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Casino perks come 3 ways: Game, time, bets

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As most gamblers have probably realized, membership in the players' club of a casino often leads to offers showing up in your mailbox. Even non-gamblers will have a difficult time avoiding some type of offer if they've signed up for a players' club membership, and big gamblers can count on them.

Virtually all players' club systems use some type of tiered structure to send out offers and rewards to players. These systems are designed to identify gamblers by the type of games they play, how often they play, how much they wager, how long it's been since they played at the casino and a myriad number of other factors.

When offers are sent out, the operators of the system are able to identify exactly which traits they're looking for in the players for specific offers. Sometimes it's as simple as telling the system to send big free play offers to big players and smaller offers to lesser gamblers, but sometimes it's not so simple.

For instance, say you and three friends all walk into the same casino, sign up for the players' club, and begin playing. Each of you has exactly \$300 to play, and just for the sake of argument let's say you all end up penniless at the end of the day. Sound realistic?

You might think since you all lost the same amount, the offers you get in the mail next month will be identical. This is rarely the case. Usually there will be some disparity between offers. For instance, you might notice your friend got offered \$20 of free slot play and you only got \$10.

These differences arise because, believe it or not, casinos don't really care how much you win or lose. What they truly care about is what game you play, how long you play and how much money you're willing to play per hand (or spin, draw, roll... whatever) and not much else.

You see, casinos think in the long-term. While you and your friends might lose \$300 apiece one day, it doesn't mean each of you has the same probability of losing the same amount the next time you're in, or the next 20 times you're in for that matter.

One of you is likely to lose more, either because you like to play a tighter game (slots vs. video poker) or maybe you play more per hand (or a higher denomination) on the same game. Even if you play the same amount on the same game as your friends, just the length of time you play could make you a more valuable player to the casino. After all, the longer you play the more money you are likely to lose.

So rather than looking at your actual wins and losses, most casinos use something called theoretical loss when coming up with offers. Basically, this means they look at how much you play, how long you play, and what the hold percentage is on the games you usually play. They

aren't looking at how much you win or lose in a given trip; they're looking at how much you are likely to lose (not win, since the house always has the advantage) if you keep playing similarly to the way you have in the past.

While this allows the casino to better tailor offers in most cases, occasionally players get the short end of the stick. After all, no system is perfect. In our example, it is entirely possible everyone played the same game, and yet they still got different offers simply because it took longer for one player to lose his bankroll. Just being luckier can lead to a bigger offer in some cases.

Also, the casino doesn't always send the biggest offers to the best gamblers. It has become increasingly common for better offers to go to less frequent players just to get them in the door again. The logic is that sending an offer to someone who is already a regular in your casino isn't driving more business because they are probably going to play in your casino anyway. It's better to get the player in who you haven't seen in a while. That might be counter intuitive to what you'd expect, but it's the type of logic some casinos use.

So the lesson here is to keep using your players' cards and take what they give you. Don't be upset if you win or lose a large sum in a short amount of time and don't get bumped up; it's how much you should be losing *in theory* given your long term gambling habits that determines your offer status. Luckily for players, theory and actuality are rarely the same; otherwise we might never be able to win!

(Editor's Note: Brad Fredella is general manager of Stetson's Saloon and Casino in Henderson, Nev.)