

Vail Resorts adds photo features to EpicMix app

August 31 2011, By CATHERINE TSAI , Associated Press

(AP) -- Tens of thousands of skiers used Vail Resorts Inc.'s free EpicMix application last season to track how much they were skiing and to compete with friends and strangers over how many digital pins they could collect for their feats.

This season Vail is adding photos to the mix.

"As successful as the first version was, a lot of people just don't care about vertical feet or collecting pins," Vail Resorts CEO Rob Katz said. "Photos is a game-changer because everyone cares about photos. Everyone particularly cares about photos if you have kids."

EpicMix uses scanners mounted on lifts at Vail Resorts' six ski areas to automatically read radio-frequency identification tags embedded on people's lift passes as they ride by.

It compiles on-mountain statistics for each visitor. Nothing is posted publicly until a user activates an EpicMix account and chooses to share information, whether it's on the EpicMix website or through automatic [status updates](#) on Facebook and Twitter.

This year, visitors who want action shots of themselves on the mountain can ask resort photographers to scan their lift passes. When the photographer shoots their pictures, low-resolution copies of the images will automatically be sent to their EpicMix accounts for sharing on social media sites like Facebook or photo sites like Shutterfly at no cost, the

company said Wednesday. Children's photos are sent to parents' accounts.

Customers can buy high-resolution versions for \$19.99 apiece. They also can use EpicMix to [share photos](#) they've shot themselves.

Vail Resorts is hiring a "couple hundred" photographers to shoot the photos, Katz said.

Katz didn't disclose costs.

Vail Resorts expects the new features to drive popularity for EpicMix, which last year had almost 100,000 people of all ages and incomes activate accounts. That represents an adoption rate of 15 percent among visitors, even though the digital pins collected through EpicMix are just for bragging rights.

The new features are set to launch in December.

To encourage EpicMix use, Vail Resorts is scrapping nearly all paper lift tickets for plastic cards embedded with radio-frequency ID tags. It costs the company about 60 to 80 cents extra per ticket to have the tag embedded, Katz said.

There are other changes too. This season, people will be able to personalize the updates EpicMix generates for [Facebook](#) and Twitter. There are also 200 new pins people can earn, and what it takes to win pins won't be secret anymore.

Broomfield, Colo.-based Vail Resorts owns Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge and Keystone resorts in Colorado and Heavenly and Northstar-at-Tahoe in California.

Katz declined to say what officials are considering for future versions of EpicMix.

Not everyone loves EpicMix. "I don't use it actually," said snowboarder Melissa Kurle, 32, of Denver. "I just think it's a Big Brother way on the mountain to track your every move."

Katz said EpicMix is aimed at enhancing visitors' experience and that details on which lifts individual customers are riding aren't worth much to the company.

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