

Does Membership really does have its Privileges?

It is not our intent to endorse a particular product or service but in this case we are. The question is, "Is there a difference in credit cards and is one better than the next", read on and you will see our opinionated answer.

Recently we had 3 circumstances that solidified our belief that there is a difference between credit cards and the service that they provide. Here are three examples that solidify our belief that American Express does offer much more value to their cards than Visa. This certainly can have an effect on your economics. Especially if you just received a decline in your credit limit from your credit card company or a \$300 dollar buy out offer from American Express.

Example one: We rented a car using our American Express card. We drove the car around town and ended up at a football game. While we were tailgating in the parking lot, another attendee thought it would be funny to throw rocks at cars. One of his rocks hit the back window of our rental car shattering the window. Upon seeing this we chased the culprit down and had him arrested. We returned the car with the damage and the police report. Our insurance company covered the cost of the damage minus the deductible. American Express without being asked credited our account for the deductible. Here is a prime example of going beyond expectations. At the time of the incident we did not realize that American Express covers the deductible of the damage. When our bill came at the end of the month, there was the charge from the car rental company for the deductible and following that was a credit for the same amount from American Express. We did not ask for this, American Express did it on their own. We were very impressed with their customer service and their initiative to add on the credit, without even being asked.

Example two, we stayed at a national hotel chain for a wedding in Minnesota. We charged our stay on our Visa card. As a platinum member of this hotel we usually have great service. This time however while we were at the wedding my iPod was removed from my laptop case. Upon checking out the next day from the hotel we noticed the iPod missing and reported it to the hotel manager. The manager said it would be taken care of and not to worry, they filed a police report and we thought we would be taken care of. The hotel turned the information to their insurance company who denied the claim saying there was no proof that the item was stolen from the room. Apparently having the item when you check in and not when you check out is not proof enough. You must see the person actually take the item. We called back to the hotel who then said it is not up to them, it is up to the insurance company. At this point we received our credit card invoice from Visa. Although the hotel cost was around \$150 and the iPod was \$250, we felt if the hotel would not reimburse us for the iPod we certainly would not pay them for our stay. Let's face it, if you stay at a hotel, you expect to get a clean safe room to stay in, which did not happen. We spent numerous calls to our credit card issuer, who denied the dispute saying we received the service offered by the hotel, a bed to sleep in. If it was not safe that was not their concern. The issuer claimed they were following Visa policies and they gave us a number to call Visa directly. We contacted Visa and received the run around as well. Policies and procedures said no dispute with the inn keeper and if we had a problem with the hotel we should sue them, however in Visa's eyes we received our service and they would pay the hotel for their services. We finally gave up on Visa and our card issuer as a lesson learned. We did get reimbursed by the chains corporate executive only because the hotel manager said we would be taken care, she was no longer at the hotel after our incident to explain her response.

Our last example just recently happened. While we were on the beach on vacation, I put my sunglasses down and went in the ocean. Upon returning to my chair I noticed my shades were missing. Were they misplaced, were they stolen, unknown. I contacted American Express since I had purchased the glasses from Costco using my American Express card 3 months earlier. American Express has a policy if your item is stolen within 90 days they replace it. It turns out it was 96 days from the purchase date. While the insurance company denied the claim (sound familiar) they put us back to American Express's customer service. The customer service rep, listened to our story, put us on hold to discuss with his supervisor and came back on the phone. He said there would be a credit on my account next month for the item purchased. No questions asked, a credit appeared with a thank you for being an American Express card holder.

While this was only three examples, this is a sample of the differences experienced between the cards. While Visa is accepted in more locations, our loyalties have been decided. Unless it is not accepted by the merchant we use American Express. In our case, membership really does have its rewards.

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