



CardzGroup

Hotel Procurement Landscape

How Major Hotel Chains Buy RFID Key Cards — And How to Win

STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE

Vertical: RFID Hotel Key Cards

Products: MIFARE Classic 1K, Ultralight/C, DESFire EV2/EV3, T5577, HID iCLASS

Chains Covered: Marriott, Hilton, IHG, Accor + Lock System Ecosystems

Prepared: March 23, 2026

INNLEAD.AI

B2B HOTEL SUPPLY INTELLIGENCE PLATFORM

Executive Summary

Key findings from InnLead.ai's analysis of how major hotel chains procure RFID key cards and where CardzGroup can capture market share.

GLOBAL HOTEL
ROOMS

17.5M

Top 10 chains
combined

ANNUAL KEY CARD
SPEND

\$1.5–2B

Global addressable
market

LOCK VENDOR
INFLUENCE

75%

Cards specified by
lock OEM

AVG. REORDER
CYCLE

90 days

Consumable
replenishment

^ Market Tailwinds

- Magstripe-to-RFID migration still underway — 30% of global hotel rooms yet to convert from legacy magnetic stripe to contactless RFID
- DESFire EV2/EV3 security upgrade cycle forcing chip technology change across major chains
- Post-pandemic renovation wave creating bulk new-property card orders (600K+ rooms in pipeline)
- Independent hotels searching for alternatives to overpriced lock vendor card supply programs

∨ Market Headwinds

- Lock vendors (ASSA ABLOY, Dormakaba) bundle cards with lock contracts, creating vendor lock-in
- Mobile key adoption threatens physical card volume at tech-forward chains (Hilton, Marriott)
- Long qualification processes via lock OEM approval programs delay revenue 6–18 months
- Price-only competition from commodity Shenzhen card factories with no quality differentiation

📌 STRATEGIC IMPLICATION FOR CARDZGROUP

The RFID hotel key card market is uniquely structured: lock system vendors (ASSA ABLOY, Dormakaba, Allegion) control card specifications, not the hotels themselves. CardzGroup's path to chain-level volume runs through lock vendor approval programs and compatibility certification. Western ownership, ex-Gemalto expertise, and Visa/Mastercard print certification position CardzGroup to bypass commodity-supplier stigma and compete on technical credibility — but only if compatibility testing data leads every sales conversation.

How Hotel Chains Procure RFID Key Cards

The 7-step procurement process for RFID key cards at major hotel chains. Unlike most hotel supplies, key card procurement is driven by lock system vendor ecosystems, not traditional GPO catalogs.

1 Lock System Selection (The Real Decision Point)

The hotel selects a lock system vendor (VingCard, Saflok, Onity, Salto). This decision — made years before any key card purchase — determines which RFID chip technology the property needs. VingCard systems require MIFARE Classic or DESFire; Saflok uses MIFARE Ultralight or Classic; Onity specifies proprietary encoding on MIFARE chips.

2 Lock Vendor Card Recommendation

Lock vendors maintain approved card supplier lists. ASSA ABLOY (VingCard) recommends specific card suppliers through their "VingCard Certified" program. Hotels ordering through the lock vendor pay 40–60% premium over direct-from-manufacturer pricing but receive guaranteed compatibility.

3 Property-Level Reorder (Consumable Pattern)

Unlike capital equipment, key cards are a consumable. A 300-room hotel consuming 3–5 cards per room per month orders 10K–20K cards quarterly. Front desk managers or operations directors handle reorders, often using the same supplier the lock vendor originally recommended — unless given a reason to switch.

4 Chain-Level Procurement (Volume Contracts)

For chains with 50+ properties, corporate procurement negotiates volume contracts covering all properties. These 2–3 year agreements specify chip type, card dimensions, print quality standards, and tiered pricing based on annual volume (typically \$0.15–\$0.45 per card for MIFARE Classic, \$0.80–\$2.50 for DESFire EV3).

