Ep #199: Transferable Points Power Rankings: Comparing the 5 Major Points Programs

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg

[Points Talk®]

Ep #199: Transferable Points Power Rankings: Comparing the 5 Major Points Programs

Alex: Of the five major transferable points programs, which one is the best? Listen in as we compare them based on partners, welcome offers, and ease of earning.

Welcome to *Points Talk*®. We are three moms who've discovered how to leverage credit card welcome offers to get hundreds of thousands of dollars of travel expenses for nearly free. We've used credit card points and miles to take vacations to places like Hawaii, Paris, Greece, Maldives, Japan, and so much more. And the best part? We each still have 800 plus credit scores. Imagine being able to take the vacation of your dreams for nearly free. It's totally possible, and we're here to show you how.

Alex: Hey, I'm Alex.

Pam: And I'm Pam, Alex's mom.

Jess: And I'm Jess. Let's talk points. Today we're comparing the five major transferable points programs in our transferable points power rankings. We'll be covering Chase Ultimate Rewards®, American Express Membership Rewards®, Capital One Venture Miles, Citi ThankYou® Points, and Bilt Rewards, and ranking them based on partners, welcome offers, and ease of earning.

All right, so I will kick it off with best transfer partners, okay? Number one, you may not have seen this coming or maybe you have based on what we've been saying recently. Our number one for best transfer partners is Bilt Rewards. They currently have 24 transfer partners, 17 airlines, seven hotels. I feel like they update their transfer partners the most out of any of these banks. They're constantly, I feel like, adding new transfer partners.

Alex: Well, and I'm interested to know, how do they get all these partners? Because some of them, for example, Chase, it makes sense that they're the only ones with United because Chase issues a United card, or Citi with AA because Citi issues the AA co-branded cards. But Bilt doesn't have that same, they don't have co-branded cards. They're just a rewards program. So it's just, I don't know if that maybe makes it so they can have this flexibility where they're not a bank, but it's just interesting.

Jess: Yeah.

Pam: It's really interesting, very interesting that it's our top one. I would never have thought, even six months ago, that we'd be saying that.

Jess: So, Bilt is the only program that transfers to Atmos™ Rewards, which is the loyalty program of Alaska Airlines and Hawaiian Airlines. They are the only program that transfers to Japan Airlines and Emirates one-to-one. They are the only one, not the only one. Okay, so they still transfer to Hyatt one-to-one. With Chase, things are getting a little trickier. So if you have the Sapphire Reserve® personal or business, you can still transfer one-to-one, but starting October 1st, if you have the Sapphire Preferred® or the Ink Preferred®, that transfer is moving to four-to-three to Hyatt.

So, I like that Bilt still transfers one-to-one to Hyatt, no matter which card you have, or even if you don't have cards, you're just earning Bilt Points. You can still transfer one-to-one to Hyatt. Not all of their of their hotel partners are one-to-one, but most of them are. They also transfer to Hilton, Marriott, IHG, and Wyndham. Again, I don't necessarily think it's worth transferring your Bilt Points to those. I think Hyatt is still the star of the show when it comes to their hotel rewards.

Some other notable airline partners are United, Qatar, Southwest, Turkish, Air Canada. Lots of these airlines are partnered with programs, but Bilt has them all in one place. That's what I really like. The big one that they're really missing is American Airlines. They used to have American Airlines. Now they don't anymore. Now Citi exclusively has American Airlines, but they just have so many in one place that it just makes them, I feel like, a transfer partner powerhouse, really.

Alex: Yeah, I totally agree with you. The fact that with Atmos Rewards, that is huge that you can transfer to Atmos because Atmos has really good partner airline options. So that's a really huge one, I think. And then the Hyatt one is huge. Japan Airlines, Emirates one-to-one, that's massive. So it's just really, really good.

Jess: I keep waiting for the other shoe to drop. I'm like…

Alex: I know. I know.

Jess: I'm like, are they going to go out of business? Are they going to go like…?

Alex: I know, this is like almost too good to be true that you have so many good partners.

Jess: Is this sustainable? Like, is this sustainable long-term? I don't know, but I'm going to ride the train while I can.

Alex: Yes. Yeah.

