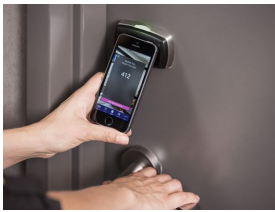


# Smartphone room entry comes to Detroit's Aloft Hotel

Lauren Abdel-Razzaq, The Detroit News 4:55 p.m. EDT March 19, 2015



(Photo: Starwood)

Detroit's Aloft Hotel at the newly renovated David Whitney Building will become the first hotel in the state to allow guests to open their rooms with their smartphone.

The Starwood Hotel and Resorts property, which opened in December, is the latest hotel to use the keyless entry technology that is being put into more than 140 properties in the Aloft, Element and W hotel chains across the country.

SPG Keyless, which is what the hotel is calling the technology, allows guests to bypass the check-in line at the hotel and open their doors by tapping their phones on the door lock. It's similar to near field communication (NFC) on Apple's iPhones that allows users to pay at some stores with a tap or flash of the screen.

Starwood is banking on its customers who are tech savvy and ready to try something new.

"We are excited to be the first in our industry to debut this new technology allowing us to further deliver on the wants and needs of our early adopter, hyper-mobile guests who use their smartphones for just about every aspect of their lives," Chris Holdren, senior vice president, Starwood preferred guest & digital, said when the smartphone entry was launched in November.

A general manager at the Aloft Hotel in Detroit did not return a request for comment Thursday.

Starwood first switched to smartphone app entry at three properties and will gradually roll it out to more hotels this year, the company said.

Once customers book their hotel rooms, they can opt into SPG Keyless and register their phone through the SPG app. A day before arrival, guests receive their room numbers and Bluetooth key via the app. When they arrive at the hotel, guests can go directly to their rooms. Once Bluetooth is enabled on their phones, they can use the app to tap their smartphones on the door lock and enter the room.

The company is leading the way on this new technology, which many analysts say will be the norm for hotels in the future.

"The hotel industry is trying to make things as convenient as possible for guests, to reduce all the friction that exists in terms of the travel experience," said Robert Cole, founder of RockCheetah, a hotel marketing strategy and travel tech consulting firm. "It all falls on mobile applications."

Hilton Worldwide is the only other hotel chain to publicly acknowledge plans for mobile room keys — which it plans to roll out at the end of 2015 at more than 250 U.S. properties in its Hilton, Waldorf Astoria, Conrad and Canopy brands.

Streamlining processes is something all hotels are trying to do, and mobile apps are a big player.

For example, Marriott International launched the ability to check in through its app at its 4,000 hotels worldwide by the end of last year. When a room becomes available, a message is sent to the guest's phone. Traditional room keys are pre-programmed and waiting at the front desk. A special express line allows guests to bypass crowds, flash their IDs and get keys.

At Hilton, all 4,000 properties worldwide have a similar check-in process. The one added feature: Guests can use maps on the app to select a specific room.

InterContinental Hotels Group is testing express check-in for its elite loyalty program members at 500 hotels, primarily in the U.S.

While developing and implementing the technology can be costly, the return on investment is good because the apps allow hotels to have a direct line to their customers, says Cole.

"If you have a smartphone app that you need to get into your room, that app is active and that provides these little opportunities for offering specials and offerings on a personalized basis," he said. "It can be a terrific tool for the guest if the hotel is responsible and respects their privacy."

Switching to smartphone room keys won't come too quickly. The top 15 hotel companies worldwide have a combined 5.2 million rooms. Many hotels have made updates over the past few years, but they remain the minority.

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