

Poker tables keep decreasing on Nevada casino floors

Written by Administrator

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When the Monte Carlo casino closes its eight-table poker room in about a month as part of a \$450 million overhaul, the Las Vegas Strip will be down nearly a quarter of the tables it had a decade ago.

Casinos constantly adjust their floors to meet customer demand. And unlike the boom years when they competed for card fans after everyman Chris Moneymaker won the World Series of Poker's main event in 2003, poker's appeal in Sin City has been weakening this decade.

Some casinos have made their poker rooms smaller. Others have eliminated them entirely.

"Casinos added more tables in response to popularity, and once it became less popular, they took away the tables," said David Schwartz, director of the Center for Gaming Research at the University of [Nevada](#), Las Vegas. The peak of the poker room was 2007.

In 2002, before fans of Texas Hold 'Em began to rush to the Strip, casinos had 144 tables and made \$30 million from the game. Five years later, casinos had more than tripled their poker revenue to \$97 million with 405 tables. Last year, the game netted them only \$78 million after the number of tables decreased to 320.

The situation is similar across the state. Casinos had 907 tables and made \$168 million in 2007. Last year, they took in \$118 million from 661 tables.

Even the game's proponents understand poker has never been a big moneymaker for casinos. That's because instead of gambling against the stacked odds of the house as they do in blackjack or slots, players wager against one another and the casinos take a portion as a fee for hosting the games.

Casinos were willing to do that to keep players in their establishments while the game's popularity soared. The boost was fueled by the rise of internet gambling and a watershed moment in 2003 when Moneymaker, as an amateur, won \$2.5 million as people watched on TV.

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The landscape drastically changed in 2011, when the federal government cracked down on internet poker and blacked out major sites — a moment poker enthusiasts refer to as "[Black Friday](#)".

MGM Resorts International, the owner of the Monte Carlo, attributes its decision to close the property's poker room to an overhaul that includes a full rebranding with the launch of a new luxury hotel named Park MGM and a version of the widely acclaimed NoMad Hotel. The company's nearby Aria and Bellagio properties have poker rooms.

The Hard Rock Casino Hotel east of the Las Vegas Strip closed its poker room earlier this month. Other Vegas casinos that have shed their poker room since 2010 include Ellis Island, Palms and Tropicana.

Property officials carefully choose games for their valued space and are always looking to maximize their revenue per square foot. Meanwhile, floors are generally smaller overall as casinos have morphed into full-service resorts with nightclubs, shopping areas, restaurants and other amenities.

"Gaming has become a smaller portion of the overall revenue mix and things like poker rooms are candidates for further evaluation as to whether they make sense or not at a casino property," said Brian Gordon, a principal at the Las Vegas-based research firm Applied Analysis.

[Caesars Palace](#), owned by the company that owns the World Series of Poker, relocated and downsized its poker room by two-thirds in 2015. But the revenue it now generates is much higher per square foot, said Seth Palansky, the tournament's spokesman.

"We recognized the room was bigger than it needed to be," Palansky said. "You can make a lot more money per square foot with a nightclub-dayclub these days than you can with a poker table."

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