Pam: Yeah. And I think, for we've preached and preached about what our favorite awards have been, which is Chase Ultimate Rewards for Hyatt transfers. I mean, a lot of that, there's been so many changes in that, that isn't quite as exciting as it used to be. And so I think I got it in my mind, Chase Ultimate Rewards, Chase Ultimate Rewards, there's nothing better. And now I'm seeing the transfer value is just phenomenal with the Bilt program.

Now, Chase Ultimate Rewards is still a very good program with 10 airlines, four hotels, definitely a lot less than Bilt, but it is still, without a doubt, the easiest program for beginners. Their transfer partners are really, very familiar, programs that everybody's familiar with, like United, Southwest, JetBlue, our Hyatt, IHG, Marriott, Wyndham. They're really good.

It's really is still probably, although it's not the transfer powerhouse that Bilt is, it is probably still our favorite program for new people in the program. Starting out, it's the easiest program for you to learn about transfer programs. Really good transfer programs. Doesn't come up quite as often as maybe some of the others. I have transferred Chase Ultimate Rewards to the Flying Blue program before. Obviously, I've done it to United. I would say that it's best to only transfer to IHG and Marriott when there is a transfer bonus. Otherwise, it just doesn't make a lot of sense.

But yes, the Chase Ultimate Rewards program is still a great transfer program. We still hold it in very high esteem. But we're giving it to Bilt as being the big powerhouse. So Alex, you've got what's our what's comes in number three?

Alex: Yeah. So, first of all, this is all just our opinions here. This is… you can have, you can think very differently. There's no right or wrong answers. I think a lot of it will depend on your personal travel style, the airlines you fly. For example, if you're an AA person and you exclusively fly AA, your best, the winner of this for every category for you, is probably going to be Citi ThankYou Points. And so, just take what we're saying with a grain of salt. It's just our opinion, just a fun little discussion. Okay, next up…

Pam: You do you.

Alex: Yeah, you do you. Next up, we're doing Amex® and Citi. We, it was a toss-up. Jess and I were talking about this one last, we were together recently at a trip in Chicago, and I was working on this outline. I was like, what do you think should get third? And she's like, I don't know. I think... you said Citi, didn't you?

Jess: Yeah, I said Citi.

Alex: You said Citi. I was like, I could, but I can see an argument for Amex. And so basically that means Capital One is getting fifth place, which, no shame on that. And I think the reason is, they don't really have transfer partners that are unique to Capital One. Their transfer partners, other people have them as well. And so, still a great partner, still a great, or still great partners in a great program and one that we are always going to be like, yes, let's get as many Venture Miles as we can get. But as far as transfer partners, the other two just edge it out a little bit.

So, third and fourth is a tie between Amex and Citi. So, Amex, that's the one you're going to want if you fly Delta. If you're going to be wanting to, you know, transfer points to Delta. If you're flying AA, Citi is the best option. Now, Citi has 20 partners, 15 airline, five hotel. Some of their notable transfer partners are AA- like I said, we've said before- the only program that transfers to AA, Turkish Airlines, there's other partners that transfer to Turkish, but not very many. That's why it's still a really good partner for Citi. Only one that transfers to EVA Air one-to-one. And I know, Mom, that's actually how you used your ThankYou points when you first had this, as your first ThankYou...

Pam: Right, to go to Thailand.

Alex: Yeah, and it's a, it's, I don't think EVA Air gets a ton of, like, not everyone talks about it a ton because I do think it's on the, it's going to cost you more points to book these flights. But let me tell you, the airline gets rave reviews.

Pam: It is so good.

Alex: So if you're wanting to go to Thailand, you're fine spending a little bit more, that would be a good option.

Pam: No, it's an amazing airline.

Alex: JetBlue one-to-one; Chase is the only… yeah, Chase is the only other one that transfers to JetBlue one-to-one.

And then for the hotel side, you have Choice Hotels®. So, one Choice point is 1.5… I'm sorry, one ThankYou point is 1.5 Choice Rewards. Transfers one-to-two to Preferred hotels. It was one-to-four, so they did just recently slash that in half, but it is still a little, it's better than one-to-one. So the hotel options for Citi aren't as strong. I feel like that's where Amex beats Citi, is on the hotel side.

