

23 05 2008 - There's Something New About Starbucks

Starbucks has been stepping up its efforts to counter its gradual loss of popularity as the economy seemingly worsens each day. Despite the looming recession or "lack thereof," as it is sometimes called, Starbucks is hard at work making sure that its customers keep filling up their cups at one of the coffee-giant's thousands of locations nationwide.



Last fall, Starbucks began giving away free cards with codes that could be used to download songs at no charge from the iTunes Music Store. The promotion disappeared for a short while but recently resurfaced in the spring and has been gaining momentum ever since. The company's partnership with Apple will also soon allow you to purchase the music playing at your local Starbucks from an iPhone or wireless-enabled computer. Though the feature's been rolled out in a select number of

Despite its ventures into the realm of music, the coffee company hasn't forgotten the two things that made it shine just a few short years ago: it's coffee and its customers. In an interesting effort to bring the two back together, Starbucks introduced its Starbucks Card Rewards program earlier this year. Typically, something like this would require a credit card with a virtually endless contract riddled with charges and legal terminology not fit for anyone outside of Yale. The twist, however, is that the program isn't for credit card owners. It's for anyone with a Starbucks gift card.

The card now enables all sorts of interesting benefits like unlimited free refills on coffee, free wireless internet, and free modifiers to your drinks (i.e. soy, mocha). Of course, you'll need to register the card online but it's nothing that should take you more than a minute or two and I haven't noticed an influx in "Starbucks" e-mail after signing up.

Also new to the chain are Starbucks' new "Treat Receipts" which are earned after each purchase early in the day. Unlike your standard receipt, these can be redeemed for discounts after 2PM the same day. They let you get virtually anything on the menu in a Grande variety for only \$2 - a nice incentive to increase your trips to Starbucks throughout the day.

Starbucks has also been softly expanding its menu beyond coffee into a new beverage line labeled "Vivanno." Though it carries a fancy italian name (as does the rest of the menu) that most customers will probably pronounce incorrectly, the new smoothie offerings are much better than I had initially expected them to be and with both Banana Chocolate and Orange Mango Banana both coming in below the 300-Calorie mark, they're not terribly bad for you. They're no substitute for a good diet, but they're definitely great options for anyone who's looking for the healthier side to indulgence.