



The Technology Tsunami Outfitting Your Hotel for Tomorrow

by Chris McBeath

Whether it's iris-scanning technology or in-room thermostats that adjust to a guest's body temperature, the world's hotels are teching up for the future. A study from *Hospitality Technology* magazine notes that hotel spending on technology in 2014 nearly doubled over the year before. And in 2015, it could well double again to nearly 10% of total revenues. Advanced technology has become critical in attracting guests.

Get With the Cloud

Just as small to mid-size hotels are discovering the speed and cost efficiencies of cloud computing, so brand chains are seeing how the cloud facilitates unified management, performance consistency, and 24-7 availability across properties.

Todd Davis, Chief Information Officer, Choice Hotels International explains: “We moved to a cloud-based SaaS solution for three reasons: the infrastructure and overhead cost savings to implement and manage a distributed, on-premise solution for 6,000 hotels; the provision of a reduced scope of PCI at the hotel; and the need for an intuitive, Internet solution that can be accessed from anywhere. We have moved accounts payable and invoicing, human resource management, and time tracking to cloud-based services. Technology is really becoming core to what we do.”



Photo courtesy of The Fairmont Waterfront Hotel, Vancouver

Guests receive an array of digital content describing the view, its visible landmarks, and pointing out nearby restaurants and attractions.

Check Out e-CHECK

As the check-in/check-out process morphs into a self-service affair, it prompted a

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senior industry executive to call the front desk “a dead duck”. The comment may not be too far-fetched. Already, many front desk personnel roam lobbies to check in guests in-situ using iPads, and chains like Hyatt and Starwood’s Sheraton hotels have started to install kiosks that allow guests to swipe their credit card and get a room key in minutes, bypassing the front desk altogether. Starwood also launched an Apple Watch app this year offering similar services. Taken one step further, the uber high-tech Blow Up Hall 50/50 in Poznan, Poland, has the guest become a part of an artsy video installation as soon as they enter the hotel. The hotel has no reception and the rooms have no numbers. Instead, every guest is given an iPhone which serves as their room key and a virtual concierge facility.

Mobility

According to comScore research, Canada has now over 20 million smartphone owners and close to 10 million tablet owners. “With a digital population of 30 million, these are big numbers,” says Steve Ringuet, CEO of a leading distributor of hotel industry IT solutions. “There are now more visits to online travel sites coming from mobile devices than from PCs.” Data revealed that visitors use a mobile device about 30% of the time during the travel research to completion cycle and it is growing exponentially.

“These are significant changes for Canadian travel companies that must lead by offering digital experiences adapted to these devices,” Ringuet continues. “Websites designed for desktops are often difficult to navigate and frustrating or impossible to use for mobile customers with smaller screens.”

Whether adopting cloud-based, ready-to-deploy solutions or integrating on-the-go mobility using an existing infrastructure, catering to customer mobility is a technological imperative.

App Happy

Enhancing a guest’s stay with a customized app is a definite trend. Among the leaders is the new Four Seasons App, which enables guests to make and manage reservations (in multiple locations), facilitate express check-in and check-out, order room service, and make itinerary plans based on suggestions from built-in geo location technology. The Fairmont Waterfront Hotel Vancouver is giving new dimension to print materials via mobile devices. By downloading Layar, a free, augmented reality application, and then scanning a specially printed window decal, guests receive an array of digital content describing the view, its visible landmarks, and pointing out nearby restaurants and attractions.

Then there are off-the-shelf apps like LobbyFriend that create temporary social networks within a specific space and only for the duration of a guest’s stay. They provide hotels a way to communicate with onsite guests regarding special offers and upsells, and enable like-minded guests to connect with each other to have a drink, watch a game, or share a cab ride. Like a standard telephone system, once a guest checks out, their messaging footprint is erased.