So Amex has 19 partners, 16 airlines, three hotels. Delta is, if you're looking for domestic, Delta is a good option. A lot of their other airlines are ones that other partners have. And so it's like, everybody has Flying Blue; everybody has Singapore. So it's not as, you know, I really need my Amex points for that Flying Blue flight. You know what I mean?

But another unique one for them is ANA, and the problem I find with ANA is I think it takes what, like, 48 hours after you transfer your points. It used to be a much sweeter spot when ANA allowed people to book around the world, and you know, that's all changed in recent years. ANA is still a really good program. I know you've booked with them, Mom, to go to… You went to Australia and did a stopover.

Pam: Australia. Mhm, in Tokyo.

Alex: Yeah. And they're part of the Star Alliance, so you can find good rewards booking, you know, flights to Europe. Even, I've personally never used ANA, though. I know a lot of people have and they really like have had really good luck with it. It's just a program I haven't used yet.

Now, hotels though, their Amex, I think beats Citi here. They have one-to-two to Hilton, which is really good. They're the only program that transfers, you know, above one-to-one to Hilton. So that's really nice. And sometimes you'll even have a transfer bonus where we've seen it be what, one to… was it a 40% transfer bonus? I think that's the highest we've seen.

Jess: Yeah, we've seen 40%, but I feel like there's regularly 20 to 30% transfer bonuses.

Alex: So yeah. So that makes that deal even better. They recently added a new partner, Leaders Club. So this is Leading Hotels of the World. Now, this transfers four-to-one. So you see that and you're like, well, that sounds terrible. Four Amex points is one Leaders Club point. But Leaders Club, their nights, they have rates that can start as low as 4,000 points, to 20,000 points a night, and more than that as well. There's no award chart, so you don't really know. You're going to have to just search the individual hotels. But if a hotel costs you, you know, let's say it's a 10,000 points a night, that's 40,000 points a night for your Amex points, and you're staying at a really nice boutique hotel. That can be a pretty good value. So they're boutique properties, lots of international properties. You can get 1.7 to 2 cents per point, which is really, really good.

So I'm interested to learn more about Leaders Club and seeing which properties are out there. I know they have some properties that were voted like best hotels in the world. So it could be a really interesting one to dive into a bit more. You know, it's it's those types of properties where usually you can't use points to book some of these standalone hotels, these boutique hotels. So I think it's an exciting new partner. So we'll have to see kind of how that shakes out. But that's, I would give third and fourth, Amex and Citi, a tie. Fifth place would go to Capital One.

Jess: All right, quick plug, Points Talk® Premium is where we share what we don't talk about here, bonus content, updates, and more. Subscribe at the show notes or at pointstalk.supercast.com.

Okay, now we are moving on to welcome offers. Which has the best welcome offers? Okay. First place for this one is going to American Express®, just because they have, a lot of their cards have a high minimum spend, but they also have really high welcome offers that can make that minimum spend worth it. I find their cards are great to get when you have a high expense that you otherwise, it's like, I can't otherwise hit the Business Platinum™ minimum spend, but it's the holidays or like I have to get new tires on my car, or I have to pay my estimated taxes, and now's a great time to get one of these cards.

And so, for the Business Gold, they have as high as 200,000 Membership Rewards, Business Platinum, as high as 300,000 Membership Rewards. I mean, 300,000 points from one welcome offer, that also won't count towards 5/24, is pretty dang good.

You can get targeted for these cards while you have them. So, I currently have a Business Platinum; Ted has a Business Platinum. We also both have Business Golds currently, and I got targeted for a Business Gold for 125,000 points, one of those mailers. We've seen people get targeted for 175,000 for the Business Platinum Card. Sometimes you can get higher, and so that's another reason why they get first place for welcome offers is they tend to be a little bit more generous, especially with those targeted offers, than some of the other banks, even though they have a “once per lifetime” rule. They're a little loosey-goosey with that rule.

