

Vail Resorts' CEO talks about the future of the ski industry

By SKI

As CEO of Vail Resorts, which owns Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge, Heavenly, Northstar and other properties and ventures, Rob Katz oversees one of the largest and most sophisticated ski-resort operations in the world. Katz is a strong believer in the power of emerging technologies to connect skiers to each other and to their favorite mountains.

SKI > What areas of a resort's operation will change the most in the immediate future?

RK > Snowmaking. The snowmaking of the future will use vastly less energy and will have a very tight system of recycling water, automated in such a way that snow is only made in exactly the right moments during the day, and you can use snowmaking not just for early or late season but also cost effectively during the season to continually optimize the conditions.

SKI > How will skiers and boarders get to the top of the mountain?

RK > We will still be using the same basic technologies, but the lifts will run much faster, be much larger and will carry more people. The process will be more streamlined, but the modern lift system works pretty well today. We need to make it easier to get from your transportation to the lifts. That's where you could see giant conveyor belts.

SKI > What about trails? How will they differ?

RK > Trail design hasn't changed radically in the past 75

years. Honestly, we don't want to alter the mountain experience so much that people lose a sense of nature. Terrain parks are a completely different story. There is unlimited potential for new features and experiences. You could ski loop-de-loops, moderating thrill and creativity with safety. The runs will look the same. The parks, however, will look nothing like today.

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