

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

## Hilton turns to celebrity ambassador in consumer-centric campaign

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Anna Kendrick at the Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills. Image credit: Hilton Worldwide

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Waldorf Astoria parent company Hilton Worldwide has recruited actress Anna Kendrick to star in a new series of advertisements touting the hospitality group's revamped rewards program.

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As third-party booking Web sites such as Expedia continue to disrupt the travel industry, hospitality brands are reinforcing the value of direct booking and long-term relationships. The new campaign, called "Expect Better. Expect Hilton," also features the Hilton Honors mobile application.

"The campaign seems to be focused on using humor and a celebrity to attract attention to the commercial and the brand, especially the benefit of booking direct versus other channels," said Ron Kurtz, president of the [American Affluence Research Center](#), Atlanta. "Mobile apps are important to business travelers who often need to change travel plans or to arrange travel on short notice."

### Hilton ambassador

The campaign with Ms. Kendrick marks the first time Hilton has worked with a celebrity brand ambassador. Ms. Kendrick, known for her down-to-earth, offbeat personality as well as singing and acting talent, has previously appeared in ads for fashion label Kate Spade.

The actress fronts a series of playful videos in which she explains to other Hilton guests how they benefit from booking travel directly through Hilton's Web site or app.

### *Anna Kendrick explains the Hilton Honors program in a new campaign*

In "Family," Ms. Kendrick tells a guest that she booked her family vacation through Hilton's digital properties to find the best hotel for each relative. She booked her dessert-loving cousins at a Doubletree, which is known for its cookies, while booking herself at the Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills even though her family is vacationing in Miami.

The bits feature scenes from various Hilton properties and show different suites and amenities, including restaurants and pools.



*Anna Kendrick for Hilton. Image credit: Hilton*

Coincidentally, Ms. Kendrick received an Academy Award nomination for her role in the film "Up in the Air," which prominently featured Hilton Honors and the American Airlines rewards program.

Through Hilton Honors, members can earn points for each stay and qualify for additional discounts. The Hilton Honors app also allows guests to select their own rooms, download digital room keys and request extra pillows or snacks.

Guests who book directly through Hilton channels can also taking advantage of the brand's Price Match Guarantee. In a customer-centric move, if a guest finds a better room rate, Hilton will match the price and discount the cost up to 25 percent.

Hilton recently ranked ninth for best customer service experiences in a recent report from C Space. Respondents considered Hilton's customer services to be consistent across the globe ([see story](#)).

#### Luxury loyalty

In addition to Waldorf Astoria properties, guests can earn Hilton Honors points at Conrad Hotels & Resorts and Hilton locations.

Loyalty programs are one of the best ways to ensure continued customer retention, something hotel brands are embracing by unifying those programs across multiple brands and merging luxury with mass market.

With loyalty programs, customers are rewarded for consistent purchases through slowly accumulating new benefits.

Earned benefits are powerful factors in ensuring a continued relationship with customers. For hotel brands, including Hilton Worldwide and Marriott International, the value is clear ([see story](#)).

Consumers with higher incomes are actually more apt to be part of a loyalty program than their peers, pointing to the potential benefit of these membership clubs for luxury brands.

According to a report from CrowdTwist, affluent consumers are some of the most active loyalty users, with these shoppers most frequently cashing in rewards. As consumers become more distrustful of data collection, luxury brands can leverage loyalty programs as an incentive for opting in ([see story](#)).

"Rewards programs give frequent travelers the opportunity to splurge by taking their family on vacations with free hotel nights," Mr. Kurtz said.