Alex: Yeah. I remember when they bumped up the Business Platinum to 300,000 points and literally like my jaw dropped to the floor. I was like, what? 300,000 points from one card? That goes really far, especially when you think of like, okay, I could transfer these to Flying Blue. Flying Blue might have, and then they could even have a transfer bonus when you transfer Amex Membership Rewards to Flying Blue. And then let's say the flight's 30,000 points, like, but I don't have to transfer that many because…

Anyways, you can just see how like 300,000 points could go crazy far if you're booking going through the right transfer partner and there's a transfer bonus and you know, it's one of those lower like, you know, one of those airlines that cost less. Or, like, sometimes Virgin Atlantic will have flights where you can fly for like we did premium economy, and it was 17,000 points from Boston to London. That's really cheap. And so it is just wild to think of, wow, 300,000 points, what could I do with 300,000 points? You can do a lot. So it's pretty crazy.

Jess: Yeah. And then on the personal card end, the personal Gold has as high as 100,000 points. That's pretty much on par with other cards, other comparable cards from other banks. With the Platinum, personal Platinum has as high as 175,000 points. So, if you have a player two, if you're getting multiple of these cards, if you're getting one of each of these cards, you're racking up some serious Amex points with these welcome offers. So they are, no question, our number one spot for best welcome offers.

Alex: All right. For second place, this one was a little hard because we love ourselves some Chase welcome offers, but I gave the edge here to Capital One just barely because really what sold me was their business offers. I know we just talked about a lot of about business offers from the Amex cards, but they it's they're not as high as the Amex ones, and the spend is really, really high. So this is not going to work for everybody. We're just going strictly off the number of points you can get from a welcome offer.

So, the Spark Cash Plus sometimes can have 200,000 points after spending $30,000. I know that's a ton. It's not going to work for everybody. But if it does, you would have because you earn 2x on everything, you would have 260,000 points from that one offer. The Venture X Business card, you would have 210,000 points because you're getting 2x on every dollar you spend after you spend $30,000, like 210,000 points. That's a ton of points.

Now, the Capital One Venture Business, this is a, you know, a little easier for people to hit this spend. It's $10,000 in three months. You're going to earn 100,000 points, but because you're earning 2x on everything, it's 120,000 points.

So, I think just earning the ability to earn 2x on all your purchases with all Capital One cards pretty much, you're it takes that welcome offer and just makes it that much higher. You know, because with other cards, it's like, oh yeah, I'm going to earn 2x on this and maybe 3x on this and 1x on most other everything else. It just, it's harder to translate that value that you're getting from the welcome offer with the additional points because it just depends on where you're spending your money.

So I also think it gets a tiny edge, I mean tiny, tiny minuscule edge with the welcome offer when you compare the Sapphire Preferred and the Venture. I think they're both typically around 75,000 points, but you're going to have a little more points because of that 2x. When you're done meeting your minimum spend on that Venture, you'll have 83,000 points. And so, and you have to, I think the minimum spend on the Venture is $4,000. The Sapphire Preferred is $5,000.

And so I, I guess a part of me is I just get excited when I get a Venture card offer, and I'm working on a spend because I'm like, oh cool, I'm going to earn like I did the Capital One Venture Business. And it's like, oh cool, I'm going to earn 100,000 points. This is great. But then you're done, and you're like, oh cool, I have 120,000 points. You kind of forget that you get that 2x, and then you're like, oh, this is awesome. So, I give this slight edge to Capital One on the welcome offers for second place.

Pam: Yeah, I agree with you. I mean, it doesn't mean that we don't love the Chase welcome offers. We are here for them all the time. They have some really solid offers. The thing that I like is they seem to increase them periodically. It's not like you're waiting once a year, you've got to get, you're going to get an increase. I think they do it periodically. It seems like every now, you know, quite often throughout the year, one of their cards has an increase.

Now you can get both the Reserve and the Preferred. You don't have to just get one or the other. You don't have to wait like the Venture or the Venture X or worry about the order of when you get them, like with the Amex Gold and the Amex Platinum. That's kind of a pain. I mean, honestly, we will say that they, there are more restrictions on the no-annual-fee business cards. We're kind of sad about that. But if you haven't started on that yet, you, we are jealous. You are in a good place. They are great cards to get. They have no annual fee. I mean, who doesn't want to not have an annual fee, and they can earn you a lot of points.