5 Compatibility Testing & Validation

Before approving a new card supplier, the chain's IT team tests sample cards against every lock firmware version deployed across the portfolio. A single encoding failure at a single property kills the deal. Testing typically covers 500–5,000 sample cards across 3–5 representative properties over 30–60 days.

6 Artwork & Brand Standards Approval

Brand standards teams approve card artwork, Pantone colors, logo placement, and finish specifications. Luxury brands (St. Regis, Waldorf Astoria) require premium finishes (metallic foil, spot UV). Select-service brands (Fairfield, Hampton) prioritize low cost with standard CMYK printing.

7 Ongoing Supply & Quarterly Review

Once approved, suppliers enter a reorder cycle. Performance is measured on: encoding failure rate (<0.5% threshold), print quality consistency (Delta E <3), on-time delivery rate (>95%), and lead time adherence. Annual business reviews determine contract renewal or competitive rebid.

Lock System Ecosystem & Contract Structures

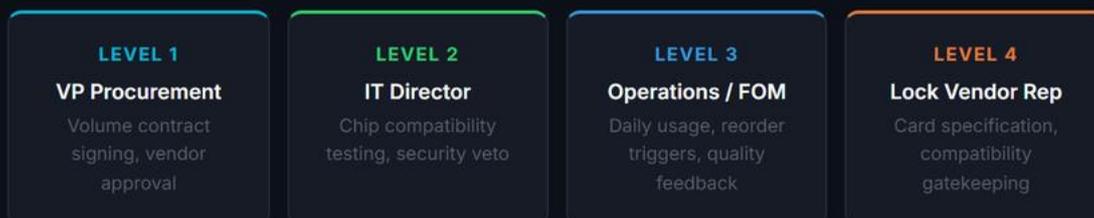
The lock vendor determines which chip technology a hotel needs. Understanding this ecosystem is the single most important factor for RFID key card market entry.

<p>ASSA ABLOY / VingCard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market share: ~40% of global hotel lock installations • Chip requirements: MIFARE Classic 1K (legacy), DESFire EV2/EV3 (current) • Card program: VingCard Certified Supplier program — requires application, testing, and annual audit • Bundling: Aggressively bundles card supply with lock maintenance contracts • CardzGroup opportunity: Apply for VingCard Certified status; ex-Gemalto credentials strengthen application 	<p>Dormakaba / Saflok</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market share: ~25% of global hotel lock installations • Chip requirements: MIFARE Ultralight C (primary), MIFARE Classic 1K (legacy Saflok RT) • Card program: Less formal than ASSA ABLOY; accepts third-party cards if they pass encoding tests • Bundling: Offers card supply but less aggressive about lock-in than VingCard • CardzGroup opportunity: Lower barrier to entry; provide encoding test documentation and competitive pricing
---	--

Key Card Contract Structures

CONTRACT TYPE	DURATION	PRICING MODEL	BEST FOR
Lock Vendor Bundled Supply	Tied to lock contract (5–10 yr)	40–60% markup over market	Risk-averse chains wanting guaranteed compatibility
Chain-Level Volume Agreement	2–3 years	Tiered volume pricing (\$0.15–\$2.50/card)	Multi-property chains with 1M+ annual card volume
Property-Level Purchase Order	Per order	Spot pricing or standing order	Independent hotels, franchise owners reordering directly
Distributor / Reseller	12–24 months	Wholesale + distributor margin (15–25%)	Regional coverage via lock system distributors

