NFC-Enabled Smartphones Replace Hotel Room Keys and Check-ins at Clarion Hotel

| October 17, 2013

With the advent of smartphones featuring Near Field Communications (NFC) technology, the same device used to make calls and access email can also be used to open office and residential doors, and to even check in to a hotel and go directly to the room without first having to visit the front desk. This capability was first demonstrated by Clarion Hotel Stockholm, whose goal was to solicit feedback from guests and employees regarding the use of NFC phones for a variety of services.

In the Clarion pilot, selected hotel guests received a Samsung® mobile phone with NFC technology and digital keys software from ASSA ABLOY. They booked their hotel rooms the usual way and received confirmation on their mobile phones. Before arrival, they were texted a link for on-line check-in, after which a digital hotel room key was delivered to their phones. Upon arrival, guests skipped the check-in line, went directly to their rooms, and opened their doors by holding their mobile phones close to the door locks. Upon departure, the doors locked automatically, and guests checked out by touching their phones to a lobby kiosk, which completed checkout and deactivated their room keys.

Streamlined services

The technology makes it possible for guests to receive a text message saying that their room at the hotel is ready, along with a request to check in. If the guest checked in at the hotel using the mobile phone prior to or upon arrival, this activated the key function on the phone. With the NFC function in the phone, guests are also able to call reception, book a taxi, or connect to a direct internet link that give a weather forecast, just by holding the phone next to a service panel on the desk.

Contributors to the Clarion pilot included ASSA ABLOY, as well as Giesecke & Devrient, TeliaSonera and VingCard® Elsafe. ASSA ABLOY has also launched a commercial ecosystem for issuing, delivering and revoking digital keys on mobile phones with NFC technology. The ASSA ABLOY Seos™ ecosystem consists of interoperable electromechanical locks and readers, mobile phone applications, a secure digital key delivery mechanism and a Trusted Service Manager (TSM) for delivering and managing applets in the phone's secure element. Seos digital keys will also work with solutions based on the iCLASS SE® access control platform from HID Global, an ASSA ABLOY Group company. The iCLASS SE platform includes iCLASS SE readers and iCLASS Seos™ cards that are interoperable with commercial and residential locks, as well as NFC-enabled smartphones and other devices carrying Seos digital keys.

It has been estimated that more than 650,000 hotel locks have already been deployed that can be configured to work with NFC-enabled smartphones. Meanwhile, the adoption of NFC technology in mobile phones is progressing steadily, driven by device retailers, mobile network operators, financial institutions and the access control industry, among others. As more and more NFC-enabled phones become available, hotel guests will have an extremely convenient and secure option for checking in and out of their rooms. Lines of guests waiting at reception will be a thing of the past, security will be improved, and hotel staff can spend more time enhancing service levels in other ways.

"Mobile keys are a great way to enhance the guest experience and add value to hotel loyalty applications, and it is also environmentally friendly", said Marcus Majewski, General Manager, Clarion Hotel Stockholm. "We get a closer relationship with our guests and can add information on promotions and events. Our survey of participants showed that 60 percent reacted positively to the prospect of getting information about hotel offerings using the service."

Pilot participants were also asked about other benefits. Approximately sixty percent of respondents said they saved more than 10 minutes by using the digital key solution, and 80 percent said they would use the solution if it were available today. The hotel also benefitted in several ways (apart from reducing the expenditure on plastic cards) by re-focusing the staffing resources from checkout to other, more valuable service issues. It was also much easier to replace lost keys when needed.