And I would say Chase, you know, very regularly has offers for at least 100k, just even on, you know, on everything up to, you know, your 200,000. One thing that's really nice too is that there it's a lot less spending for business cards from Chase then than from Amex or Capital One. So that makes it more appealing for someone who's never gotten a business card before and's like, I can't possibly spend $30,000, or I can't possibly spend $20,000. You know, you do have some lower spend options to get into the business cards slowly and then work your way up.

Alex: Yeah, I think that Chase is going to make the most sense for the most people. Like, most people aren't going to hop out and be like, I'm going to open this Amex Business Platinum card and spend $20,000 or whatever, you know, whatever it is at the time. And so Chase is really great because it has that lower entry where you don't have an annual fee and you have a much lower minimum spend. So it's a lot easier to, you know, swallow that minimum spend amount and a lot more attainable for most people. So, for a lot of you, Chase is probably going to be might be your top spot in this category.

And I think that's the kind of interesting thing too about doing this is you're seeing like not one bank gets first place in every category. You know, not one gets last in every category. They all kind of shift around and change because it just depends on what you're looking for, what you need. And none of them are just have everything perfectly. You know, like they've got to be competitive with each other, anyway.

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All right, so fourth place, giving it to Citi. Perfectly fine welcome offers. There's like nothing to complain about. I just feel like they don't increase them as often as the others do. You know, it's like we might see an offer go up once a year, maybe, and sometimes it's not even that often. And so, if you do see a limited-time offer on a Citi card, you want to take it because they don't come around very often.

And then number five is Bilt. So they got first in their last category, but they get dead last in this next one because they only have one card with a welcome offer, and it's a measly 50,000 points. So it's nothing to be writing home about. You know, when you compare it to getting 300,000 points or 100,000 points, it's not in the same realm as the other as the other options. So Bilt gets number five.

Jess: All right, but the next category, ease of earning on everyday spend, Bilt, specifically the Palladium card, is back on top at our number one spot. This card earns 2x on every purchase. We love a no-thinking card. And the cool thing is, if you have a stash of Bilt Cash, you can spend $200, you can redeem $200 of Bilt Cash for the Points Accelerator. We have talked about how much we love this option.

So once you redeem that $200 of Bilt Cash, you earn 3x on your next $5,000 in spend. You can do this up to five times per calendar year. That's a total of $25,000 in spend, or 75,000 points that you're getting from earning 3x, the 3x multiplier on all your everyday expenses. And so, the Bilt card is my go-to card for Amazon. It's my default Amazon card because I'm like, I'm earning 3x on all my Amazon purchases without even thinking about it. You know, and it's like, I know people will take their cards, and they'll go buy gift cards to, like, earn more multipliers, but I'm like, I don't want to do that. Like, this is just so easy to just, I don't have to leave my house. I just put my Bilt card as my default on something like Amazon or something that's only going to…

Alex: I save it to my Apple Pay too. So if I'm like shopping online, I'm like, okay, I don't want to re-enter every credit card thing. I'm just okay, done.

Jess: Or like when I pay my electric bill, I'm like, 3x on my electricity. It's just one of those cards that's so easy to earn 3x on all those other expenses that you would normally just earn the flat 1x on. So, Bilt Palladium in particular is getting our number one spot for that.

And then number two is Capital One. Like Alex said, we love earning just a flat 2x on everything. Capital One makes it so easy. It's a great no-thinking card. And so, Capital One is number two spot for that reason. Number two for 2x.

Alex: And we didn't even plan that. Okay. Next up, it's another toss-up between Citi and Chase. Now, Citi had the edge before. I would have given Citi third place, no questions asked. But then the Sapphire Preferred, they made some changes to that card. So, I'm going to get into that in a minute. But the Citi Strata Premier®, you get 3x on travel, dining, grocery, gas, and EV charging. Literally where people spend the most. I mean, they hit it out of the park on that on that on the Citi Strata Premier with where you're spending your money.

Now though, CSP just got a lot more competitive. They have 3x online grocery orders, select streaming services, gas and EV charging, dining and vacation homes. So very similar to the Citi Strata Premier. I mean, theirs is online grocery, you can't just like get 3x if you walk into your local grocery store, but and you know, the 3x is just on the vacation homes, not on all travel, and you get then you get 2x on everything else. But they're so close, and they have the addition of the select streaming. And I'd rather have, for me and my particular how I like to travel, how I'm using my, I'd rather have Ultimate Rewards than ThankYou points because I'm not a big AA flyer. So that would totally change depending on, you know, your airline of choice.

