

Pandemic accelerates move toward cashless casino industry

Written by Administrator
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Omer Sattar, executive vice president and co-founder of Sightline Payments, anticipates that three out of every four casinos in the United States will offer some form of a cashless payment system for gaming within the next three years.

That's where Sightline, a Las Vegas-based financial tech firm helping make the casino industry more cashless-friendly, hopes to capitalize on the marketplace.

The industry—synonymous with cash for decades—has flirted with the cashless concept for years, but Sattar and others believe consumer habits driven by the COVID-19 pandemic will help progress that courtship.

“You can go to almost any casino in the country and, if you want to play blackjack or play a slot machine, you're going to be using cash,” Sattar said. “In your everyday life, however, you use electronic payment options for almost everything. In the next 36 months, we believe you'll see 60-70% of the U.S. casino industry offering some form of cashless.”

Sightline, which has 43 employees in Las Vegas and 70 in all, has worked with gaming companies like MGM Resorts International, Wynn Resorts and Caesars Entertainment, and game technology firms like Aristocrat Technologies, to bring forth cashless payment options.

Much of what it has done to date has been in the sports betting arena.

[Christopher DeVargas](#)

Joe Pappano, CEO of Sightline Payments, sits down with the Las Vegas Sun to discuss the future of cashless gaming technology Tuesday Feb. 2, 2021. Sightline Payments is a Las Vegas-based financial tech firm that specializes in mobile "cashless" payment systems for casinos and gaming businesses.

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For instance, Sightline’s “Play+” program works in conjunction with Bank of George to allow BetMGM or William Hill mobile account users, through a prepaid card, to load money into their sports betting account without stepping foot in the casino. The card, which operates on the Discover network, can also be used like a debit card to make purchases, though fees apply—for every \$100 loaded, there’s a \$4 fee.

Taking the concept a step further, Sattar said a deal is in place with a major Strip casino operator to allow loyalty program members to use a cashless system to pay for their entire experience at the property.

That could include anything from lunch at a resort restaurant to a few hands of blackjack, all without handling any paper money.

The endgame, Sattar said, is that most casinos nationwide would require a customer to do nothing more than present a smartphone to gamble—no touching potentially germ-laced money or un-wrinkling old bills.

There are reasons why the industry has generally been reluctant to move away from the cash standard—security concerns among them—but Sattar said the pandemic has put the changeover into overdrive.

“Places were getting shut down in March (of 2020), and we started getting calls from casino operators around the country in May,” Sattar said. “They were saying they needed to open and that many of their consumers were no longer comfortable using cash. Contactless payments have skyrocketed all around the world because consumers are wanting to touch less paper.”

It’s all part of a trend that isn’t likely to slow down.

Last year, Gary Ellis, owner of Ellis Island Hotel, Casino & Brewery in Las Vegas, started testing a cashless line of credit system for casino loyalty program members.

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That system, called Marker Trax, was set to debut at Morongo, a tribal casino in Cabazon, Calif., early this year.

This month, Sightline, along with Aristocrat, announced the launch of Boyd Gaming's "BoydPay" digital wallet product at casinos in Indiana and Ohio.

The BoydPay system, which is also in a trial phase at Aliante Casino in North Las Vegas, allows gamblers to play slot machines using their Boyd loyalty card account without handling any cash.

Boyd officials have said they plan to have the option in place at all of its casinos sometime this summer.

"COVID-19 has sped up this cashless wagering process, though it was on everyone's roadmap before the pandemic," said Blake Rampmaier, Boyd's chief information officer. "Operators and customers have been getting more comfortable with the idea."

Bill Miller, president and CEO of the American Gaming Association, said one silver lining in an otherwise disastrous past 11 months for the industry has been the acceptance of digital payment options.

Miller, a vocal cashless proponent in recent years, said it's important to present customers with the "payment choice they expect in every aspect of their daily lives" when they gamble.

Miller added that "the collaborative work of gaming suppliers, operators, and regulators to advance payments modernization over the past year is a testament to how innovation will accelerate gaming's recovery in 2021 and beyond."

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