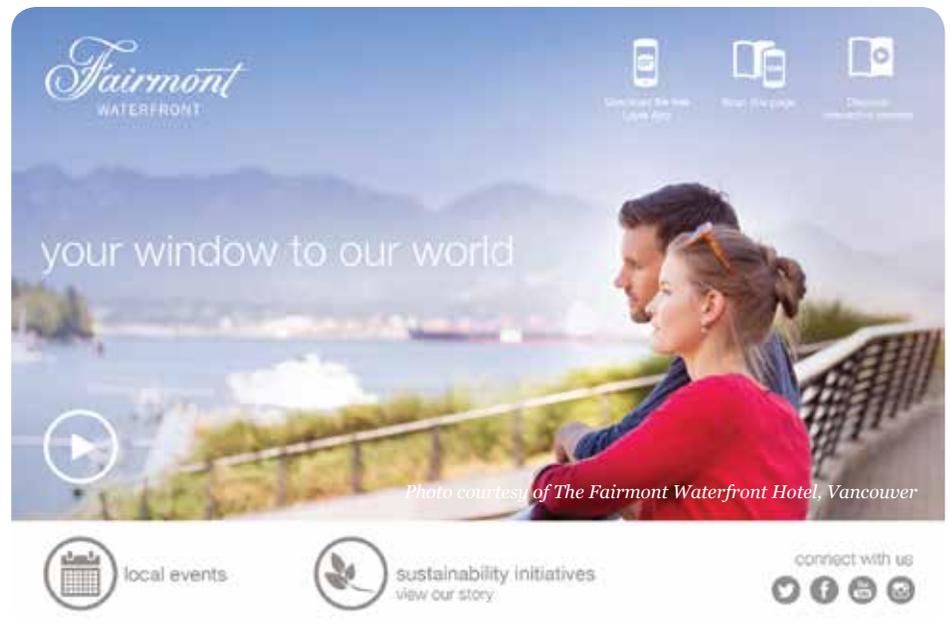
For high volume hotels, virtual queues like QLess are proving big hits. Guests receive a text once their room is ready, so they are free

to enjoy their stay without the necessity of standing in line. Greeting customers with a room-ready-and-waiting creates a good first impression and is an indicator of the hotel's service for the duration of the stay.

IT Drives Design

Connection has become integral to room design, and was the impetus behind Delta Hotels & Resort's (Marriott's) three-year redesign (completing this year) of its guestrooms. ModeRooms are equipped with a signature SmartDesk™ featuring multiple electrical outlets as well as audio, video, and Internet connections, all mounted in a slanted console atop the desk. Because the dock comes with standard interfaces, guests don't have to bring along any cables to link their laptop or mobile device to preview presentations or stream movies onto the flat-screen, high-definition TV. Although hoteliers might bark at losing pay-for-view revenues, the new reality is that people are no longer willing to pay for content they can access online. And since this includes Internet calling, in-room telephones are quietly becoming obsolete.

If extreme-connectivity is a "now" trend, then technological wellness is a developing one. A number of hotels are now using the PURE Room concept: a seven-step



Research tells us that a consumer will visit 20 websites across nine different online sessions before booking a single hotel room.

cleaning process that includes an ozone shock treatment to make it odour-free and resistant to mold, dust mites, and other irritants. Then there are StayWell® rooms with amenities such as a vitamin C-infused shower, air and water purification, and long

wave night lighting. And for aging baby boomers, health-monitoring rooms are on the drawing boards. Services here could include sensors in the toilet that measure blood sugar in your urine, and infrared cameras that track your body temperature

This advertisement features a photograph of a hotel room with two beds, green accents, and a window with curtains. The text on the right side of the image reads: "WESTPORT MANUFACTURING Since 1947, Canada's industry leader in quality & craftsmanship. Window Coverings Bedding Blinds & Shades Hospitality, Healthcare, & Contract". At the bottom, there are logos for Marriott, Qualified Vendor, Choice Hotels, and Endorsed Best Western Supplier. Contact information at the bottom left includes "1-800-663-9587 ~ www.west-port.com ~ info@west-port.com".

and send a message to regulate the thermostat and humidity in your room to ensure a restful night's sleep.

i-Security

In the age of technology, and with an ever-increasing concern for security, paper cards, cellphones, fingerprints, and iris scanners are popping up as alternative unlocking devices.

