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Ritz-Carlton taps email for American Express partnership

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By RACHEL LAMB

Hotel chain Ritz-Carlton is using email to entice reservations at its properties with special promotions when guests use American Express cards to book their stays online.

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Depending on whether consumers stay in a city or resort property, benefits when using American Express cards vary. Ritz-Carlton is likely using email because it is an easy transition to ecommerce booking.

"This partnership makes sense because the consumer profile of both Ritz-Carlton and American Express overlap," said Courtney Albert, brand strategist at [Parker Avery](#), Atlanta. "This promotion further establishes American Express as a preferred partner of Ritz-Carlton."

"Additionally, even though the both brands have the same profile of consumer, they might not have the ability to share in detail because of privacy issues," she said. "I would assume that a majority of people who take advantage of this promotion were already planning to use this combination of brands for their travel plans or might have been on the fence."

"In the eyes of the guest, this can be seen as an added amenity or bonus during their stay."

Ms. Albert is not affiliated with Ritz-Carlton, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Ritz-Carlton did not respond before press deadline.

Express upgrade

The email sent to the Ritz-Carlton database has the subject, “Enhance your stay.”

In the email, consumers are told that they will get complimentary room upgrades and hotel credits if they book using an American Express card. Recipients can click through the email for more information.



Email from Ritz-Carlton

Ritz-Carlton also included two new hotels after the American Express email. This is likely a strategy to send visitors to the newly-opened properties in Montréal, Canada, and Okinawa, Japan.

When consumers click through the email, it takes them right to the [booking page](#) with American Express card benefits.

Guests looking to book in a resort receive a daily American breakfast for two, \$100 resort credit per night, a destination experience once per stay and a room upgrade.

Meanwhile, consumers who stay in a city property receive a daily American breakfast for two, \$50 hotel credit per night, a destination experience once per stay and a room upgrade.

The screenshot shows the Ritz-Carlton website's booking interface. At the top, there are links for 'THE RITZ-CARLTON STORY', 'LOCATIONS', 'OFFERS', 'MEETINGS & WEDDINGS - SPA', 'REWARDS', 'RESIDENCES & CLUBS', 'SHOP', and 'RESERVATION'. The main area features a large photo of a couple relaxing on a sofa. To the right is a form titled 'Check Room Rates & Availability' with fields for 'Select a Hotel', 'Arrive' (Jun-2012, 15), 'Depart' (Jun-2012, 16), 'No. Rooms' (1), 'Guests Per Room' (1), 'Reward Number', and a checkbox for 'Use Rewards Points'. Below the form are buttons for 'RESERVE', 'Reserve by Phone', and 'Edit/Cancel Reservation'. A note at the bottom left says: 'Make a reservation with any American Express® Card and receive a room upgrade plus valuable hotel credits that can be used for dining, spa services and much more. Also enjoy daily American breakfast for two and a destination experience once per stay.' and 'Package varies by location.'

Ritz-Carlton booking page with American Express benefits

Hotel credits can be used for dining and spa purchases. This could be a move by Ritz-Carlton to make consumers spend more at the properties rather than leaving to go elsewhere.

Seasons e-greetings

Ritz-Carlton has finely-tuned its email campaigns.

The hotel chain started off the new year by sending multiple emails to remind its database to visit its properties worldwide. Ritz-Carlton sends emails promoting a specific hotel or all of its properties, in general, and promotes discount packages and branded accessories in the process.

All of the emails link to the commerce-enabled site to increase online bookings.

Indeed, Ritz-Carlton has been putting a lot of effort into increasing the user experience.

For example, the brand planned a multichannel marketing effort that included email to flaunt its just-completed five-year, \$65 million investment to its Amelia Island, FL, property to further enhance the guest experience ([see story](#)).

In addition, Ritz-Carlton just came out with its first branded mobile application, a feature that the company told consumers about via email and in its properties at check-in ([see story](#)).

Ritz-Carlton is offering a few perks such as hotel credits and free room upgrades, but it is careful not to dilute itself by giving too much away.

Frequent promotions and discounted prices are traps that many high-end hotel brands fall into, which could dissuade the truly affluent from picturing them as luxury establishments.

Since email is an opt-in channel, this medium serves as a good way to entice consumers to stay without making Ritz-Carlton seem desperate for visitors.

"Other luxury marketers can use this as a case study," Ms. Albert said. "Sometimes it can be tricky to offer promotions within the luxury industry without hurting brand equity."

"This particular scenario is a win, however, because we have two equal luxury brands rewarding consumers for doing something – traveling and using a credit card – [and] they already had a higher possibility in doing and shifting those actions towards two particular brands," she said.

Final Take

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