But the other thing that I like about both of these programs, they have similar systems where you can earn points on a no-annual-fee card and then move them to a premium card that allows you to transfer your points out. So, for example, if you have a Freedom Unlimited, you can earn points on your Freedom Unlimited, move them to your Sapphire Preferred, and then from there transfer them to your transfer partners. Citi works similarly where you have the Citi Double Cash, and then you can earn your points on the Citi Double Cash, move them to your Citi Premier, move them out to transfer partners. So I love that option that they both offer that where you can earn points on no-annual-fee cards with really good spending categories.

Now, I do give the edge to Chase here because Chase has the Freedom Flex℠, where you earn that 5x on rotating categories, and that is the time, Jess, where I do switch out my, who I'm, my Bilt card on Amazon. When Flex has 5x on Amazon, I move my Amazon spending to my Freedom Flex card. And Citi no longer has a rotating categories card like that. They used to, and then they got rid of it.

So they're very similar earning potential. So I will let the listener decide which one they prefer. For me, it's going to be Chase Ultimate Rewards because I value those points more, but they're very, very close.

Pam: Okay. Well, sadly, Amex, you're in the bottom of the barrel, it sounds like, on this. Although, I will say that the personal Gold card is a card that almost every family should have for everyday spend. It is a great card because it earns 4x on restaurants and grocery shopping. I mean, so for that in itself, it's a great card for families to have. The Platinum earns 5x on flights. I mean, that's great, but it's nothing to write home about. And you know, there's other cards that I'd rather be earning, maybe not as much on, but still earning on flights. There is just not as many bonus categories to earn points on spend like the other programs. There are too many areas where all you're going to earn is 1x. I mean, that just does not excite me.

To be honest, I'm not the best person at maximizing my daily spend. Sometimes I'm, and I think it comes to the fact that I have historically, throughout my career in doing this, I'm constantly meeting a minimum spend. So I'm not even looking at anything.

Alex: Your career?

Pam: My career.

Jess: I mean, it is your career now.

Pam: It is, yes, yes. Ever since I started doing this, I'm earning a minimum spend on something. So that's the card that I'm using. But for many people, they're not getting, you know, eight cards a year, which, you know, as a family and stuff. And so minimum, using everyday spend, the right card can be great.

Now, another card that is really good for business owners is the Business Gold. So if you have a real, legitimate, thriving business, I know business owners who really earn a lot of points with this. You earn four times in the top two areas on your first $150k of spend on these areas like US advertising and select media, online TV, radio, running ads for a business. This can be a big way to make a lot of spend. US purchases at restaurants…

Alex: Yeah, I know people who max that out all the time because they're doing like Facebook ads for their business. And so that can be a huge...

Pam: It can be huge for those people. I mean, I don't, it doesn't work for my business. But US purchases at restaurants, including takeout and delivery, US purchases at gas stations, transit purchases, monthly wireless telephone service. I could definitely think that advertising is where you could earn really a ton if you've got a big thriving business. You know, overall, it's got good earning potential, but it is just beat out by the others. So, sorry, Amex.

Alex: I think the thing is, though, is my, just because someone's getting, you know, fourth or fifth doesn't mean we don't love them. We love all five of these programs, and anytime we can earn points with any of them, we are like, yes, please, and thank you. We will take all of the points from any of these programs anytime we can get. It's just interesting thinking about, okay, like which one's better in this category? And what one's better in this? But getting fifth in these categories isn't a bad thing. So we love them all.

Pam: And each of us has cards, all of these cards. So you know, having a portfolio that is diversified is huge. And so, yeah, these are, none of these are slackers. We just had to go in and play around and pick the best of the best.

Okay, so like we said, we love all of these points. We will earn, like Alex said, as many of each of these points as we can. What's the best in each category will really vary from person to person. If you love AA flights, you'll want to focus on Citi. You love United, then Chase and Bilt Points are your best options. Any Delta fans out there will want to get more Amex points. Each program has its place. If you enjoy today's episode, please leave a rating and a review.

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