Decision-Maker Hierarchy for Key Card Procurement



Procurement Calendar & Regional Variations

Annual RFID Key Card Procurement Calendar

QUARTER	HOTEL PROCUREMENT ACTIVITY	ACTION FOR CARDZGROUP
Q1 (Jan–Mar)	Annual budget finalization. Procurement teams review card supplier performance from prior year. Contract renewals begin for current-year agreements. Bulk orders placed for spring renovation season.	Submit capability presentations to chain procurement directors. Respond to RFIs. Send updated lock compatibility test results from latest firmware versions.
Q2 (Apr–Jun)	Peak renovation season drives new-property card orders. Trade shows (HITEC in June, HD Expo). RFP season for chains evaluating new suppliers for following year.	Attend HITEC with encoding demo station. Submit RFP responses. Ship sample cards to properties for live lock testing. Focus on DESFire EV3 migration sales pitch.
Q3 (Jul–Sep)	Vendor selection decisions made. Contract negotiations for following year. Summer travel peak drives consumable reorder spikes. Independent hotels place largest orders for fall conference season.	Close pipeline from Q2 trade shows. Negotiate volume agreements. Fulfill rush orders with rapid turnaround to demonstrate supply chain reliability.
Q4 (Oct–Dec)	Budget planning for next fiscal year. Holiday travel surge creates emergency card reorder demand. Year-end performance reviews of existing suppliers. PIP announcements for following year.	Position for next-year contracts with QBR results. Fulfill holiday rush orders. Submit proposals for PIP-related card refreshes launching in Q1–Q2.

Regional Procurement Variations

Key card procurement patterns differ significantly by region, driven by lock vendor market share, technology adoption pace, and purchasing structures.

NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

- **Dominance:** ASSA ABLOY (VingCard) and Dormakaba (Saflok) control 65%+ of lock installations
- **Technology:** Accelerated migration to DESFire EV2/EV3; MIFARE Classic being phased out
- **Purchasing:** Chain-level contracts via GPOs (Avendra, Entegra) or direct procurement
- **Mobile key impact:** Highest adoption (Hilton 60%+ mobile key penetration) but physical cards still required as fallback

ASIA-PACIFIC & MIDDLE EAST

- **Dominance:** Mix of ASSA ABLOY, Dormakaba, plus regional players (MIWA Japan, Hafele Asia, ADEL China)
- **Technology:** MIFARE Classic 1K still dominant; slower DESFire migration due to cost sensitivity
- **Purchasing:** Property-level purchasing; fewer chain-mandated vendor programs
- **Growth:** 600K+ new hotel rooms in pipeline (China, India, Saudi Arabia, UAE)
- **CardzGroup advantage:** Shenzhen

- **CardzGroup entry:** Target independent hotels and franchise owners who bypass GPO contracts

- **CardzGroup advantage:** Shenzhen manufacturing base enables fastest lead times and lowest logistics cost for APAC customers

ⓘ KEY CARDS ARE A CONSUMABLE, NOT A CAPITAL PURCHASE

Unlike lock systems (5–10 year replacement cycle), key cards are consumed and reordered quarterly. A 300-room hotel uses 12K–18K cards per year. This consumable pattern creates recurring revenue once a property is onboarded — the real value is not the first order but the ongoing reorder stream.

CardzGroup should prioritize frictionless reordering: online portal, artwork on file, standing order automation, and regional warehouse inventory for 48-hour delivery.

Chain-Specific Procurement Approaches

How the Big 4 hotel chains structure their RFID key card procurement and the best entry strategy for CardzGroup.

Marriott International

8,800+ properties | **30** brands | **VingCard** primary lock system

- Standardized on ASSA ABLOY VingCard across most brands; migrating to DESFire EV2
- Central procurement via Avendra manages card supply for select-service brands (Fairfield, Courtyard)
- Luxury brands (Ritz-Carlton, St. Regis, W) have more flexibility for premium card finishes
- **Entry path:** Target APAC Marriott franchise owners who purchase outside Avendra. Lead with DESFire EV2/EV3 pricing advantage and Shenzhen proximity for fastest delivery

Hilton Worldwide

7,500+ properties | **22** brands | **Mixed** lock systems

- Mix of VingCard, Saflok, and Onity across portfolio — no single lock vendor mandate
- Entegra manages procurement for most categories; key cards often property-level decision
- Highest mobile key adoption (Digital Key) but physical cards still required for all properties
- **Entry path:** Target Hilton franchise owners via AAHOA network. Offer multi-chip card supply (MIFARE Classic + Ultralight C) to serve mixed lock environments

