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Half a million visitors descend on Las Vegas each week, and virtually all of them want to spend some money, have a good time and do it all within a few blocks on one street – Las Vegas Boulevard South, a.k.a. the Strip. Which means the competition to get into the hottest clubs, restaurants and shows, or even to book tee time at one of the city's best golf courses, is fierce. That's where Steven Striker comes in. The man that the *Today Show* called "the ultimate insider" in Vegas can get you past the lines and into the best seats without a hassle. "I have a simple slogan," says Striker: "Anything, Anywhere, Anyhow."

A third-degree black belt in karate and a former competitor on the martial arts circuit, Striker cuts an impressive and confident figure in his \$1,000 suits, deep tan and neatly trimmed grey goatee. He founded Striker VIP a decade ago, after spending 20 years



Gambling built Las Vegas. The fact that the city is still expanding at record speed proves the pastime has lost none of its appeal. (opposite, top) The Fremont Street experience. (top) the Stratosphere's rotating restaurant, Top of the World, affords killer viewing; (right) 4 Queens casino, a Glitter Gulch landmark; (far right) Mermaids' greeters.



"If you expect to enhance the family fortune, or even win enough to make it a costless vacation, you are almost surely doomed to failure."

—Peter Steiner, Thursday-Night Poker

If you build it, they will come. That was mobster Bugsy Siegel's vision when he constructed Las Vegas's first big, glitzy casino, the Flamingo, in 1946. Siegel didn't live to see his dream flourish. After going wildly over budget on construction costs he was murdered by his East Coast financial partners. Yet the Flamingo gave Las Vegas exactly what it needed to become Nevada's number one gambling destination – a luxurious place where the high rollers could spend their money in style. The Flamingo, a riot of vibrating pink neon, still exists today, though Siegel wouldn't recognize it, or anything else about the town.

In Siegel's day, less than 9,000 people lived in Las Vegas. Today, at nearly two million, it's the fastest-growing metropolis in

the U.S., with a population swelling so quickly that it needs to issue two phone books a year – one in January and one in July – and a new street map every year. Although the city's location, in a desert basin rimmed by rust-colored mountains, affords several spectacular nearby sightseeing options, including Hoover Dam, Lake Mead, Red Rock Canyon and a dozen national parks, the majority of its 35 million annual tourists don't come seeking natural wonders but rather those of the artificial variety, which are plentiful in a place that magician Penn Jillette calls "A Disneyland for adults bad at math." According to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, 87 per cent of tourists will gamble during their stay, and though the LVCVA doesn't mention it, most

promoting pro athletes and working with sports organizations such as the NFL's San Francisco 49ers. The premise behind the company is simple: athletes and movie stars always receive the royal treatment, so why not give the average Joe the same opportunity when visiting Glitter City?

Services range from VIP access to nightclubs to prime seats to any show, from helicopter rides over the Strip to bachelor parties. If you want a private guide, Striker can provide that too – and she will be a looker. "I don't have any guys working for me, only good-looking girls," he says. And if you want to hire Striker personally, you can do that too. But it will cost: his rate is \$350 an hour.

"In Vegas, it's all about who you know," he says, "and I'm 'the who' you need to know."

Details: Striker VIP Inc. (702-895-8426; striker@strikervip.com) □