

For high-end Scandic Hotels, using wood is the key to being green

BY BRUCE SERLEN

HEDE, SWEDEN—Checking into a Scandic Hotel, a sophisticated upscale chain of 170 hotels located throughout Scandinavia, isn't much different than checking into any upscale hotel—except that the key card you're given to open the electronic lock on your guestroom door is made of wood, rather than plastic.

"Scandic mandates the use of wooden key cards in all their hotels," noted Peo Akesson, founder & CEO of Sustainable Cards, a five-year-old company based in Hede, Sweden, that developed, manufactures and markets the wooden key cards. "The chain has a very strong reputation for being environmentally friendly and makes it a priority to source only the most sustainable products for their properties."

Sustainable Cards has begun trying



Scandic Hotels' key cards are made of wood, showing a commitment to the environment. Miami-based hotel, The Betsy, is on board too.

to make inroads in the U.S. market on two fronts. "First, we want to make hotel companies based in the U.S. aware of the environmental advantages of our product. But we also want to interest existing manufacturers of plastic key cards

to possibly include our wooden cards in their product offering," noted Akesson, who is presently based in Boulder, CO.

"Over the years, electronic door lock systems have enhanced the security of hotels and have also made operations much more secure," explained Bruce Humphrey, the company's vp of hospitality. "But there is a downside to the plastic

key cards in use today." Namely, more than 2,000 tons of PVC ends up in landfills every year in the form of hotel key cards, Humphrey continued. Using existing technology, the company has produced a completely sustainable hotel key card.

Rather than being made of PVC or recycled PVC, the key cards are made of birch wood. Three layers of the wood are used, cross-hatched like ply-

wood, to ensure they're as durable and flexible as traditional key cards. "From the point-of-view of wear and tear, they last as long as plastic cards," noted Humphrey, who is based in Chicago.

The company uses birch that comes from managed forests exclusively. "So for every tree that is chopped down to make our keys, another tree is planted. The trees we're using right now come

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Sustainable birch key cards are an eco-friendly alternative to plastic

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from Sweden, but birch trees are found in plentiful supply in other parts of the world as well," Humphrey said.

Improvements have also been

made in the quality of the adhesive, which is used to hold the layers of wood together. "We now use organic, plant-based glues that work well," he added.

The company already has had

some penetration in the North American market. A few hotels have started using the cards, including The Betsy, a boutique hotel in South Beach, Miami.

In addition, some hotels have

started using them on a short-term basis to draw attention to their commitment to sustainability. The Westin Tabor Center Hotel in Denver, for example, has used the wooden key cards

to commemorate Earth Day and for various promotions.

Hotels using the wooden key cards are given a wooden sign to display on the front desk, explaining how the card works and its environmental benefits. "It's a handsome sign and reinforces the message that the hotel values sustainable practices," Humphrey said.

The wooden key card comes in two formats: magnetic strip or RFID (Radio Frequency ID) enabled. Both have all the functionality of their traditional key card counterparts, including the audit functionality.

The cost of the wooden cards is a bit higher than traditional cards, but given how popular



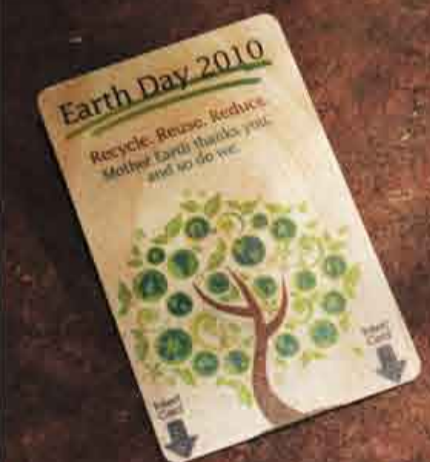
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In addition to using wooden key cards for room access, they can serve as a promotional tool for hotels.

green initiatives have become in recent years, Humphrey believes the wooden cards' 100-percent sustainability justifies the difference.

"Often there's a lot of waste associated with traditional cards, regardless of the cost involved," he noted. Hotels, for example, will print news of limited time restaurant offers on them. After the dates have expired, hundreds of the cards are discarded in the trash.

Sustainable Cards plans to add other in-room items to its product line, plastic items that could be made from wood. "Do not disturb" signs are a likely possibility. Folders on the guestroom desk with information about the hotel might be another possibility. In addition to hotels, the company markets wood cards to loyalty programs and to retailers for use as gift cards. **HB**

