MOBILE

Starwood taps Passbook for mobile member benefits

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By TRICIA CARR

Starwood Hotels & Resorts is enabling its preferred guests to upload their member card to the Passbook application for the iPhone's iOS 6 for instant access to account information and reservations at all nine of its brands including the St. Regis and The Luxury Collection.

Passbook lets iPhone users who are Starwood Preferred Guest members add their cards to the platform and see account details such as Starpoints balance, year-to-date earned nights, customer service contacts and upcoming stay details. Soon, users will also be able to add an SPG Stay Pass to Passbook that corresponds to an upcoming hotel stay and shows a complete reservation confirmation.

"While it is undeniably the early days for mobile wallets, Starwood is wisely giving its customers choice on how to quickly and easily access available points, statuses and more," said Jeff Hasen, chief marketing officer of Hipcricket, Kirkland, WA.

"Some guests will want to use Passbook to pay," he said. "Others may just want to get to their information fast.

"Given the fact that the affluent over-index when it comes to the use of iPhones and iPads,

going the Passbook route makes sense for Starwood."

Mr. Hasen is not affiliated with SPG, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

SPG was not available for comment before press deadline.

Free pass

SPG members can add their member card to Passbook by visiting http://spg.com/passbook.

Members will soon be able to download their member card from the SPG app after the next update. SPG Stay Passes will also be available through the app update in early December.

The SPG member card in Passbook is double-sided.

SPG member card

The front of the card shows the Starpoints balance, member number, member level, year-to-date nights and stays and each member's path to the next membership level.

The back of the card shows a customer service contact and upcoming stay details.

SPG cards in Passbook are updated within minutes on any changes to a member's account.

Starwood anticipates that it will use the mobile bar code on each member card in Passbook to enhance members' stay in the future.
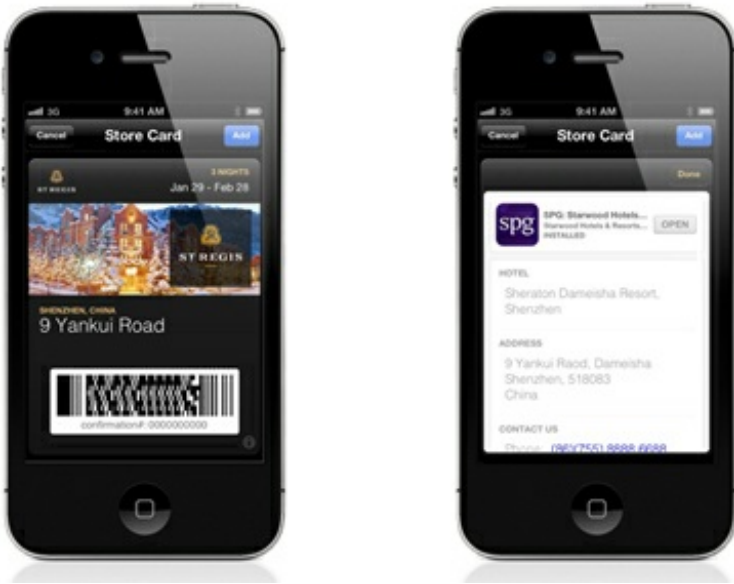
SPG Stay Pass, coming soon

Mobile priorities

Starwood uses mobile often to enhance its member program.

Earlier this year, the company updated its SPG mobile app to create a seamless, guest-centric experience. The updates include content based on whether or not the user is planning, en route or already checked-in to a specific hotel.

The personalized "My Stay" interface allows fully-integrated booking, member information, hotel searches, travel details, FaceTime customer service and social media.

Users must enter their SPG information to have the personalized experience.

Detailed information, photo galleries, transportation options, weather and local attractions are available for each hotel at each of Starwood's brands when consumers are in the booking and researching process (see story).

In addition, Starwood is encouraging SPG members to book via its Web site and mobile app through a fourth-quarter campaign that offers bonus rewards when consumers visit properties.

Members will get double and triple the Starpoints depending on how many nights they book through Dec. 20 at the brand's hotels including St. Regis and The Luxury Collection, as well as bonus points for bookings on SPG.com and the SPG iPhone app and foursquare check-ins (see story).

"A luxury brand would be making a mistake by betting it all on Passbook this early in the game," Mr. Hasen said. "It is all about understanding the customer and prospect and building mobile programs accordingly.

"Reach is important, so those who want to engage with a brand via mobile are not shut out because they have the wrong device or are without the appropriate app," he said.

Final Take

Tricia Carr, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York