

THE DIGITAL FUTURE OF A HOTEL STAY



Our modern age is defined by our technology and how it's become a part of our day-to-day lives, yet when traveling hotels have struggled to keep up.

Everyone from business travelers to the common vacationer has their life somehow linked to digital technology with iPods, smart phones, tablets, and laptops. Hotels, amazingly, are slow to offer a way for guests to plug-in and integrate with the hotel. Even something as simple as internet access is difficult to get without being charged a princely sum. Amazing because internet access is something that is freely available at coffee shops like Starbucks or even McDonald's now offers free internet access at many of their locations.

However, some hotels are beginning to change by providing more ways for guests to plug-in. There may be a day very soon where guests could have a complete stay from making a reservation to ordering room service to receiving their checkout receipt without speaking to a single real person. They can achieve this completely by digital means.

There are a couple of reasons for this change of attitude among hotels. One reason is that a hotel or a hotel chain can really stand out in the market by offering new and appealing technologies to their guests. A second reason is that early adopters of technology are an appealing demographic for hotels, not only because of their economic affluence but also their propensity to tell others practically immediately about their stay. A hotel with a significant technological component for the geek-set would be reason enough for them to brag across all social media platforms about their hotel stay.

Social media is a great equalizer that both the large chain hotels and the small independently owned bed and breakfast can use. Consider how a guest can put up their own pictures from their smart phones onto Pinterest bragging about their stay. Or another guest tweeting in real-time how they are on Twitter using the hotel room's multiple monitors. Immediate word-of-mouth.

An Example at Check-in

Taking concierge service into the digital age a pair of boutique hotels in New York are greeting guests at the door with an iPad carrying greeter. Using the iPad the hotel greeter is able to check-in guests and create room keys either in the lobby or in transit to the room. Not only does this service enable a more friendly and relaxed check-in, it also introduces the guests to the person who will be acting as their concierge for their stay. The greeter/concierge is easily made available by texting.

One hotel in Hong Kong is doing away with people altogether. Check-in actually starts when they are picked up at the airport. The shuttle vehicle is equipped with internet access where people can both check-in and checkout without paper and without people.

While these are just a few remote examples, they are a snapshot of the future of the hotel stay.

An Example of a Room Key

One Las Vegas hotel is differentiating itself by providing keys that operate by using a sensor. While

this is not new technology, as people have been "badging-in" at work for years now. The use of sensor keys as an access control to a person's hotel room is a new use of this technology. However, this being Las Vegas, the hotel does do some unique one-upmanship with it. As a person enters a room for the first time using the key, the room will turn on the lights, open the curtains, and turn on the television automatically. The television turns onto a list of controls that the guest can personalize for their stay. Also, the hotel not only offers but brags about its free internet access (or at least included in their room rate) which can be up to eight times faster than the other Vegas hotels.

An Example of Entertainment in the Room

An upscale chain hotel in Seoul is providing a way for guests to plug in their equipment to the hotel room's audio and video systems at a single location. Then their video or music files can be controlled through the room's large screen televisions. Even one's laptop can be plugged into the system. This provides the ultimate of personalized entertainment, entertainment that the guest brought with them.

A London hotel provides charging stations in the room's walls, but its true differentiator is that it gives guest an iPod 2 to use in the room. Also, the rooms come with 3D Blu-ray systems for the large screen 3D television. Of course, 3D specs are provided in the room for the television. Continuing that theme, the hotel also has a 103 inch 3D screen in the hotel bar with specs available there too.

An Example of Things to Do

A hotel in Tokyo realizes that people come to stay in hotels but want activity outside it. Actually, hotels have known this for some time because ever hotel tries to tout its proximity to popular local attractions. So, in the digital age this Tokyo hotel provides walking tours of the surrounding neighborhoods via iPod. It even provides an iPod tour of the hotel's 1000 piece art collection. Should someone not have an iPod, then they can get one provided by the hotel.

An Example of Reservations

One major US-based hotel chain is growing its app presence in the smart phone market, like those for the iPhone or Android phones. Their smart phone app lets people check for the closest hotels, availability, and the rates for those available rooms. This helps them gain more regular customers who will use the app for last minute reservations. Last minute reservations are actually growing as people are learning they can check for hotel availability from their digital devices (and often score the best rates for a last minute reservation). The app also helps those last minute users loyal to the chain.

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