

MGM, Buffalo Wild Wings teaming up on sports gaming venture

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MGM Resorts International is looking to bring sports gaming experiences to Buffalo Wild Wings restaurants nationwide.

MGM and Road Digital, its sports betting venture, will be working alongside the sports bar brand in a multiyear partnership. The companies will be introducing free-to-play mobile games and a sports betting test program to various restaurants, according to a Thursday press release.

“Deals like this signal that casinos are considering sports betting as a mainstream product,” said Eilers & Krejcik Gaming analyst Chris Grove. “It’s a product they’ll need mainstream partners in, in order to win.”

The partnership is a first-of-its-kind alignment, according to MGM, and is “focused on capitalizing on future opportunities as states continue to pass sports betting legislation.”

Earlier this month, Indiana became the 12th state with sports betting. But there are more expected to come online in the coming months — eight have legalized sports betting but don't yet offer it, five states are considering it, and it will be voted upon in Colorado this November.

“Everybody’s jockeying for positions,” said Brendan Bussmann, a partner at casino research firm Global Market Advisors. MGM’s new partnership “gets their brand across a much more global sphere. Whether it’s down the street in your neighborhood in Las Vegas to Lincoln, Nebraska ... everyone has a Buffalo Wild Wings.”

This partnership could help MGM reach a broader audience, according to Grove. He said the average sports bettor — usually a younger male — isn’t the typical customer found within a casino. According to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, 57 percent of visitors in Las Vegas in 2018 were 40 years old or older, and half were female.

“The sports bettor isn’t necessarily a customer that a casino like MGM or Caesars has been focused on,” Grove said. These partnerships “allow casinos to expand beyond their core demographic.”

Free-to-play games

The companies are first introducing a free-to-play football game in Buffalo Wild Wings restaurants nationwide on Thursday, as pro football season kicks off.

The mobile game — available on the Buffalo Wind Wings Blazin’ Rewards app — offers a sports betting-like experience that offers players the chance to win prizes such as trips to Las Vegas.

Bussmann said the free-to-play game can help customers new to sports betting adjust to the game, potentially earning MGM an audience in certain states before sports betting even launches.

Later this year, the companies will test a sports betting program in New Jersey, with sights set on expanding the program across the country as more states legalize sports betting. The program will offer enhanced odds and free bets when the BetMGM app is used inside a Buffalo Wild Wings restaurant.

Additionally, Buffalo Wild Wings will begin showing custom sports book content on its TVs that feature live odds from BetMGM, and at least three Buffalo Wild Wings sports bars are expected to open in MGM properties or in partnership with BetMGM as more states come online. One of the new sports bars is slated to open in Mandalay Bay next year.

“Adding access to MGM’s world-class properties and the BetMGM mobile app will create unique customer experiences and redefine how fans enjoy sports,” said MGM CEO Jim Murren in the statement.

According to Grove, players can expect more partnerships like this in the near future as sports betting continues to expand.

“I would expect this to be the year you see an incredible flurry of these kinds of announcements. This is just the tip of the iceberg,” he said. “We’ll find out in a few years how valuable some of these partnerships are.”

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