

Are guests ready for keyless entry in hotels?

14 January 2015

By Brendan Manley

HNN contributor

Source: Hotel News Now – www.hotelnewsnow.com

REPORT FROM THE U.S.—Major hotel conglomerates such as Hilton Worldwide Holdings and Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide are rolling out new mobile keyless guestroom entry systems that replace plastic hotel keycards with a guest’s mobile device, but it’s not just the locks that will potentially need an upgrade.

There could be a considerable learning curve and transition period for many travelers, including those who don’t presently use or own a smartphone. That’s not deterring proponents, however.

“I think it’s inevitable that this is going to happen,” said HotelTonight CEO Sam Shank, whose company recently demoed at Google I/O 2014 its own keyless entry solution as an outgrowth of its mobile app’s Express Check-In functionality. “There’s just so many benefits to it, in terms of security and convenience. ... You’ll see it in a lot of places.”

The change isn’t likely to be too jarring for traditionalists, considering conversion plans usually provide for locks that work with both key cards and mobile devices. Therefore, if a guest’s phone battery dies, he loses his phone or just doesn’t care for technology, he can still get into the room. Staff will be trained to handle other pertinent technical questions as well.

“Our solution will allow traditional keycards to continue to work alongside the mobile-enabled doors,” said Dustin Bomar, VP of digital acquisition for Hilton, which will mandate the new locks at all United States-based Conrad Hotels & Resorts, Hilton Hotels & Resorts, Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts and Canopy by [Hilton](#) hotels in 2015.

“If a guest feels more comfortable using a traditional magnetic-strip key, they can simply pick up a traditional key at reception. For those guests who are more hesitant about adopting new technology, our team members are always happy to answer questions and walk them through the digital processes,” Bomar said.

Based upon the popularity and ubiquity of express check-in for travel—whether it’s at the airport kiosk or through a hotel mobile app—experts believe similar levels of adoption of keyless entry will occur in the future. For many travelers, front-desk interaction is an unwelcome, time-consuming process; others still prefer some form of human contact. For now, sources said it’s best to cover all the bases and plan for a diverse range of guest preferences.

“Mobile room keys are certainly something Hyatt (Hotels Corporation) is pursuing and, in fact, we’re already testing a number of solutions,” said Brett Cowell, VP of strategic systems for [Hyatt](#). “We have learned that some guests, after the end of a long travel day, want to go straight to their room, while others prefer engaging with the front-desk staff just to say ‘hello.’ Some guests are happy to use self-service technology, and some want assistance. These insights keep us continually testing new offerings.”

Security scares?

Another prime hurdle is easing users’ fears in the age of the hacker. Security of the keyless method remains a prime concern for guests and operators alike, but experts claim the solution is not only safe, but as effective—if not more secure—than standard plastic hotel keycards with magnetic stripes.

“All of Hilton Worldwide’s proprietary systems undergo rigorous testing and validation,” Bomar said. “Before new technology is deployed to our hotels, this rigorous internal testing is supplemented with certification by external security experts. The mobile-enabled room key solution will be as safe as the traditional magnetic-strip keycard widely used today.”

[Starwood Hotels](#), which will retrofit 30,000 doors at 150 hotels worldwide by early 2015, touts similar security features for its own keyless entry system.

“We have been working in close collaboration with our lock manufacturer ... and have developed a software and hardware solution that is safe, reliable and design-forward, and just as secure as today’s key card,” said Chris Holdren, senior VP of global and digital at Starwood Preferred Guest. “The software is a highly secure, two-part key system. ... It requires users to enter a personal password along with an additional temporary code that is sent directly to their mobile phone.”

Sources said consumer acceptance outside the hotel environment will drive usage of keyless entry within hotels, similar to other recent advances in mobile technology (i.e. streaming) that have trickled down into new guestroom designs and accessories. [HotelTonight](#)’s Shank pointed to similar uses for keyless smartphone functionality in office buildings, as well as upgrades such as Bluetooth- and Internet-enabled locking devices early adopters have already started installing at home.

“For many consumers, they’re going to experience this technology first outside of a hotel stay. Once they’re presented with it during a hotel stay, it’s going to feel natural,” Shank said. “I think it’s important to talk about the benefits of it, versus the perceived inconvenience of it, such as things like batteries going dead. For me, I like having fewer things that I can misplace.”