

TOURISM IN THE WORLD OF TECHNOLOGY



unintended consequences.

In these precarious economic times, the hospitality industry composed of tourism and travel is facing a quintessential question. Technology has the great advantage that it allows tourism industries to replace expensive human labor with technological labor, thus not only reducing labor costs but also avoiding issues of customer service. Yet technology may produce a whole new set of

How does it draw the line between technology and personal service? **There is no doubt that technology plays an important role in tourism and travel.** Most of us are now used to booking our airline reservations online, dealing with telephone trees and other cost-saving devices. These technological advances have allowed corporations to save on manpower while at the same time empowering customers to make their own decisions.

On the other side of the equation, travelers use more technology than ever before and often the tourism industry has taken advantage of this desire (need) to stay in touch with its clientele. Most of us are now used to being almost harassed with on-line surveys or computer-driven telephone calls. Now we have entered into the world of e-marketing, a system that may be called an advanced form of "spam."

Although many hotels do provide free internet services, many of the "better" hotels have added additional charges for local calls, for internet access and a per-page fee to receive a fax. These additional charges combined with less personalized service often means that travelers have the idea that technology has become a one-way street. **Technology is used to provide less personalized service and at the same time to generate additional revenue at hotels, on airplanes, and at transportation hubs.**

Despite the misuse of technology, tourism and travel are highly dependent on technology and its use has made life a whole lot easier. There is no doubt that the cell phone has become a major part of our lives. And although technology etiquette may lag behind technology machinery the inconvenience of someone speaking too loud on a cell phone is more than outweighed by the safety, security and convenience that cell phones bring to most of us.

On the other hand, technology's growth has allowed worldwide terrorism to attack the tourism industry. Cell phones can save lives or detonate bombs; air conditioning units serve to make life bearable in hot climates, but also pollute the atmosphere and can be carriers of the disease. The dawn of the computer age permits us to know weather forecasts around the world, allows business travelers to stay in touch with their offices and to supersede the problem of cross time zones negotiation, but can be used to destroy air travel.

Technology then has become a mixed bag for the tourism industry. It creates plenty of conveniences while at the same time has been used as a way to increase revenues and to lessen customer service. The world of technology has made air travel safe and abundant but has also brought about the need to go through long security lines and daily hassles.

Certainly, some parts of the industry have begun to use technology prudently. When used ethically, technology can be a great help in increasing our communication and security. If on the other hand technology is used for selfish or destructive purposes than it can become a nemesis within the travel

and tourism industry. Hamlet's question "to be or not to be" has never seemed more poignant in its relationship to travel and tourism.

To help you decide how much or how little technology is right for your tourism business, Tourism Tidbits offers the following suggestions:

Remember that tourism is about people "interfacing" with other people

No matter how good your technology may be, technology does not provide the human warmth of take-home experiences. Be mindful that tourism is about the selling of memories and then ask yourself at what point are you willing to sacrifice memories for efficiency.

Make sure that your employees are well trained in the use of technology

Technology is only as good as the people who use it. Often tourism centers hire people who simply are not up to the task, misuse the technology and create more problems than they solve. Train, train and then train your people some more. Do not update so often that your employees' knowledge base lags behind the technology's capabilities.

Use technology wisely

While even the best computer can never substitute the care and love that comes from another human being, technology, if used properly, can solve many a problem in tourism. Among these are:

Issues of time: Nothing upsets the tourism industry's clientele as much as the misuse of time. The proper use of computers to facilitate both check-ins and check-outs of places such as hotels, allows the person-on-duty to attend to other problems.

Clarity and consistency: In an interrelated multi-lingual world a great deal of information can be provided to guests in their own language without linguistic, pronunciation or grammatical errors.

Ease of place: Use technology and social networks to allow visitors to research from home and to gather basic information. However, many hotels and transportation companies seem to hide telephone numbers on their web sites. Combine basic information that can be given on a computer with the human side of information. Remember that if the tourist can never reach you, then you may find that your customer has found a more user-friendly location.

If we like it or not technology touches almost every aspect of the tourism industry. **If we are smart enough to use the benefits of technology such as convenience, speed, and accuracy and avoid some of the pitfalls, user-friendliness, size of lettering, and lack of human contact, then technology can be a great time and cost saver.** But if the tourism industry forgets the importance of the human element and that tourism is all about the experience then it is making a major error.

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