

Smart Hospitality - Emerging Trends at the Front Desk

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Abstract

In this fast changing world, hospitality industry is bound to change its approach. Technology has changed rapidly so has hotel techniques and trends. Gone are the days when customers had to call for reservations or fill in a register at the time of check in. With the introduction of computers and internet, things have become much easier than in the past. Customers can make their reservation online without even calling up hotels for the room availability and rates as then can view all this information on the hotel website. Hotels can update information on website as and when required so that viewers can get the updated information. Technology has evolved from desktop computer to lap top, palm top, tablets and smart phones which are used worldwide. With internet easily available on your smart phone, it has become convenient to access information even while one is on a go. Hotels have come up with various mobile applications which are user friendly and help hotels to give their customers a better service and real time information.

Key Words: - Hotel Trends, Technology in Hospitality, Customer friendly system, Mobile apps for hotels.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The face of innovation in technology is continually changing. The hotel and restaurant industry needs to take a proactive stance in implementing technological advances, while continually striving to build levels of service quality and guest loyalty (Magnini, Honeycutt, & Hodge, 2003). Hotels and restaurants are continually competing for employees, locations, and more recent information about customers. As more people are using the Internet there is a high amount of information that is being captured on web server logs (Garver, 2002).

Identifying patterns of current and potential customers and servicing their needs is one way that organizations are attempting to use information as a leverage tool against competitors (Magnini, et al., 2003; Piccoli, 2008). Proactive identification and implementation of these technologies can help in building a sustainable competitive advantage (Piccoli, 2008).

The most important goal identified by the hoteliers was to use technology to enhance the guest experience. When asked which technologies they believed that customers most care about, Wi-Fi hotspots were named most frequently (82%, n=244), followed by in-room entertainment systems (48%), kiosks for airline check-in and boarding pass printing (38%), infrastructure for handheld devices (27%), and Internet kiosks in the lobby (25%). Figure 5 shows the most common technologies identified, however the following technologies were also mentioned as 9 important: reservations, on-line reservations, temperature / environment controls in rooms, secure DSL and Wi-Fi, on-demand (or tank-less) water heaters, and free wireless throughout the hotel.

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innovations, hospitality magazine- 7 technologies that are transforming the hospitality industry, Current and future technology use in hospitality industry AH&LA,

The findings show that the customers today prefer to go online or use smart phones rather than calling up hotels for reservation, check-in, check-out or booking a meeting space with different sitting arrangements or styles.

OBJECTIVES

Hotels have changed from manual Front Desk activities to semi automated to fully automated and at present with introduction of hotels mobile application on a smart phone.

In future mobile application for hotel can help guest not only in check-in and check-out but also mobile keys, ordering food, valet parking, concierge service, travel desk, giving complaints etc.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional method of checking guest in a hotel was to use a *register*. There used to be a large, bound book ruled into columns which the guest used to fill the necessary information upon arrival, which is ideal for smaller hotels where guests arrive individually. The above traditional method was replaced by *semi automated system* as the computers were introduced. Computers had all the guest related information if he / she had done a prior reservation which was then printed and offered to the guest to verify the details. Like the check-in, the Check-out was much easier than the manual system, as the bills raised by in-house guest at various outlets were sent to the front office cashier to be posted in the computer system.

With the introduction of *fully automated system*, the guests were able to make room reservation via Global

Distribution System (GDS) or a Centralised Reservation System (CRS) which could be viewed and printed by front office staff when the guest arrived at the front desk. Posting bills directly to the guest account or folio was also much easier as it was done directly from the point of sale.

To further improve guest satisfaction, by faster check in and a check out procedures without getting them to wait in the lobby for a very long time; hotels introduced *Self Check-In Check-Out Terminals* much like the ATM machine, which act like a dummy receptionist. The guest enters his credit card, debit card or smart card into a slot in the machine which confirms the encrypted code of the card and opens the reservation form of the guest for bookings which are already done through GDS or CRS. She / he confirm the information by pressing a "Yes" button or amend the information accordingly. The machine will allot a room number with a key through a dispensing tray. For a Check – out, the guest has to enter his credit or debit card into a slot in the machine which will confirm the code and display the guest folio. Guest will go through the folio and if satisfied will press the "Yes" button which will process the payment.

Latest technology or trend in hotel is mobile application, which can fulfil the above mentioned procedure minimising the actual interaction with hotel staff.

ADAPTING TECHNOLOGY

Hospitality must be a combination of "Technology and Personal Touch". Services today must include enabling guests to be self-sufficient, and thus providing a mobile application and website which provides that information will appeal to many customers. The rise of this digital traveller requires the hotel industry to balance the expectation of personalization while enhancing the need to remain independent.

INTERNET-ON-LINE IN SECONDS/BLITZ

Various classes of travellers, (Business Travellers, F. I.T, G.I.T.), carried their personal computers to make presentations, communicate with their office, via e-mails, etc. One possibility offered to them today consists in the use of so-called Pad offering, in particular-

- Cable-free and universal access to Internet or intranet, wherever you happen to be
- Brilliant colour touch screen
- Ready to go in seconds
- Freedom in the selection of transmission standards by interchangeable PC cards
- Comprehensive office software package

- Virtual keyboard and handwriting recognition

For sure, new technologies are continuously offering innovative and more comfortable ways to the traveller.