When several Aloft and element Starwood Hotels properties revamped their traditional key card systems a few years ago, they had the foresight to install systems that could be converted to read RFID (Radio frequency identification) when that technology became more mainstream. We're not just talking about guests scanning their right eye when they check-in or enter their room. Staff also use iris scans to unlock the staff entrance and log into the system at the beginning of each shift.

Multi-purpose RFID wristbands are also coming onto the market. Wearers can use them for room entry or as an alternative way to pay for spa treatments, casino chips, and running a tab for cocktails.

e-Housekeeping

Designed to integrate with property management systems such as Opera, Galaxy and OnQ, e-housekeeping works in conjunction with a special mobile app to streamline the cleaning and inspection process for guestroom and public areas. It provides automated assignments, job dispatch and comprehensive reporting, priority adjustment based on guest VIP-status, and built-in guidelines with photos to help clearly explain hotel standards for tasks like bed corners or amenities placement. From a management perspective, this becomes a practical training system, especially where language issues are concerned, and digitized data makes it easy to compile and pull reports in real time for overall operations status.

The e-Housekeeping app has multiple features, including a QR code system that requires room attendants to scan a QR code placed on the back of the guestroom door prior to activating the countdown. Room status updates can incorporate jobs like carpet cleaning or spring-cleaning with credit and time calculations. In addition, safety features include a panic button as well as the ability to trigger alerts using SMS, ad-hoc messaging, direct call job dispatch, and alarm sounds.

Riding the Wave

In terms of seamless, back-of-house communications and customer service, it doesn't get much better than the technology employed at Trump Tower in Toronto, a system that could well be coming to the Trump International Hotel & Tower Vancouver. Hotel staff are equipped with a wearable, voice-controlled communications badge that enables instant hands-free, two-way or one-to-many conversations using intuitive and simple commands. When Trump's Vancouver property opens in 2016, it will be the city's most technologically advanced hotel.

Prepare now to ride the technology wave into the future. 📍



Yobot is a 20 ft tall robotic arm used to store luggage in lockers. Photo courtesy of YOTEL

Cutting Edge Technology

- Eccleston Square Hotel, London uses a system that turns the washroom glass from crystal clear to frost at the touch of a button. Choose transparency for a spacious, light-filled suite or switch it off for privacy.
- YOTEL New York uses Yobot, a 20 ft tall robotic arm, to store luggage in lockers. Housed behind a secure glass enclosure, Yobot issues a receipt with bar code for guests to submit when they want to pick up their bag.
- Eventi, New York, features a Business Bar that provides guests with a selection of Apple products from the latest Macbook to a reading tablet, and a smorgasbord of tech accessories, including a GoPro camera.
- The Muse Hotel, New York, provides guests with Nook e-readers during their stays. The devices are preloaded with books and magazines and guests can request personalized uploads.
- Scarp Ridge Lodge, Colorado has introduced a state-of-the-art oxygen system to help guests acclimatize to the 12,000 ft altitude. It delivers oxygen-rich air through in-room ports and individual headsets.
- At St. Martin's Lane Hotel in London, guestroom walls are white, so guests can dial a light display, altering the colour of their room anywhere from deep violet to a jungle green.
- Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group has rooms outfitted to remember preferences of regular visitors. When a regular walks into a room, the lights, room temperature and speed dial on the phone are set to their specifications.
- At the Crowne Plaza Hotel Copenhagen Towers in Denmark, guests who use an exercise bike for 15 minutes, thereby helping to generate electricity for the hotel's own system, are given a voucher for the restaurant.
- Four Seasons Silicon Valley has consigned door peepholes to history. Instead, LCD displays show the person on the other side of the door.
- MGM Grand Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas, encourages guests to tweet messages about the hotel or other topics; tweets are displayed behind the hotel's front desk on a huge video wall.