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**Las Vegas: Stores on The Strip have to target more middlebrow shoppers**

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LAS VEGAS (AP) — Fewer customers shopping on the Las Vegas Strip are splurging, forcing malls to target fewer luxury and more middle-market stores to attract more sales.

Analyst Jeremy Aguero says consumers have less to spend, and even folks with money are being more judicious with it.

“We have more high-end retail than high-end consumers, and that is why there is the shift to middle-market retailers,” said Aguero, a principal at consulting firm Applied Analysis. “Everybody has less to spend.”

Laurie Paquette, vice president of asset management for the Fashion Show mall, says mid-level stores are doing better there than high-end retail.

For example, budget-friendly Forever 21 is moving from a 5,000-square-foot store to a 126,000-square-foot location.

Owners of the Miracle Mile Shops at Planet Hollywood reported sales up 10 percent through the first five months of this year compared with the same period in 2009, with a mix of more middle-market stores.

Miracle Mile General Manager Russ Joyner said luxury operators should be patient and ride through current consumer woes.

“They will have their opportunity to rise again in due time,” Joyner said.

Some mall operators are sticking to the luxury strategy despite today’s economic climate. Farid Matraki of the Crystals mall at CityCenter says its tenants appreciate it keeping high-end neighbors.

“We leased the building in the worst economic time ever and we know that,” Matraki said. “But despite that, we had a mission, and we stayed on that course on that mission. We knew we wanted a certain type of client and we pursued (that client).”

Aguero said that because Strip retailers are skewed toward the high end, the area’s mix of stores has to shake out. He wonders whether there is too much on Las Vegas Boulevard.

“The jury is still out on that question today and whether they do well is a function of visitors coming back and opening their wallets,” he said. “For stores that are more competitive, they are likely to capture a greater share than higher-end retail.”

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