IHG Hotels & Resorts

6,300+ properties | **19** brands | **Saflok** primary lock system

- Heavy franchise model — individual owners control most purchasing decisions
- Dormakaba Saflok dominant across Holiday Inn, Holiday Inn Express, Crowne Plaza
- Brand standards specify MIFARE Ultralight C for Saflok properties but allow third-party supply
- **Entry path:** Target IHG franchise owners directly via management companies (Aimbridge, Interstate). Offer MIFARE Ultralight C at 25–35% below Dormakaba's bundled card pricing

Accor

5,500+ properties | **40+** brands | **Regional** lock vendor mix

- Does NOT use US-based GPOs; manages procurement regionally with significant local autonomy
- Strongest sustainability requirements — Planet 21 program mandates recyclable card options
- Diverse lock vendor mix across regions: VingCard (Europe), Saflok (Americas), MIWA (Japan), local suppliers (Asia)
- **Entry path:** Contact APAC and Middle East regional procurement directly. Lead with recycled PET card option and competitive DESFire pricing. EcoVadis sustainability rating strengthens application

Action Plan for CardzGroup

Prioritized steps to position CardzGroup for hotel chain RFID key card procurement success within 12 months.

✔ 90-Day Quick Wins

- Build lock compatibility test documentation for top 4 lock systems** 0–90 days
 Perform and document encoding tests for VingCard Classic/Essence/Visionline, Saflok RT/Confidant, Onity HT24/HT28, and Salto XS4 using CardzGroup MIFARE Classic 1K, Ultralight C, and DESFire EV2/EV3 cards. Publish results as downloadable PDF spec sheets on cardzgroup.com.
- Apply to ASSA ABLOY VingCard Certified Supplier program** 0–60 days
 Submit application with ex-Gemalto credentials, Visa/Mastercard print certification, 600M+ annual card capacity, and ISO 14443A/B compliance documentation. This is the single highest-leverage action for chain-level access.
- Create RFID hotel key card product catalog with per-chip pricing tiers** 0–45 days
 One-page spec sheet per chip type (MIFARE Classic, Ultralight C, DESFire EV2, DESFire EV3, T5577) showing lock system compatibility, pricing at 10K/50K/100K/500K volume tiers, lead times, and custom artwork options.

+ 6-Month Strategic Moves

- Attend HITEC with live encoding demonstration station** Q2 (June)
 Demonstrate real-time card encoding on VingCard and Saflok hardware at the booth. IT directors need to see cards work on their specific lock system before they will consider a new supplier. Budget \$15K–25K for booth, lock hardware rental, and sample card inventory.
- Launch pilot program with 5 independent hotels across APAC** 90–180 days
 Target boutique and mid-scale properties in Singapore, Bangkok, Dubai, Hong Kong, and Bali. Offer first-order pricing at cost to build reference accounts and collect lock compatibility validation data from real-world deployments.
- Build distributor relationships with lock system integrators in 3 key markets** 90–180 days
 Lock system distributors (not the OEMs) often recommend card suppliers to hotels during lock installation. Target 2–3 distributors in each of: UAE/GCC, Southeast Asia, and Greater China. Offer 20–25% distributor margin.

☆ 12-Month Goals

- Achieve VingCard Certified or Dormakaba Approved supplier status** 6–12 months
 This single credential unlocks access to chain procurement catalogs and enables lock vendor reps to recommend CardzGroup cards during lock system installations. It is the

vendor reps to recommend CardGroup cards during lock system installations. It is the difference between cold-calling hotels and being recommended by the lock vendor.

- Secure first chain-level volume contract (20+ properties)** 9–12 months
Target a regional hotel management company (Aimbridge, Interstate, Minor Hotels, Banyan Tree) managing 20–100 properties. Use pilot results as proof of performance. Target contract value: \$200K–\$500K annual recurring revenue.
- Launch online reorder portal with artwork-on-file and automated reorder triggers** 6–12 months
Key card procurement is a consumable reorder cycle. The supplier who makes reordering frictionless wins the ongoing business. Build a self-service portal where hotels upload artwork once, set par levels, and receive automated reorder reminders with one-click purchasing.