

Utah ski resorts go on marketing offensive

By Brady McCombs, AP

SALT LAKE CITY – Utah officials launched a \$1.8 million campaign Tuesday to market Salt Lake City as “Ski City USA” in an effort to lure skiers away from top destination spots like Colorado and earn a bigger chunk of the lucrative winter sports market.

A package of online and print advertisements highlights the benefits of Salt Lake City being a short drive from four ski resorts located in the Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons east of Salt Lake City: Alta Ski Area, Brighton Resort, Snowbird Ski Resort and Solitude Mountain Resort.

Salt Lake County Mayor Ben McAdams said during a news conference Tuesday that no other ski destination in the United States offers the quality of terrain and proximity to a major airport and large city with restaurants, bars and night life.

McAdams was joined by other local government leaders, tourism officials and ski resort executives during the unveiling of the campaign.

“It’s about time that we all got together and realized this whole valley is the base camp for the skiing that will happen in our four ski resorts,” said Tom Dolan, mayor of Sandy, a Salt Lake City suburb that sits down the hill from the ski areas. “We all benefit from skiers who come here from all over the world.”

Visit Salt Lake President Scott Beck said the new campaign is absolutely aimed at luring skiers away from Colorado, which annually registers about three times more skier visits than Utah, according to figures from the National Ski Area

Association. Last season, Utah had 4.1 million day visits from skiers and snowboarders – compared to 12.6 million in Colorado.

Vicki Varela, managing director of the Utah Office of Tourism, said her office's research has shown that more than half of people who are shown a picture of Salt Lake City's skyline with the mountains behind think it is Denver.

"It's outrageous that we have the product and they have that brand," Varela said. "This gives us the story that we deserve to have on the national stage."

The new marketing campaign doesn't include three resorts near Park City, Utah, also located a short drive from Salt Lake City.

Last week, Vail Resorts Inc., a ski industry titan based in Colorado, purchased Park City Mountain Resort in a move that put an end to a messy legal battle between the two major companies and paved the way for the creation of what could be the country's largest resort. Vail also operates the adjacent Canyons ski area.

McAdams mentioned Park City by name in listing other ski towns that don't match what Salt Lake City has to offer. But Visit Salt Lake President Scott Beck said the campaign isn't a response to Vail's entry into the market or an attempt to steal skiers away from their neighboring resorts.

The four resorts in this program are partners with three Park City resorts – Canyons Resort, Deer Valley Resort, Park City Mountain Resort – in another long-term plan that is being promoted by Utah ski officials. In a program being called, "One Wasatch," a plan is being hatched to link seven ski areas with connecting lifts that would give the state a European-style experience.

If that plan comes to fruition – there is no timeline yet – it

would be like "Sky City on steroids," Beck joked.

The campaign is paid for by Visit Salt Lake, which gets its revenue from a tax visitors pay when they stay at hotels. The branding campaign won't replace the long-running statewide slogan, "The Greatest Snow on Earth," which is on Utah license plates and used throughout promotional materials.