CLOUD BASED PROPERTY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

It is wise to invest in a cloud based property management system to cater to the demanding guests efficiently. This versatile and user-friendly technology will make operations simplified without any involvement of people, just basic monitoring is required. From handling operations, departments and guests to keeping all departments updated; a cloud based property management system is a one-stop solution for all the worries.

Benefits of PMS used in Hotel:

- First and foremost, the software lets you make reservations directly making it easier for you to maintain check-in and check-out lists anytime during the day
- Bookings can be customized on different dates, group bookings and multiple room rates can also be set
- Guest details can be available easily
- Reservations can be altered according to the room, guest and date changes
- Appointments and payments with spa and restaurants can be managed through the front desk with the help of the POS
- Multiple shifts can be managed
- Tasks can be assigned to the housekeeping and be checked for timely status
- Multiple reports and folios can be generated
- Multiple guest management options can be used

TECHNOLOGY-

Hotel management thought, that mobile technologies will have a minimum impact in future. However, this myth has been thoroughly laid to rest as tablets, mobile phones, smart phones and laptops have become critical tools on both sides of the hotels check-in desk.

Technology is making its way through tablets and smart phones which are being used by front desk staff for easy check-in/out, retrieving guest details, engaging with the guests and managing other operations. Gone are those days when guests used to wait in queues to be checked-in or struggle to get through the waiters to place an order. New-age technologies have made it easy for the guests to swipe through menus or get a faster check-in/out. Using tablet and smart phone technology, the front desk staff can simplify many processes and save time that can be spent in improving guest experience. Embracing technology has become the need of the hour for the hotel's front office to function efficiently.

Mobile check-in, and seamless connectivity across platforms and devices are no longer the future, they are the present. Today, mobile apps are being used as everything from a digital concierge to accessing big data. Geo-location can make it easy to sell guests something that is literally right in front of them. Most importantly, when looking at the face of a changing consumer today, technology innovation is paramount.

Hotels have started adopting this smart technology to eliminate old-fashioned, manual registration desk processes. This enables hotel team members to 'meet and greet' their guests at any location, improving the personalisation of the check-in experience and reducing the costs associated with static reception desks and all their technology at each location.

These benefits are not reserved for just large international chains: the low capital expenditure investment for mobile hardware and much reduced software costs mean that mobile is a viable option for small independent properties, looking to develop customer service as a competitive edge.

PERSONALISED SYSTEMS

Customers expect their experience within a hotel to be totally personalised: from the welcome message on the television screen and food preferences to additional services such as personal training or flowers in the room.

This quickly creates a huge range of valuable customer preference data that needs to be fed into the hotel management system in order to deliver a personalised, high quality service for each return visit. This is not just a case of linking the customer relationship management system into the hotel operations - it is embedding the process of capturing guest preferences and proactively using that data.

For example, if a guest comments on the facilities in the room to someone on the front desk as they leave for the day, the data can be passed to the relevant operational team for the issue to be rectified and the guest notified upon their return - delivering a truly personalised service at all levels of the stay.

HOTELS GO HIGH TECH

The Hyatt Union Square New York offers three check-in options for guests: an iPad check-in with a staff member called Gallery Host, a self-serve check-in kiosk and a traditional front desk. About 40% of guests at the hotel select the iPad option.

According to Roe, Marriott recently launched a test in 31 hotels that will allow for remote check-in. She said the hotels send messages to guests 24 hours ahead of

arrival asking for their planned check-in time, and the hotel answers back to let them know when their rooms will be ready. The company recently introduced its Red Coat Direct service, which allows meeting planners to electronically communicate with hotels where they've scheduled events.

"It allows the meeting planner and the Red Coat at the hotel to connect in real time," she said. Three days before the event, the planner gets a link to the customized Red Coat Direct application, which the planner can use to make requests before they arrive on-site.

"When the planners are in the hotel, they can request more coffee, more flipcharts, a change in temperature in the room, or whatever they need. We're facilitating the conversation in the way planners and customers really want to talk to us."

She said the application was launched in April, is now in 25 to 30 hotels and should be available in all properties in the U.S. by the end of the year. It will be available in 19 languages for global properties during 2014.

FEED BACK & SOCIAL SIGHTS

Reputation management continues its importance because it is no longer all about Trip Advisor. Although this platform continues to dominate in the hotel industry, it is easy to skip over the increasing importance of Yelp, Yahoo, Face book, and Expedia for guest reviews and comments. Managing a property's reputation is increasingly important and using tools to help this process is crucial. Many properties use Revinat as a complete, one-stop solution for reputation management instead of the cumbersome process of logging into each platform and spending an exorbitant amount of time on a crucial yet time consuming aspect of the hotel industry. Engaging with guests and responding to their needs publicly through these forums can go a long way in driving future bookings to your property.

Social is Mobile and maybe soon we will see social as a dominant booking engine. Hotel companies are likely underestimating traveller interaction with them via mobile. For most social platforms, mobile is becoming the primary means for travellers to access and contribute content.

Travellers' ability to access social networks anytime, anywhere empowers them to create and consume more content than ever before. And this is not just for domestic travellers. Our international visitors are just as likely to have a smart phone.

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