transport will have your bags for you so you won't need to get them.

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You go to passenger pickup and get into your car. Your AI notifies you that the concierge will have your room ready when you arrive. The front desk was overhauled and merged with guest services since the advent of immutable biometric secured wallets was invented way back in 2017. So you won't have to wait in any line and can instead go straight to your room when you arrive. If there was ever a problem that caused a room delay, the hotel AI would set you up with something to do that fits your unique profile and sends you offers to take advantage of free play or drinks or a visit to the sportsbook, interactive experience center (arcade) or spa while you wait for someone to collect you and take you to your room.

While on the ride to the hotel you can initiate an automated tour of the city because you've never visited it before, or send the movie you were watching on the plane to the screens that have been mounted in the back of every modern cab or ride-sharing vehicle for the past five years. You decide to take advantage of your reward play credit and use the touch screens to browse and play one of the casino skill games offered at the property you're staying at. You could also decide to watch the current esports qualifying match and place a wager while you ride as well. So many options to enjoy your trip. You're not concerned with dinner plans or how you're going to get your bags to your room because Las Vegas has automated nearly everything.

What I describe isn't science fiction and it isn't even a full description of all we could achieve if we apply a new definition to the casino-hotel or 'integrated resort'. It's all about human-centered design and how with the current and emerging technologies we have today — and will have as early as next year — we truly can serve every guest, every player, every need in every

language and have that total experience catered to each guest individually. It really only requires thinking about how we want to be treated when we travel. There are areas in limbo, such as the Supreme Court hearing of Christie vs NCAA, that need to be decided before we can define some of the new ways that people will play and stay and how we will allow the new type of guest to feel like the casino has everything they want, including the opportunity to meet others who are just like them. The casino is already changing but we need to accelerate that change and broaden the focus while rooting it firmly in radical inclusivity, social atmospheres, and interactive gaming with real skill affecting the outcome of the winnings paid out.

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We need to stop focusing on Millennials over everybody else. It's not only they who want a more social casino. We are born social animals. Even our parents and grandparents appreciate us stopping by every once in awhile or giving them a call. The more important question is: how do we satisfy our deepest desires with the exponential growth of technology? Computers, mobile devices, AR, VR, AI, hoverboards, flying cars, holograms — all of these are tools we are finally actually seeing. How do we create an environment that embraces the inevitable?

The future casino floor already exists. I'm a part of the generation that picked up video game technology for the first time in the 80s and 90s. We have all experienced

our first 'wow' moment. Maybe it was as we booted up our first adventure in Azeroth in World of Warcraft. Or the first time we experienced gritty hyperrealism by seeing what it was like to be in the trenches in Call of Duty. There's a storytelling hub where people from all sorts of places and things collide. A hub was a place where your next adventure was clearly defined. Just like Disneyland, you start at the hub. This used to be our Las Vegas hotel lobbies, but what once was a welcoming statement has now turned into long, egregious lines that keep our guests away from the casino floor. To bring Las Vegas into the future, it's not going to be just about the casino floor — but how it is integrated through the story of each guest we seek to entertain.

The future of the gaming floor is about creating a holistic new experience. It's like creating a new Disneyland park. We can't just piecemeal the experience like we tend to do with resorts (leasing space here or throwing darts on a concept there). The casino of the future should feel like Disneyland: curated experiences that our guests come to experience, and an experience that starts before they even set foot on the property.

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